

Empowering of Women through Economic Independence Participation of Manipuri Women In Various Income Generating Activities For The Upliftment of State's Economy

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ABSTRACT: *Women empowerment is an essential tool to bring about changes in their socio-economic condition. Empowerment of women needs to begin with their participation in different spheres of life. Education is a great determinant in this regard. To achieve empowerment, women have to be educated about their rights and privileges in a modern society. It is education that can bring about awareness in them related to their social status, injustice and differentiation meted out to them. In Manipur women plays a significant role not only in economic development but also in social, political, religious etc. As handlooms and handicrafts being the inmate artistic skill for the Manipuri women they successfully take up these occupation as income generating activities. Empowerment of women is the pre-requisite to transform a developing into on that is developed.*

Women empowerment is an essential tool to bring about changes in their socio- economic condition. There is a widespread feeling at the national as individual levels that no society can progress as long as women, a major constituent of society lag behind. The need for women's empowerment arises from the subordinate position that have been accorded for a long time. "women is the companion of man, gifted with equal mental capacity". _ Mahatma Gandhi.

WHAT ARE INCOME GENERATING ACTIVITIES?

Income generating activities will be considered those initiatives that affect the economic aspects of people's lives through the use of economic tools such as credit.

Other types of support affecting women's production are considered complimentary to income generating activities. For eg. these might include child care or basic services provision and labour saving technologies.

The limits of a welfare- oriented response to this growing crisis are now well recognized. Alternatively, many development agencies are increasing their emphasis on assisting women to secure income through their own efforts. Such approaches are often categorized as income generating activities and cover initiatives as diverse as small business promotion, cooperative undertakings, job creation schemes, sewing circle, credit and saving groups and youth training programmes.

UNICEF'S ROLE IN SUPPORTING WOMEN PRODUCTIVE ACTIVITIES:

UNICEF'S mandate and modes of operation allow it to maintain close cooperation with social sector ministries in developing countries, and it has built its global reputation by addressing both strategic and practical needs on behalf of women and children. Strategic needs are those that derive from the imbalance in gender relationships and women's position in society. Practical needs are those that formulated from the immediate and concrete conditions of daily life.

Unicef has played a significant role in broadening and complementing income generating activities and has been involved in the trend towards the use of credit as a key tool, as well as in catalysing and coordinating agencies that support women's productive activities.

THE GROWING PREDOMINANCE OF CREDIT AS A DEVELOPMENT TOOL:

Several grants were given for training and income-generating projects that emphasized the domestication of women projects tended to be small scale, underfunded and isolated from mainstream development.

A shift by some agencies began in the late 1970s towards creating income generating components of larger programme. However, the income generating components often received far less funding and priority than other components and awareness of gender issues in the programmes as a whole was frequently missing. By the mid 1980s, disillusionment with income generating activities began to surface within many agencies. Many agencies were avoiding to use of the term “income- generating” as it continued to conjure up images of women undertaking marginal economic activities far removed from the increasing thrust towards gender issues and women’s empowerment.

By the end of the decade, scattered evidence was revealing that an increasing number of poor women were creating their own jobs in small agriculture, manufacturing services and petty trade. Evidence also indicated that the smaller the business the greater the chance of its being owned and operated by a women.

Studies of women focused credit projects, mostly carried out by the implementing agencies themselves, generally have found positive economic and social benefits resulting from these projects and have shown credit projects to be generally superior to other types of income-generating initiatives.

ROLE OF MANIPURI WOMEN IN THE UPLIFTMENT OF STATE’S ECONOMY:

Manipur has witnessed the successful role of collective women’s power in the past and also in the present day. There is something which we can celebrate. However despite their major contributions in the socio-economic and political life of the state, they are not given their due position in society. Thus, there is a mismatch between women’s role and status.

Manipuri women’s role in the socio- economic and cultural life of Manipur is significant.They do not stay behind the veil...They also do all the buying and selling of goods in the market.Women dominate the markets in the rural and urban areas.Their unique role in market will be known if one visits Khwairamband Bazar at the heart of Imphal.

They are greatly involved in the agricultural related activities. They are artistic and creative which they prove in the field of handlooms, handicrafts and dance. Their dominance in the field of sports not only in the national level but also in the international level is remarkable.

HANDLOOM AS INCOME GENERATING ACTIVITIES FOR THE MANIPURI WOMEN:

From the time immemorial the handloom industry has been playing a vital role in the economy of North-Eastern India and specially to Manipur, the traditional skill of handloom weaving is not only a status symbol for the women-folk but is also an indispensable aspects of the socio-economic life. Handloom weaving is by far the largest and the most important cottage industry in the state.

From the employment point of view, it has occupied a position providing employment to a great number of people.The employment potential of handlooms were both direct and indirect. The handloom industry, by virtue of its being the largest cottage industry were provided means of livelihood to about 10 million persons particularly in the villages. Further,the industry has also provided indirect employment to loom manufacturers, dyers, twistors, sizers, traders, cloth printers,tailors, fabric designers,others and so on. Again it has provided employment to tens of thousands of salaried employees who worked in various sales, managerial, executive, technical, supervisory,various developmental schemes in the handlooms sector worked in Central and State Govt. Dept., govt. Sponsored agencies or enterprises, weaver’s co- operatives, etc. One significant observation that we find today in Manipur is the rise in the number of women entrepreneurs and women self help groups. The numbers of working women in different sectors are increasing.

Marup or Cooperative movement is another movement spearheaded by women for generating income. From the early days the Manipuri society has inbuilt system of socio-economic cooperation known as Marup which continues till now successfully throughout the state. Marup, a type of self help group, is a group or association of with common economic needs who undertake an economic activity by participating directly in decision making and sharing the benefits on an equitable basis. It strengthens the existing income generating activity of members and also helps the members to start a new activity of members. This not only makes them economically independent but also helps their families with their financial contributions and acts as the financial intermediaries. Among the Manipuri women Marups are the best vehicles for empowerment. They are the major force for the economic development of the state.

SCHEMES IMPLEMENTED TO MANIPURI WOMEN FOR THE UPLIFTMENT OF INCOMES THROUGH THEIR TRADITIONAL SKILLS:

Department of Social Welfare, Govt. Of Manipur implemented many for the welfare and upliftment of women of Manipur specially destitute, divorced, widows etc.

The main objectives of such schemes are:-

- 1) Establishment of self reliant women's self help group.
- 2) Creation of confidence and awareness among members of self help group regarding women's status, health, nutrition, education, sanitation and hygiene, legal rights, economic upliftment and other economic and political issues.
- 3) Strengthening institutionalizing the habits in rural women and their control over economic resources.
- 4) Improving access of women to micro credit.
- 5) Involvement of women in local level planning.
- 6) Convergence of services of Dept. Of Women and Child development and other departments.

SCHEMES WITH ASSISTANCE FROM CENTRAL GOVT.:-

- 1) Support to Training and Employment Programme (STEP):-
- 2) Department of women and child development Ministry of Human Resource Sashtri Bhavan, New- Delhi has given financial support to impart training under this programme. The programme aims to increase the self reliance and autonomy of women by enhancing their productivity and enabling them to take up income generation activities. It provides training for skill up gradation to poor and asset less women in the traditional sectors viz:-agriculture, animal husbandry, dairying, fisheries, handlooms, handicrafts, khadi and village industries, sericulture, social forestry and wasteland development.
- 3) Setting up of employment, cum income generating units (NORAD):-
- 4) This programme partially assisted by NORAD, aims to improve the lives of poor women by training in traditional and non- traditional trades viz, electronics, watch assembly, basic and computer training, garment making, embroidery etc. And to ensure their employment in these areas given training.
- 5) Conclusion:-It is high time that we respect and reflect on the contributions of women not only in the socio economic sphere but also in the fields of cultural, political and sports. Women of Manipur deserve a higher status, for the development of any society the status of women is a key factor determining progress.

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