

## Women Empowerment through Poverty Alleviation

*Karunesh Kumar Shukla\**

### ABSTRACT

*Engendering national development plans is imperative for gender mainstreaming and their empowerment. Engendered development plans would include a gender dimension in all macro policies and budgetary support for their implementation. Women's needs are multi-dimensional – access to health and nutrition, water and sanitation, asset based marketing, credit, technology, education and skills, political participation etc. Thus, convergence of development policies, programmes, schemes and institutional resources is imperative for engendering and inclusive development. There is also the need for revision in existing urban development schemes and programmes so that gender issues may be incorporated and their concerns are effectively addressed. The present paper aims at reviewing the efforts of poverty alleviation for women empowerment.*

Women are major contributors to India's economy and important constituent of development. Their empowerment is essential for distributive justice for the nation's growth. In order to promote pro-women inclusive growth, it is imperative to create and strengthen institutional mechanism for addressing the destitute, marginalized, disadvantaged and vulnerable women. The enhanced budgetary resources besides strong political and bureaucratic will for engendering growth and development will lead to progressive society (Government of India, 2013). Policy approaches to women and development in India have changed over the years of planned development. However, the shift from 'welfare' to an 'empowerment' approach has remained more in the realm of the rhetoric. The approach to the Twelfth Plan also exhibits insufficient awareness of the specific problems of women, their unpaid labour and their distinctive economic contribution to the nation's economy. Thus, the major shift through this initiative was to move the engendering of public policy into the macroeconomic space (Government of India, 2010). The policy approach underlying both the Eleventh and Twelfth plans expects to promote economic growth through creating opportunities for the entrepreneurial class by liberalizing domestic and global markets. The strategies for growth proposed in the Approach to the Twelfth Plan appear to be formulated with

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\* Principal, Pant Inter College, Bamhaura, Sitapur, Uttar Pradesh

little consideration for the needs and roles of large sections of the population of the country and especially of poor women. This document aims to highlight some of these gaps in the overall design of the proposed approach to planning and to suggest ways of making economic growth during the Twelfth Plan truly more inclusive.

The process of urbanization is a natural process associated with growth and that agglomeration and densification of economic activities in urban conglomerations stimulates economic efficiencies and provides more opportunities for earning livelihoods; possibilities for entrepreneurship and employment and “this enables faster inclusion of more people in the growth process and is therefore more inclusive.” Most workers in urban areas are working in the informal economy. Informal employment is higher for women than for men. Among the self employed, most of the workers would be in a “vulnerable” category, being either own account workers such as street vendors or family helpers. The role of governance, in particular local governance, in which women can play an active role in developmental planning, given their political presence is critical in this convergence. Women’s participation as elected representatives in local bodies has been noteworthy. Hence, the strengthening of these agencies’ roles and powers, especially for implementing the ‘inclusive’ programmes at the grassroots level would be enabling for women led governance factored in. Needless to state, it is the combined effect of these inclusive programmes that can ameliorate much of the rural deprivation, in particular for women who perform some of these tasks in the unpaid ‘care economy’.

Urban development schemes, programmes, and projects target to infrastructure development, delivery of services, and strengthening of local governments. It further highlighted on implementation of reforms at state and ULB level. The scheme was implemented in 65 selected towns and cities across the states during the period of 2005 to 2012. At the Union Government level, there are some schemes and policies that focus specifically on water and sanitation in the urban setting. A major government programme that provides facilities for water supply and sanitation in urban areas is Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM), which aims at improving and augmenting economic and social infrastructure facilities of the cities, extending basic services to the urban poor including security of tenure at affordable prices and strengthening municipal governments and their functioning in accordance with the provisions of the 74th Constitutional Amendment. Services to the urban poor include access to water supply and sanitation which largely hinges on an effective local government.

Urban poverty is a major challenge before the urban managers and administrators of the present time. Though the anti-poverty strategy

comprising of a wide range of poverty alleviation and employment generating programmes has been implemented but results show that the situation is grim. Importantly, poverty in urban India gets exacerbated by substantial rate of population growth, high rate of migration from the rural areas and mushrooming of slum pockets. Migration alone accounts for about 40 per cent of the growth in urban population, converting the rural poverty into urban one. Moreover, poverty has become synonymous with slums. The relationship is bilateral i.e. slums also breed poverty. This vicious circle never ends. Most of the world's poor reside in India and majority of the poor live in rural areas and about one-fourth urban population in India lives below poverty line. If we count those who are deprived of safe drinking water, adequate clothing, or shelter, the number is considerably higher. Moreover, the vulnerable groups such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, minorities, pavement dwellers etc., are living in acute poverty. Housing conditions in large cities and towns are depicting sub human lives of slum dwellers. With the reconstruction of poverty alleviation programmes in urban India, it is expected that social and economic benefits will percolate to the population below the poverty line. However, eradication of poverty and improving the quality of life of the poor remain one of the daunting tasks.

*Basic Services to the Urban Poor (BSUP)* scheme under JNNURM has stressed on the development of basic services for the urban poor which includes water and sanitation. *Rajiv Awas Yojana (RAY)* has a vision of a "slum free state". It seeks to bring existing slums within the formal system while redressing the deeper issues of slum creation. The scheme talks of earmarking for basic services to the urban poor within the local body budgets. As one of its reformative measures, it also mentions provision of basic services to the urban poor which includes water supply and sanitation. The intention of the scheme belies the fact that no separate funds have been earmarked to achieve its vision. *National Urban Habitat and Housing Policy (2007)* "intends to promote sustainable development of habitat in the country with a view to ensuring equitable supply of land, shelter and services at affordable prices to all sections of society". It also plans to involve women at all levels of decision making to ensure participation in the formulation and implementation of housing policies and programmes. Further, it aims to address the special needs of women-headed households, single women, working women and women in difficult circumstances in relation to housing serviced by basic services, which would include water and sanitation. This is the only policy which tries to include women in its guidelines. *Integrated Housing Slum Development Programme (IHSDP)*, In addition to providing shelter through up gradating and construction of new houses, *IHSDP* also aims to provide community toilets, water supply, storm water drains, community baths, widening and paving of existing lanes, sewers and street lights. Slum improvement and

rehabilitation are part of the scheme, which focus on inclusive urban planning. Yet there has been no specific mention of women directly in the scheme despite the funding mechanism being explicitly laid out.

The approach to the Twelfth Plan exhibits insufficient awareness of the specific problems of women, their unpaid labour and their distinctive economic contribution to the nation's economy. Thus, the major shift through this initiative was to move the engendering of public policy into the macroeconomic space (Government of India, 2010). The policy approach underlying both the Eleventh and Twelfth plans expects to promote economic growth through creating opportunities for the entrepreneurial class by liberalizing domestic and global markets. This framework – in which Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth is the relevant indicator and 'a dynamic private sector' is seen as the main instrument for its expansion – gives insufficient importance to employment intensive activities and conditions of existence for the majority of workers. This in turn permeates and infects all the other aspects of the Approach such that the basic objective of making growth "more inclusive" is unlikely to be met (UNIFEM, 2013).

There is increasing focus on Reforming Public Services in India through urban good governance. World Bank (2006) in its report on Reforming Public Services in India highlighted the common factors that influence the delivery of public services in India and demanded for restructuring of public services in India. Singh (2006) in his paper on "Restructuring of Municipal Services in India" maintained that there has been considerable debate in India about the indifferent quality of public service delivery which remains poor on a whole. Though, decentralization initiatives have brought about institutional changes in municipal services, yet urbanization, unplanned urban development and inadequate infrastructure of resources have stressed urban services. These services have not been able to keep pace with the fast growing population. Dhar (2006) in his paper on "Good Governance, Civil Service Reforms and Decentralization" said that in developing countries like India, full transition to market systems has to be very wisely and continuously brought about or ill the impacts of change can be inequitable and even catastrophic. He highlighted the need of a bold, effective and credible state which trusts people, which governs through policy and bold, open, people's friendly action. Singh (2006) in his paper on "Fostering Excellence in Public Services in India" remarked that independence India has been constantly endeavoring to bring efficiency, particularly in public service delivery through more accountability, transparency and responsiveness. Singh (2007) in his report on "Decentralized Urban Governance in India" highlighted the need for introducing municipal reforms and strengthening the urban local governments for delivering public services to urban poor. Pintu (2007) in his paper on "People's Centred

Development and Participatory Urban Governance” said that in the emerging scenario, under a liberalized regime and in the context of participatory democracy, movements, action groups and the like are representatives of a vibrant civil society have introduced new conceptions of power and politics. They have initiated new modes of organizations, emphasizing self government and decentralization. Benjamin and Bhuvneshwari (2007) in their paper on “Urban Futures of Poor Groups in Chennai and Bangalore” highlighted the emerging issues in the era of post-74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment and their implications on urban poor. They called for local accountability and strengthening of parastatals and local bodies for empowering urban poor. Singh (2007) in his paper on “Urban Poverty in India” discussed in detail the nature, extent, dimensions and magnitude of urban poverty in India. He also reviewed the plans and policies for urban poverty alleviation. World Bank (2004) in its report on “Challenges of Poverty in Uttar Pradesh” highlighted the incidence and dimensions of poverty in the state of Uttar Pradesh. The report maintained that about 8 per cent of world’s poor live in Uttar Pradesh alone. Planning Commission (2007) in its Uttar Pradesh Development report elaborated the governance framework and social development. Krueger (1993) maintained that accelerated growth and social welfare improvements have a lot to do with strong leadership and a well functioning bureaucracy. Mauro (1995) said that bureaucratic inefficiency could affect growth indirectly or directly by leading to a misallocation of investment among sectors. Hart, Shleifer and Vishny (1997) have maintained that private provision is likely to work well for some public goods but not at all well for some others. Oates (1972) said that decentralization is the transfer of decision making from the highest level of the government to quasi autonomous units of the local government. The strong merit of decentralization is that it enables the government to be more responsive to local needs, tastes and financial viability.

In order to ensure inclusive growth, it is essential that all potential workers find remunerative employment in the mainstream of development. *Generating productive work has to be an integral part of the plan model.* It is now officially acknowledged (NCUES, 2007) that economic ‘development’ has not just witnessed the growth of the informal sector and of those being employed informally, but also the phenomenon of the ‘informalization of the formal sector’. The National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector (2009) estimated the effectiveness of the coverage of important labour laws for the year 1999-2000. Among other things, this exercise revealed that the effectiveness of coverage as far as the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 was concerned was only 16 per cent. The International Labour Organization’s recently concluded evaluation of maternity benefit schemes in India, carried this exercise further and revealed the manner in which eligible women

workers were denied maternity benefits statutorily due to them (Lingan and Krishnaraj, 2010).

The constitution of India has made provision of establishment of Local Self Governments in order to decentralize the planning process and governance. 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendments Acts were introduced which made provisions for three tier system of decentralized governance. Women's role in decision making is one of the most important questions for consideration in the movement for their empowerment. The 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendments (1992) to the Indian Constitution have served as a major breakthrough towards ensuring women's equal access and increased participation in political power structure. There are about one million elected women representatives in Panchayats and municipal bodies in India. The Constitutional Amendment Acts also ensured the provision of reservation of women in local governments. One-third seats were reserved in urban local bodies also. A few states such as Bihar, M.P., and Rajasthan have also made provision for 50 percent reservation for women in local governments. Thus the gender mainstreaming in decentralized governance has been initiated. More over, women's share in policy perspective and resources allocation in urban sector has been reported to be very low. With the launch of JNNURM and other infrastructure programmes and schemes, gender mainstreaming is getting momentum. JNNURM and reforms agenda seek to improve the effectiveness, accountability, efficiency, sustainability and service equity in cities. It also aims to reduce class and gender fragmentation by making socio-political-economic institutions, processes and resource allocations more equitable. Thus, gender based urban development is about promoting cities that respond, equally to men and women. Urban women experience cities differently and thus meeting their needs becomes critical for promoting sustainable and equitable urban development (Singh, 2013). The 74<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Indian Constitution, 1992 has served as a major breakthrough towards women's equal access and increased participation in local government. The Constitutional Amendment Act aims at constitutional guarantees to safeguard the interests of urban local government to enable them to function as effective and self governing institutions at grassroot level. "Women also comprise a sizeable segment of the poverty struck population" (Annual Report, WCD, 2007). There is lot of indirect evidence of differential treatment of women and men, particularly of girls *vis-a-vis* boys, in many parts of the world, e.g., among rural families in Asia and Africa: morbidity and mortality rates reflect the differential female deprivation of extraordinary proportions (Sen., 2006). "Women form the most oppressed and vulnerable section of the society, gender responsive budgets can contribute to achieve the objectives of gender equality, human development and economic efficiency" (Govt. of India, 2009).

According to the World Economic Forum, gender inequality is inefficient and costly to women, men, girls and boys (Ratnasi, 2008). These costs are manifested by lower levels of productivity, competitiveness and reduced levels of well-being. Diane Elson is of the view that “if women themselves have more control over resources there will be gains for society as a whole” (Elson, 2002). A national budget that is gender responsive recognizes the underlying inequalities between women and men and redresses them through the allocation of public resources” (Helena, 2003). It also views women not as “a vulnerable group who are beneficiaries of government assistance but rather as right holders, whose governments are under obligation to empower and protect them” (Noeleen, 2006). In order to understand the significance of gender budgeting and why gender budgeting is needed it is necessary to learn how women are faring in different areas such as, life expectancy, adult literacy rate and labour force participation.

Gender equality is central to the realization of Millennium Development Goals. Gender equality, leading to increased work opportunities, enhanced capacities for livelihood developments, enhanced social protection and overall increasing voice may enable women to participate equally in productive employment, contributing to women’s development leading to economic growth of the nation. No nation can afford development without considering women who constitute about half of the stock of human resources. Urbanization is increasing gradually with its wider implications on social development, gender equity and economic growth.

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