

Chapter 14

Role of Infrastructure Development to Empower Women: An Over-Determined View

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ABSTRACT

A modern economy is market focused. It is held that when a woman becomes a participant in the market on her own term as a rational economic agent she is empowered in an economic sense. It does not take into account the other spectrums of empowerment viz. gender political, cultural and like. A nation's infrastructure provides the basic scaffolding for development. The differences in how men and women use infrastructure services have important implications for sector policies, investment priorities, and program designs. This chapter will analyse how the infrastructure development programme as an economic process assist women to enhance capability of them within society and how its actual impact is mutually constituted by other non-economic social processes and make it an over determined matter. Our study has shown that adequate access of the social infrastructure services has fetched benefits for women and ensures empowerment of women.

INTRODUCTION

Gender equality stands as a key of Millennium Development Goal (MDG) and it is well recognised that poor infrastructure can act as an obstacle to meet this goal. Indeed, it is the first time when importance of women's contributions to development has received such high-level attention from the world's global leaders and institutions. The Gender Action Plan (GAP), launched in 2006, commits more than \$65 million over 4 years to catalyze activities that strengthen women's economic empowerment (World Bank, 2010). This includes infrastructure that meets women's as well as men's needs. Before evaluating how infrastructure projects can and do transform people's lives, and especially those of women, we

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need to realise why such integration of women into infrastructure development become a needful to ensure women's empowerment. Kabeer (1996) defines women's empowerment as the "ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them." The global financial and economic crises have highlighted the need for greater gender equality in the society to counter vulnerability to economic shocks. Simultaneously these efforts support recovery and poverty reduction. Investing in women's full economic potential is critical to increasing productivity and economic growth, and supporting the move towards a more balanced and sustainable development. Not doing so is an under-utilization of available human resources and hampering of productive diversity (World Bank, 2010). Women continue to disproportionately face a range of multiple challenges relating to access to employment, choice of work, working conditions, employment security, wage parity, discrimination, and balancing the competing burdens of work and family responsibilities. To promote gender equality and empowerment of women, one useful weapon may be the gendering in infrastructure development.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

There exists a two-way link between infrastructure development, and women empowerment. Women may be a part of infrastructure development programme by rendering their services as an employee. Here they are acting as a productive labour of an economic process. This process may be exploitative or non- exploitative depending on nature of fundamental and subsumed class process. On the other side one level lack of infrastructural development facilities (which is attached with other non-economic processes) exacerbated gender oppression. Inequalities between girls and boys in access to schooling, adequate health care and less accessibility of sanitation, safe drinking water, and adequate uses of electricity make the women less efficient. These less efficient women fail to achieve such opportunities that they can derive from the participation as a productive labour in infrastructure development programme (World Bank, 2010). Inadequate infrastructure also affects women more than men, because women are often responsible for a larger share of, and often more time consuming, household activities (World Bank, 2013). This lack of aforesaid facilities could be influenced by several non- economic processes such as gender, cultural, political and legal processes. While disparities in basic rights, access to schooling, credit and jobs, and the ability to participate in public life took their most direct toll on women and girls, the adequacy in infrastructural services may reduce the burden of domestic chores of women and allow them more time to be spent on marketing activities. Evidence has shown that gender inequality ultimately hindered economic growth.

According to the OECD Development Assistance Committee, the process of gendering infrastructural services requires a shift in mindsets from seeing gender as "requiring attention" to consider women and girls as the "primary clients". This effort is a critical factor in ensuring the project's success and sustainability. When gender equality issues are not taken into account, women can become worse off—both absolutely and in relation to men" (World Bank, 2010).

It is argued that as economic development proceeds, quality of life for all will improve. Quality of life includes freedom to make choices. The concept of empowerment can be explained in several ways. It may be economic empowerment, political empowerment and cultural empowerment. In gross, we

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