

# Directions for women's advocacy

D. Rudrappan

Despite much economic progress in the last few decades, gender inequalities remain pervasive in many dimensions, particularly more prevalent in poor developing countries. Gender inequalities persist in the allocation of such resources as education, employment opportunities, health care, and political voice matter much because of the strong association with well being, productivity and economic growth. Gender inequalities begin at an early age, with boys receiving larger share of education and health expenditure than girls. Having a child during the teenage years limits girl's opportunities for better education, jobs, and income.

The Millennium Development Goals promulgated by the 2000 UN Millennium Summit declared Women Empowerment as the third important MDG goal which will determine all other goals such as: 1) Reducing poverty and hunger; 2) Educating all children; 3) Saving children; 4) Caring for mothers; 5)

Combating disease; 6) Sustainable development and 7) Development partnership between rich and poor countries. Women Empowerment may be explained as building the ability and skills of women to gain insights of actions and issues in the external environment that influence them and build up their capacity to overcome social and institutional obstacles, and strengthening their participation in the economic and political progressions for an overall improvement in their quality of life.

Gender disparity puts women at a disadvantage throughout their lives and stifles the development prospects of their societies. Illiterate and poorly educated mothers are less able to care for their children. Low education levels and household work responsibilities prevent women from finding productive employment and participating in decision making process both at the household and public levels. Women's wage work is important for the well-being of families and economic growth. But restricted access to education and vocational training, heavy workloads at home and in non-paid domestic and market activities, and

labour market discrimination against women often limit their participation in paid economic activities besides reducing their productivity and wage. Hence, prevailing barriers in the form of social and economic obstacles to women empowerment have to be removed by the government so as to 'reach the unreached'.

Empowerment is concerned particularly, with acquisition of power and distribution of power between individuals and groups. Empowerment encompasses not only economic, educational, social but also political, legal and personal empowerment. Economic Empowerment: Control over household income, relative contribution of income to family support, access to and control over family resources, access to employment opportunities, credit and market and ownership of assets. Social Empowerment: Freedom of movement, access to social activities and transportation, lack of discrimination against daughters and commitment to educate girl child.

Political and legal empowerment: Knowledge of politics, participation in the political system, freedom to vote inde-

pendently, knowledge of legal rights and awareness and family support for exercising legal rights.

Personal empowerment: Participation in domestic decision making, ability to make spouse selection and child bearing decisions, freedom from domestic violence indicating greater value and autonomy for women.

As stated above, advocacy programmes should be formulated for the empowerment of women in all fields so as to have equal access to education, household income, social activities, political system, legal rights and participation in domestic decision making process on par with men.

Women and knowledge: The main resource that liberates women from poverty and empowers them is knowledge which is acquired through education and training. World Bank forum by the name Voices of Poor; based on a feedback from 60,000 people in 60 countries has concluded that people sought access to knowledge and opportunities instead of charity to fight conditions leading to poverty. Knowledge is not a scarce resource; it infinitely ex-

pands and proliferates with its use, and is the most important factor in the improvement of human condition. Therefore, knowledge through education is indispensable to initiate the change process in women development. It is an established fact that without progress towards empowerment of women, any attempt to raise the quality of life of people would be incomplete and unsuccessful.

Women empowerment is considered a pre-requisite for economic and social emancipation of women and in a welfare state such as Nigeria, welfare of women is fundamental. Napoleon Bonaparte, realizing the importance of women remarked: "Give me good mothers; I'll give a good nation." The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world. Such being the eminent position of women in society, their empowerment is essential for a happy, prosperous and contented humanity.

*D. Rudrappan is a professor of Economics, Covenant University, Ota*  
rudrappan\_d@rediffmail.com  
• comment@businessdayonline.com