

## Sustainable Development through Empowerment of Women: Role of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) - A study of Kashmir

**Tanveer Ahmad Lone**, *Research Scholar, Department of Women Education, MANUU, Hyderabad, [lonetanveeramu@gmail.com](mailto:lonetanveeramu@gmail.com)*

**Dr. Shabana Kesar**, *Assistant Professor, Department Women Education, MANUU, Hyderabad [sabasuri@gmail.com](mailto:sabasuri@gmail.com)*

### Abstract

*In this paper, the researcher aims to highlight that how empowerment of women- half of the world's population, contributes towards the Sustainable Development. As women in areas like Kashmir particularly in rural areas of Kashmir are mostly illiterate and have been traditionally engaged in domestic work wherein they use natural bounty (forest etc.). Their illiteracy and such proximity with the nature would certainly have an impact on the upbringing of their children and the natural environment. In such a situation Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's) would prove handful in the empowerment of women, so that they would become aware about their duties and responsibilities towards Sustainable Development. The researcher in this paper attempts to visualize the importance of women in preservation of the natural sink (forests), so that our future is not put in jeopardy. No development in the world can be inclusive and sustainable without women being a part of it. In order to enable women to be part of sustainable development and perform their duties and responsibilities towards this end, they need to be empowered and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's) can be handful enough in this regard especially in patriarchal societies.*

**Keywords:** Sustainable Development, Women Empowerment, Non-Governmental Organization, Responsibility, Patriarchal Society.

### Introduction

Sustainable Development has acquired tremendous importance especially in the wake of rapid economic development taking place throughout the world and consequent usage of limited natural resources by humans for satisfying their needs. Rapid and large scale use of natural

resources has given rise to problem like degradation and depletion of resources, environmental degradation and scarcity of resources for future generations. Keeping in mind these concerns various UN agencies on environment and other such bodies launched programmes and policies for awareness and commitment towards sustainability of development. Sustainable development is not only the responsibility of governments and international or national agencies on environment. It is the responsibility of every section of the society. One of the most important section are the women. Women have a special responsibility towards this end, as they are not just only the half of the man force but they are the ones who as mothers can inculcate values of environmental awareness among the children.

Women in developing countries like India are traditionally discriminated and lack empowerment. They need to be empowered and made aware about their rights so that they would come to know about their place in the society. But unfortunately our society in general and politics in particular male dominated. Organisations other than politics would have to come forward for this cause. Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO's) are a very good tool towards this end. The need of NGO's for empowering women is more required in rural areas where women are mostly illiterate and more discriminated. The areas like Kashmir valley are lacking behind in women empowerment due to political, social, economic and geographical reasons. Therefore they need to be empowered on priority basis through the efforts of NGO's to do their due in sustainable development.

### **Sustainable Development: Concept and Meaning**

The idea of Sustainable Development attained importance in the backdrop of growing realization that the degradation of the earth's resources in order to meet the current needs is disastrous for the future generations. Looking at the pace with which natural resources were degraded and depleted in the name of so called economic development, the need was felt to save these resources from degradation, as these resources have to be preserved for our future generations. It is a matter of grave concern that those if we reap the fruits of economic development in the contemporary era then it is to make future generations worse by the consumption of natural resources cum the environment. .

As a result of this realization on the world stage, Sustainable Development happened to be a major emphasis of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) which was held in Brazil in June 1992. The World Commission on Environment and Development said that effort to achieve Sustainable Development is being carried out amidst the additional pressure of such global difficulties as “Climate change, Ozone depletion and Species loss”.

The origin of the term can be traced to Brundtland Commission Report- Our Common Future, where it meant as “Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. There are three essential elements of sustainable development: ‘economic development’, ‘social inclusion’ and ‘environmental protection’.

### **Empowerment of Women**

In the area of women development, ‘Women Empowerment’ is a new term and as such the term empowerment is basically found in the theories of “Paulo Freire” who presented the notion of “conscientization” as the process, where the powerless and disempowered gain a bigger share of control of resources and also decision making. It includes five major components like economic independence, participation, self-image, knowledge and awareness, and autonomy. Women Empowerment denotes growing improving social, economic, political, and legal strength of the women in order to make sure equal rights to women; make them self-confident so that they may claim their own rights. It is a way by which women get to power over material and intellectual resources which assists them to increase their Self-assurance to affirm their independent rights. It helps them to challenge patriarchy cum gender based discrimination against women. It also enables them to establish themselves to emphasize their autonomy in order to make decisions and choices and ultimately reduce their own submission in all the institutions of society.

### **Sustainable Development and Women**

Women constitute almost half of the population of the world, having enormous potential for economic development; women have to come forward to utilize their potential in a productive way. Women as mothers and care takers contribute to human resource development

and their representation is vital in all fields. Any Development model where women are underrepresented cannot be termed as development in the real sense. Sustainable Development needs efforts from all the sections of the society; if the half of the population is excluded Sustainable Development cannot take place. Women and Sustainable Development approach covers a variety of areas including forests, irrigation, agriculture, and water systems. This approach contains women's relationship with the environment in the context of economic development as well as many harmful effects that the degradation of environment has had on women themselves and on society at large. So it is important to empower them, so that they can play their due in Sustainable Development.

Since the 1990's women have been identified as key agents of sustainable development and women's equality and empowerment are seen as central to a more holistic approach towards establishing new patterns and processes of development that are sustainable. The World Bank has suggested that empowerment of women should be a key aspect of all social development programmes (World Bank 2001). To bring social change women have to be empowered especially in rural areas for collective strength, collective action and equal participation in every area. Historically and even today women take care of the basic needs of society like food, fodder, fuel, shelter, nurturing etc. ( Kamala Bhasin 1992). In United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) 1992 reports that empowerment of women also implies enhancement of the position of women and their access to family planning services, make a triple contribution to sustainable development so that they can make their own contribution to the quality of life and reduction of absolute poverty, they can contribute to the skills of the work force and slowing down population growth thereby reducing the burden on the environment which will develop sustainability. Realizing the importance of women empowerment in sustainable development, the United Nations has enlisted it in Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) at number 5 as 'gender equality'.

Therefore women need to be empowered especially in countries like India to meet the goals of Sustainable Development. In India Women have been traditionally subjugated to discrimination in all spheres of life. Unfortunately, women in developing countries like India where there is patriarchal society, have been subjected to discrimination .Women are considered backward mentally, socially and even religiously which has led to their political, economic and

educational backwardness. There is an urgent need for their upliftment and empowerment. Such upliftment could have been achieved by political initiative through women empowering policies and practices of the government. But in a male dominated society where politicians are a part of associating taboos with women empowerment, desire for women empowerment through political initiative is a distant dream. Therefore such initiatives must come from other sections of society like women rights associations, civil society organisations, academicians, women rights movements and the Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO's). The role of NGO's is particularly important given the fact that they work at the ground level with the target group and develop a special bond with them based on humanity.

### **Role of NGO's in Empowerment of Women (A study of Kashmir Valley)**

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) can be defined as, non-profit agencies, adopting a professional managerial approach to promote development or render services to the marginalized groups and weaker sections of societies, so that their voice is heard and they get empowered to assert their democratic rights. In its broadest sense, the term refers to organisations that are usually set up by a group of people out of their initiative and are partly influenced by external forces like the state or donor agencies. NGOs are also non-profit organisations and can be organized on a local, regional, national and international level. NGOs may perform several activities but are usually associated with humanitarian works. The main activities of NGOs are creation of community awareness, training, counselling, surveys, research, income generation and creation of community assets. They also high-light individual's concern to governments, evaluate as well as monitor government policies and encourage political participation at community level.

Jammu and Kashmir is northern most state of India. Majority of the population lives in rural areas and have marginal to small size of land holding. Empowerment of women in the context of sustainable development in Kashmir gets even more important as it is an ecologically important habitation with a large number of women involved in those domestic activities directly connected with maintenance of ecological balance. Women in rural and hilly areas of Kashmir gather firewood from forest and get water from water bodies. In this way they remain in constant proximity with environment, they must therefore be made aware about their duty towards maintaining its sanctity. A lot of efforts are being undertaken by the Government and Non-

Government Organisations for socio-economic development of rural population of the state. By and large the professional focus of these NGOs is to larger extent on rural development and poverty alleviation. As Women are vital and productive workers in Indian economy and constitute half of the country population, overall rural development is possible only when the women folk of the rural areas will be empowered. Though a good number of Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) are working in Kashmir Valley, but the NGOs working for emancipation of women are quite few. From the analysis of NGOs working for women, we find that these NGOs are mainly working for their empowerment, whether it is through education or awareness, through economic aid or skill development and by providing them access to basic amenities of life like food, drinking water and medical care etc. These NGOs adopted different means for their empowerment in the valley, the main ones are:-

**Through Education:** World over studies have revealed that the most important tool for the empowerment of women is education. Proper education and training imparted to women make them play their roles in social, economic and political spheres as equal members of the society. Keeping in mind the importance of education for women emancipation and empowerment, the NGOs in Kashmir have adopted the education as an instrument for women upliftment and welfare.

**Through Awareness Camps:** Another measure used by the NGOs for women empowerment in Kashmir is through conducting many awareness camps for women. Through these camps, women are provided awareness about their right both in civil as well as political spheres. Various awareness programmes were organized in the far flung areas of Kashmir to enhance their potentialities in various spheres of life.

**Through socio-economic means:** Another important measure for women empowerment adopted by the NGOs in Kashmir is through socio-economic means. Through this measure, women who were unable to provide for their own sustenance were provided financial aid. Even various training camps and programmes were organized where these women were provided vocational and skill development training. Various socio-economic development programmes were organized for the general welfare of women.

**Women participation:** This is one of the main tools adopted for the women empowerment by the NGOs in Kashmir. Women were encouraged to be part of social programmes organized for women welfare. They were made to become the part of various self-help groups.

## **Conclusion**

Depletion and degradation of resources not only affects prospects of development of the present generation but casts a shadow on the prosperity of future generations as well. Our ancestors have entrusted the duty of custodianship of natural resources on us, we are therefore duty bound to carry them forward in good shape to our future generations. That is the rationale behind the concept of sustainable development. This is the responsibility of all of us to work towards sustainable development. Women being half of the world's population and almost half of the population of India need to realize their duties for sustainable development. Such realization is not easy given the fact that women in India particularly in its rural areas lack empowerment. Though the government has necessary reach and wherewithal to enforce change in the status of women, but they are not able to do so due to socio-political reasons emanating from patriarchal nature of the society. In such a situation Non- Governmental Organisations (NGO's) are a viable option to empower women. Non- Governmental Organisations(NGO's) would not only take direct steps empowering women like organizing awareness programmes and doing door to door campaigns but they would also serve as watchdog for efforts of government towards this end. So through empowerment of women NGO's have an important role in Sustainable Development.

## References

- Sapru, R. k. (1994). Development Administration. Sterling Publishers Private Limited, New Delhi.
- Bhattacharya, M. (2016). Social Theory and Development Administration. Jawahar Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi.
- Ganesamurthy, V. S. (2008). Empowerment of Women in India: Social, Economic and Political. New Century Publications, New Delhi, India.
- Sadik, N. K. (1988). Women the Centre of Development, 1988, Vol. 1, 30-33.
- World Book, (2001). Engendering Development through Gender equality in Rights, Resources and Voice, New York, Oxford University Press.
- Bhasin, K. (1998). Women and Empowerment: Approach and strategies. Discovery Publishing House, New Delhi.
- Rowlands (2000). Article on A word of the Times, but what does it mean? In the book, Women Empowerment (Ed.) by Halch Afshar. Macmillon Press Ltd., London.
- Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future. United Nations 1987.
- Slathia, P. S., Nain, M.S., & Sharma. J.P. (2014). NGO in Socioeconomic Development of Rural Women: A case Study. Journal of Community Mobilization and Sustainable Development Vol. 9(1), 101-06, January-June, 2014.