Abstract - Empowerment in the context of women's development is a way of defining, challenging and overcoming barriers in a woman's life through which she increases her ability to shape her life and environment. It is an active, multidimensional process, which should enable women to realize their full identity and power in all spheres of life. India envisions a future in which Indian women are independent and self-reliant. It is unfortunate that because of centuries of inertia, ignorance and conservatism, the actual and potential role of women in the society has been ignored, preventing them from making their rightful contribution to social progress. Entrepreneurship development and income generating activities are a feasible solution for empowering women. It generates income and also provides flexible working hours according to the needs of homemakers. Economic independence is the need of the hour. Participation in income generating activities helps in the overall empowerment of women this paper focuses and provides an insight into the challenges and advantages faced by them.

Keywords—Women Development, Women entrepreneurs

INTRODUCTION - ISSUE OF CONCERN

Women almost constitute 50 per cent of the world population and have been making substantial contribution to socio-economic development. But, unfortunately their contribution largely remains unrecognized and unnoticed in most developing and least developed countries. Besides, society gives little chance to women to enter into the fields of various economic activities. It has been observed that though women are burdened with family and house-hold responsibilities, they, particularly in semi-urban and rural areas, have been actively participating in economic activities in the unorganised sector. Yet, the overall socio-economic environment discriminates against them.

Women empowerment – Role of entrepreneurship

Women make the second largest target group for identification of potential entrepreneurs being slightly less than 50% of the total population. In India there are 99.4 million women workers in a labour force of 272.84 million. Majority of the women seek work, out of economic necessity, but of these a large number are unable to find employment. Their share in total unemployment (40%) is higher than their share in the labour force (33%). According to the 1981 census, there are only 150,000 self employed women, a mere 5.2% of the total number are self employed, of this a majority are concentrated in low paid, low skilled, low technology and low productivity jobs in the rural and recognised sectors. 90% (79.4 million) women workers are in the rural area as against only 10% (8.6 million) in urban areas. Only 2.5 million women work in the organised sector, a mere 12.4% of the total employment.

Empowering women has become the key element in the development of an economy. With women moving forward, the family moves, the village moves and the nation moves. Hence, improving the status of women by way of their economic empowerment is highly called for.

“You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women.”

-By Jawaharlal Nehru.

Starting a business and bringing creativity in life with self-esteem and happiness have a direct link with each other. Economic growth is highly indispensable for any developing country, which can be substantiated by ensuring participation of women. Being the focal point of economic development, entrepreneurship can play an instrumental role in building the world.

Entrepreneurial activities transform the ideas and creativity of aspiring women into business ventures with high potential and growth. This certainly helps in generating jobs and wealth creation, resulting into a state of well-being and increased opportunities in the country. As more and more women are getting to know the benefits of entrepreneurial activity, a silent renaissance is sweeping across all the sectors resulting in larger participation.

Women venture into entrepreneurial activities for myriads of reasons such as economic necessity; lack of better employment options, commercializing an idea; desire to be economically independent; an urge to be
creative and utilise their time gainfully; and pursuing a hobby.

In spite of the discrimination against them, women are increasingly taking up the leadership role in economic activity. Owing to supportive policies and programmes of governments aimed at solving the twin problems of poverty and unemployment, there has been a proliferation in number of women-owned micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), contributing to their respective economies across the globe. It is to be noted that their presence in the economic leadership role in least-developed countries (LDCs) is not comparable in developed countries. Interestingly, the number of women-owned and managed SMEs, though still small in numbers, is on the rise in developing countries. It is in this context observed that countries in which women are marginalized are seen in the bottom of the list on measures of economic prosperity and entrepreneurial opportunity. In contrast, countries that are more proactive towards gender equality, top the list.

International Scenario

Alleviating poverty through entrepreneurship is a key tool for economic empowerment of women around the world. Women entrepreneurs must be supported to grow from small informal enterprises to formal small and medium enterprises in order to create sustainable employments, be visible in their national economies, contribute to GDP growth and be relevant in the global market place.

Promotion of women entrepreneurs as a part of SME development programmes has become an important priority among countries, both developed and developing ones. In most of the developing countries today, more and more emphasis is laid on the need for development of women and their active participation in the main stream of development process. Women entrepreneurs as major part of informal and small scale industries in the current global economic scenario are going to play vital role in the social-economic and political development programs. Gender equality is a key policy objective in developing countries. It is increasingly seen as providing a double dividend: not only guaranteeing a fundamental human right, but also boosting economic growth.

Experiences of European countries and USA have clearly established that promotion of women entrepreneurs have immensely benefited them in terms of job creation and economic growth. According to U.S. Small Business Administration, “Women business owners are critically important to the American economy. America’s 9.1 million women-owned businesses employ 27.5 million people and contribute $3.6 trillion to the economy.” “Women-owned businesses constitute approximately 26 per cent of the total non-agricultural business population of the United States...”. The government has launched Women-21.gov, a premier one-stop federal resource for targeted information, registration for online programs, and networking opportunities to help women entrepreneurs navigate the ever-changing business world and do what they do best: innovate, create jobs, and make a vital contribution to the strength of America. In member countries of Organisation for Economic Development (OECD), “women entrepreneurs reportedly constitute a growing share of SME owners, with higher than average start-up rates in several OECD member and non-member countries”.

The One Woman initiative is a joint public private “Women’s empowerment fund” provided by United States focuses on empowerment initiatives including entrepreneurship. The “Ladies Business School” that has run for almost 20 years in Finland, or the micro-credits programmes in Spain and Finland are supported by their government as they have proved to be very effective and relevant.

A major force behind China’s growth in the global market is its women. In China women comprise almost half of the labour force (about 45.5%) and still growing. Rural women make up 65% of those working in agricultural production.

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific says “small businesses have emerged as significant avenues for the economic empowerment of women” in the region. Between 1995 and 1997, women business operators increased by 9% while male business operators increased by 2.6%”. Women are increasingly venturing into business in African countries also and growing membership of African Federation of Women Entrepreneurs (AFWE), Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, reflects increasing entrepreneurial activities among women in African continent.

Women are not only found in manufacturing and trading sector in the domestic economy but also are active in export/import trade. For example, “in Russia, women business owners are involved in international trade at a higher rate (19%) than in the US (13%). In Brazil, Mexico and Argentina, 22% to 32% of women business owners are involved in international trade”. Yet, women entrepreneurs around the world continue to face hurdles in their operations, necessitating governments to design appropriate remedial measures.

UNIDO’s Rural and Women Entrepreneurship (RWE) Programme contributes to poverty reduction through entrepreneurship development programmes— with a focus on rural development and gender equality.

Women Entrepreneurship

An increasing number of women are wanting to participate in the economic activities of the nation. Thus we find the emergence of women entrepreneurs. A woman entrepreneur is a person who is an enterprising individual with an eye for opportunities, and an uncanny vision, commercial acumen, with tremendous perseverance and above all a person who is willing to take risks with the unknown because of the adventurous spirit she possesses.
Women entrepreneurs can be divided into three categories:

1. Entrepreneurs in Large and Medium Sector - In large and medium sectors, women with educational and professional qualifications, take the initiative and manage the business as well as a man. A woman entrepreneur who has received basic managerial training and educational qualifications, sometimes even an MBA degree, usually may head the medium sector and large units. These women because of their qualifications and other opportunities which are available to them are in a superior position and have a competitive edge over others to set up and manage the units.

2. Entrepreneurs in the Small Sector - Those women entrepreneurs who do not have education or any formal training in management, but have developed skills take to small scale industry. They choose that product with which they are familiar i.e. garments, weaving, pickles, dolls and handicrafts. Some have ventured into engineering, electronics, chemicals and pharmaceuticals. Some also make surgical instruments, furniture and pottery. These women entrepreneurs need in the initial period, certain special privileges to overcome the practical social handicaps they face for being a woman such as attitudinal reluctance of officers, lack of information, and too many formalities that need to be completed.

The third category of women entrepreneurs - work in cities and slums to help women with lower means of livelihood. Their service motivated organization to help economically backward sections. They need Government support in marketing as well as getting finances at a concessional rate for their products.

 Preferential purchasing policy of government helps such institutions to manufacture and sell to the government items like files, chalk, stationery, etc.

Challenges Faced By Women Entrepreneurs

Women in our country always remained a victim of neglect and discrimination and were not allowed to perform their due role in the economic or social life of the society. Recognizing the injustice meted out to women in the past, the architects of our Constitution took special care to guarantee equality of rights and opportunities for women in political and social fields and to specifically prohibit any discrimination particularly in matters of employment, wages and human conditions of work. The need is now keenly felt that women should also work outside the home for getting better living standards for all. It is in this context, that the question of women entrepreneurs or women’s industries has taken a new significance especially when unemployment has become a matter of great concern to all. Better health and decreasing infant mortality is a sufficiently persuasive force for women to come out of their homes. Rapid industrialization, urbanization, and socio-political movements have made a dent in the old pattern.

The literature review emphasizes on the following critical problems faced by women entrepreneurs.

A. Access to Finance - It is considered as a key issue to women. Accessing credit, particularly for starting an enterprise, is one of the major constraints faced by women entrepreneurs. Women often have fewer opportunities than men to gain access to credit for various reasons, including lack of collateral, unwillingness to accept household assets as collateral and negative perceptions of female entrepreneurs by loan officers. Sometimes, credit may be available for women through several schemes but there are bottlenecks and gaps, and the multiplicity of schemes is often not adequately listed nor is there networking among agencies. As a result, clients approaching one institution are sometimes not made aware of the best option for their requirements (Vishwanathan, 2001). A study by Das (2000) shows that more than 50 per cent of the women used their own funds or funds borrowed from their spouse or family to set up their business.

Another such study done among women entrepreneurs in Coimbatore District, Tamil Nadu points out financing the enterprise as major problem faced by the women entrepreneurs (Mangai et al, 1992). Most of the entrepreneurs rely on family finance or at the maximum on partners and friends. Lack of access to capital has been a primary obstacle for women entrepreneurs. Research suggests that the primary source of finding for women has been through family loans, personal savings, credit cards and home equity loans.

B. Lack of Relevant Education and Experience - Women tend to have an educational background which is less relevant in preparing them for business ownership. More women have training in ‘non-practical’, traditional ‘female’ subjects such as arts (Watkins and Watkins, 1984) and they lack more directly professional qualification. They also lack relevant managerial and entrepreneurial experience. Women also tend to be less likely to have had education and experience relevant to starting and managing a business and thus less potential for success. Gaining relevant skills and knowledge can also be more difficult for women since they frequently have double work burden and childcare responsibilities, thus making them less able than men to attend formal and informal trainings. The analysis of the research done on women entrepreneurs in India (Anil Kumar, 2007) with reference to education-wise information reveals that 58% women entrepreneurs possessing metric level of education face this problem to a great extent, one-fourth women entrepreneurs possessing graduate level of education and 36% post graduate level face the problem of getting information up to a great extent. Low-level education provides low-level self-confidence and self-reliance to the women folk to engage in business, which is continuous risk taking and strategic decision making profession.

C. Conflicts between Work and Domestic Commitments

Women’s family obligations also bar them from
becoming successful entrepreneurs in both developed and developing nations. "Having primary responsibility for children, home and older dependent family members, few women can devote all their time and energies to their business" (Starcher, 1996). It has been suggested that many women enter self-employment to gain more control over their time and to achieve greater personal autonomy (Belcourt, 1991). For all small business owners, running a business involves long hours, but because domestic duties and child-care are frequently seen as women’s responsibility, many business women face conflicts in their roles as wife, mother, and business owner (Carter and Cannon, 1992). It is common to find the female business owners, particularly those who are mothers, displaying the feeling of guilt because they do not fulfill the traditional female role. Domestic responsibility may mean that the female entrepreneurs face problems allocating sufficient time to the business. The demands associated with running the business and home may therefore restrict the growth and potential success of many women-owned businesses (Fischer et al., 1993 as cited by Wendy Ming -Yen, 2007). Lack of family support worsens the problem.

D. Access to Training - Women have limited access to vocational and technical training in India. UNIDO report suggests that most of the women are often unaware of the training opportunities.

Advantages of Entrepreneurship among Women

Empowering women is a challenge. Micro enterprises can help to meet these challenges. Micro – enterprises not only enhance national productivity, generate employment but also help to develop economic independence, personal and social capabilities among women. Following are some of the personal and social capabilities, which develops as result of taking up enterprise among women.

• Economic empowerment
• Improved standard of living
• Self confidence
• Enhance awareness
• Sense of achievement
• Increased social interaction
• Engaged in political activities
• Improvement in leadership qualities
• Involvement in solving problems related to women and community
• Decision making capacity in family and community.

Recommendations

The main purpose of Women Empowerment must be to enhance awareness and create a more informed understanding on the opportunities, issues and approaches with resultant attention and resources directed towards supporting women entrepreneurs. Women empowerment must

- promote entrepreneurship among women;
- share business acumen and technical know-how;
- provide new opportunities to bridge the gaps and increase opportunities for linkages;
- avail comprehensive toolkits to facilitate joint venture opportunities for economic empowerments, increased production, job creation and poverty alleviation;
- recommend governments for more conducive regulatory and administrative environment for women entrepreneurs;
- discuss gender-specific constraints faced by women entrepreneurs;
- identify the role of various intermediaries such as associations and NGOs, micro finance institutions towards enhancing women entrepreneurship;
- suggest measures to improve the reach of credit to women entrepreneurs through a comprehensive programme;
- share good practices in the promotion of female entrepreneurship;
- discuss actions and support measures for promoting female entrepreneurship in different countries; and

Capacity building of women entrepreneurs for increased competitiveness, technology absorbing capacities and women’s control over asset management.

CONCLUSION

Women’s entrepreneurship is both about women’s position in society and about the role of entrepreneurship in the same society. Women entrepreneurs faced many obstacles specifically in market their product (including family responsibilities) that have to be overcome in order to give them access to the same opportunities as men. In addition, in some countries, women may experience obstacles with respect to holding property and entering contracts. Increased participation of women in the labour force is a prerequisite for improving the position of women in society and self-employed women. Particularly the entry of women in micro enterprises will be encouraged and aggravated. Women can do wonders by their effectual and competent involvement in entrepreneurial activities. The women are having basic indigenous knowledge, skill, potential and resources to establish and manage enterprise. Now, what is the need is knowledge regarding accessibility to loans, various funding agencies procedure regarding certification, awareness on government welfare programmes, motivation, technical skill and support from family, government and other
organization. More over Formation and strengthening of women Entrepreneurs network must be encouraged. Women entrepreneur networks are major sources of knowledge about women's entrepreneurship and they are increasingly recognized as a valuable tool for its development and promotion. This network helps to give lectures, printed material imparting first hand technical knowledge in production, processing, procurement, management and marketing among the other women. This will motivate other women to engage in micro entrepreneurship with the right assistance and they can strengthen their capacities besides adding to the family income and national productivity. Empowerment would not hold any meaning unless they are made strong, alert and aware of their equal status in the society particularly in rural areas. Policies should be framed to bring them into the mainstream of society. It is important to educate the women particularly in rural areas. The need of the hour is to improve female literacy as education holds the key to development women in rural India. Thus women entrepreneurship promotes and results in empowerment of women.

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