Enhancing Women's Empowerment Through Capacity Building Programs: Reflections From Jammu And Kashmir

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ABSTRACT
Jammu and Kashmir is faced with an armed conflict since past 24 years. The past over two decades of conflict have deeply affected people's livelihood, their living environments, health, eating habits, their work and workplaces, their access to education and so on. But it is the women of Kashmir who have felt its impact most severely. Women are affected by its short and long-term effects and thus are among the most vulnerable groups during conflict for more reasons than just violence.

The present paper would focus on the programmes initiated by various state and centre government for the enhancing empowerment of Jammu and Kashmir women through various capacity building programmes. Various programmes which support women to take up new ventures and start self employment have been initiated by Jammu and Kashmir State Women Development Corporation, J&K Social Welfare Department and J&K Rural Development in the past few years.

The paper will be also focus on the challenges to women empowerment in J&K and how economic empowerment of women through their capacity building can be one of the most important options to help and bring out these women from their economic distress.

Keywords: Kashmir, conflict, women empowerment, employment, rural development

Introduction
Kashmir is one of the most volatile regions in entire South Asia. Since the outbreak of armed struggle which is termed as ‘proxy war’ unleashed from across the border by Pakistan, between the Kashmiri militants and Indian security forces in 1989, thousands of people have been killed in the mindless violence in the region. The armed conflict in Jammu and Kashmir has entered its 24th year. The past over two decades of conflict have deeply affected people's livelihood, their living environments, health, eating habits, their work and workplaces, their access to education and so on. But it is the women of Kashmir who have felt its impact most severely. Women are affected by its short and long-term effects and thus are among the most vulnerable groups during conflict for more reasons than just violence. Be it the economic deprivation, displacement, poverty or gender-based violence, the costs of conflict are borne disproportionately by women and their children. In the absence of an earning member in the family, women are forced to earn a livelihood and feed the family which is not easy being part of traditional conservative societies and also due to the shrunk economic opportunities in the wake of the conflict. Widows especially are often unable to provide for themselves and their families due to cultural and religious restraints, lack of education etc. Women are not always able to obtain meaningful employment and are therefore unable to provide for their families. In this process the pressure on women increases manifold.

Under such circumstances there is an urgent need to empower women and children. In the light of this, though several programmes have been started, yet these have not achieved the anticipated positive impact on the status of women.

Jammu and Kashmir women and livelihood issues
The female population of Jammu and Kashmir State slashed down from 47.15% of the total population in 2001 to 46.88% (prov.) in 2011. As per details from Census 2011, Jammu and Kashmir has population of 12,548,926 of which male and female are 6,665,561 and 5,883,365 respectively indicating a reduced sex ratio of 883. The corresponding figures of male and female as per Census 2001 were 5,360,926 and 4,782,774 respectively indicating sex ratio of 892. Women thus constitute about 47% of the total population of the State.

Women are significant contributors to the growing economy. The total work force in 2001 was 37.54 lakh workers consisting of 26.80 lakh males and 10.74 lakh females. This work force consisted of 26.09 lakh main workers and 11.45 lakh marginal workers. Work participation rate amongst females
was 22.45 in 2001. A sectoral breakdown of women workers reveals that 56% women are cultivators, 5% are agricultural labourers and 10% workers in the household industry.

**Table No. Occupational Status of Women in Jammu and Kashmir (Census 2001)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Total Population</td>
<td>101.44 Lakhs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Total Women</td>
<td>47.83 Lakhs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Rate of Participation of women in workforce out of total women</td>
<td>22.45 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Rate of Participation of men in workforce out of total men</td>
<td>50 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Total Cultivators</td>
<td>15.91 lakh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Female Cultivators</td>
<td>6.05 lakhs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Total Agricultural Labourers</td>
<td>2.46 lakhs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Female Agricultural Labourers</td>
<td>0.57 lakhs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Women development, no doubt, has been part of the development planning for all the governments. These initiatives have helped in improving the status of women in various spheres to a great extent, yet the imbalance exists.

**Capacity building of women of Jammu and Kashmir**

Keeping in view the fact that the women of Jammu and Kashmir have suffered badly during the last 24 years of bloodshed and violence, their economic empowerment through their capacity building can be one of the most important option to help and bring out these women from their economic distress. Given the fact that hundreds of thousands of women in Jammu and Kashmir have lost their male bread-earners in the family and they have to fend for themselves and their children, capacity building of these women is the only way to help the women in distress. No doubt the state government has launched various programmes in the past few years which support women to take up new ventures and start self employment, more efforts are required for the capacity building of these women.

**Socio-economic-political security and livelihoods in Jammu and Kashmir**

As mentioned earlier, Jammu and Kashmir which is a border state of India situated in the Himalayas is faced with a protracted conflict which has touched almost every single life in the region. Women and children are most hit by this mindless violence. In the absence of stability in the region, hundreds and thousands of women (there is no authentic data to support the claim but the data given by Kashmiri separatist leaders suggest that over 30,000 women have become widows due to conflict) continue to suffer. Widows and half widows (the women whose husbands have simply gone missing and they do not know their status—whether they are dead or alive), in particular are suffering a lot in the absence of adequate sustenance. Due to illiteracy, limited knowledge, skill and resources at their disposal, they are engaged in informal and unorganized sectors where the wages are very low. Low income degrades their quality of life and lowers their standards of living.

**Programmes for women’s economic empowerment**

Taking cognizance of women empowerment as one of the main focused area, the J&K government has launched various schemes for self employment of the women. Various programmes which support women to take up new ventures and start self employment have been initiated by Jammu and Kashmir State Women Development Corporation, J&K Social Welfare Department and J&K Rural Development in the past few years. The Jammu and Kashmir State Women Development Corporation established in the year 1991, is the channelizing agency for implementation of the schemes for social and economic upliftment of the women living below the poverty line. Few of the JKWDC schemes which are benefitting women are:

**Empowering Skilled Young Women Scheme:**

Empowering Skilled Young Women Scheme (ESW) that forms a part of Sher-i-Kashmir Employment and Welfare Programme was launched by J&K State Women Development
Corporation on 8th March, 2010, on International Women’s Day. Women entrepreneurs belonging to different districts of the state can establish gainful income generating units on nominal interest rate of 6% on select trades of readymade garments, aromatic Medicinal Plants, boutique, fashion designing, cosmetic Shop, DTP, Medical Health Care, Mushroom Cultivation and Floriculture/ Agriculture etc.

The J&K Women Development Corporation is raising loan from National Minorities Development and Finance Corporation (NMDFC) and releasing the term loans to female beneficiaries for starting income generating units. Besides, there are schemes financed by National Backward Classes Finance and Development Corporation (NBFCD) and National Handicapped Finance & Development Corporation (NHFDC) under which loans are advanced to females of backward classes for setting up of their income generating units and handicapped respectively. Training centres for skill development of artisans/women beneficiaries are set up under these schemes and thereafter, women are brought under micro credit net to display & sell their products in exhibition-cum-melas which are organized by the State Women Development Corporation, both inside and outside the State. These meets give opportunities to women to sell their products.

Swayam Sidha:
This scheme is meant for economic empowerment of women by framing Self Help Groups. The centre government provides 100% grant in aids for implementation of the scheme. Swayam Sidha is the modified version of Indira Mahila Yojana (IMY) as integrated programme for women empowerment which envisages execution of composite and integrated projects for women’s empowerment duration of 4-5 years at the block level by Project Implementing Agencies (PIAs). J&K State Women Development Corporation is the nodal agency for implementation of this scheme in J&K.

Social Welfare Department:
The J&K Social Welfare Department is also implementing various schemes for development of women which include “Development of Vocational Skills”, “Lady Vocational Training Centres”. Females in the age group of 15 to 35 years are imparted trainings in various crafts through Social Welfare Training Centres. At present, there are 150 Social Welfare Centres which are engaged in imparting training to women folk. The number of inmates in each centre is 25. The inmates are being provided training for 11 months and are being provided stipend @ `100/- per month. Apart from this, there are four ladies vocational trainings centres in the State one each at Jammu, Srinagar, Kargil and Leh. In these centres, besides imparting advanced trainings in various crafts, training in stenography is also imparted.

Challenges to women empowerment in Jammu and Kashmir:
In a state like Jammu and Kashmir where a huge population of women is unemployed and another significant section consists of widows and half-widows, the importance of women’s economic independence for their overall dignity and even survival is brought out by the fact that there is a linkage between the physical survival of women and their entry into the workforce.

Though there are many challenges to women empowerment in Jammu and Kashmir, the main barriers to women empowerment are:

- Violence against Women
- Lack of decision-making authority
- Lack of participation in political affairs
- Poor and low status of women
- Lack of education
- Lack of awareness
- Inadequate & unorganized health care delivery system
- Under/unemployment leading to poverty

Conclusions

- Any women can grow and progress in her life if she is provided with an environment which is violence-free, where there is no violation of human rights, where there is no discrimination and she can take her own decisions. For this, it is very important that the sphere of violence which has continued in Jammu and Kashmir in the past 24 years should end. The focus needs to be also on the elimination of violence against women. Besides, more and more women from Jammu and Kashmir should be included in the dialogue processes that are now unfolding in the terrorism-hit state. Women of J&K need to be involved in various intra-state dialogue processes too. Steps need to be taken to address this serious gap. Women’s equal participation in political life, as voters, candidates and members of electoral committees, could play a crucial role in the empowerment of women and the reconstruction of violence-hit society. Adequate representation of women in the state legislature needs to be actively encouraged. And any peace process that excludes more than half the population, i.e., greatly risks the possibility of keeping several creative solutions and options out.
Women of Jammu and Kashmir need to be empowered as it would not only shape the path for peace and reconciliation but would also lead to peace and development of the state. Peace building attempts in order to promote sustainable peace need to address and transform structures which not only refer to the system of access and distribution of resources, but also social and political institutions, situations and relationships. In this process, principles of democratic participation, human rights and gender equality are crucial elements for the longer-term process of building peace based on social justice and equality for women.

Women also need to be economic empowered by providing her better employment opportunities. For those uneducated widows and their orphan children, skills building programmes or vocational training need to be given to them so that they are able to sustain themselves economically.

The female literacy rate in Jammu and Kashmir is quite low though there has been some increase in it in the past few decades. The government has launched schemes like Sarve Shiksha Abhiyaan and Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyaan (RMSA) and gender is one of the important components under both these centrally-sponsored schemes, yet the low literacy rates of its female folk is posing lot of challenges before the state government. Jammu and Kashmir is still educationally very backward and lagged behind the rest of the population. More sincere efforts need to be initiated by the Jammu and Kashmir government to educate girls’ education which can enable the Kashmiri women to secure an emancipated position in economic, social and political fields. Much needs to be done in the rural areas of the state where female literacy figures and still depressing. Gender equation or the enrolment ratio reveals that the female enrolment ratio has remained lower than the males at all the three levels. The dropout rate was found to be higher among girls especially after the primary school.

A three-tier effort is needed which should include individuals, society and the state who need to coordinate, organize and implement relevant programs for the betterment of the women and children. There should also be the involvement of grassroots functionaries and non-governmental organizations in a big way which can help shape a community approach to tackle the problems.

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