
WOMEN EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

SUCHARITA ROY CHOWDHURY

Abstract: Women have the same responsibility for the total development of a nation. They can enhance the sustainability by using their management skills and expertise. But to use this human resource to the utmost, they should be given proper education. Education is the only tool to make women conducive to sustainability. Indian statistical data show that till now, women education is far behind the total literacy rate and male literacy rate. To reduce this gap, more and more Govt. Policies should be introduced, so that women can take part in the development process both positively and more productively.

Keywords: Environmental Sustainability, women conducive to sustainable development, women education, women literacy rate and female enrolment ratio.

Introduction: Women are one of the pillars of the nation. They contribute a lot to the development of the country. Likewise they have a great role to play for sustainable development as we all know that development has an effect on everyone whether it is male or female. In fact the status of women has been changed over the last decade in life expectancy, school enrolment and education, employment, health and sanitation. The laws have been amended for more and more protection of women right. But still the women all over the world are undervalued. India is not also an exception. If the total women power of the world are better utilised, the development would have been more in all the fields and it would lead towards sustainable development. Education is the key to the development of women and in the long run a way out for better sustainable development. By raising the literacy rate and women enrolment in education the economic growth of the country could be enhanced.

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil in 1992-Agenda 21) proposed actions to strengthen women's role in sustainable development by eliminating obstacles to their equal participation and in decision making.

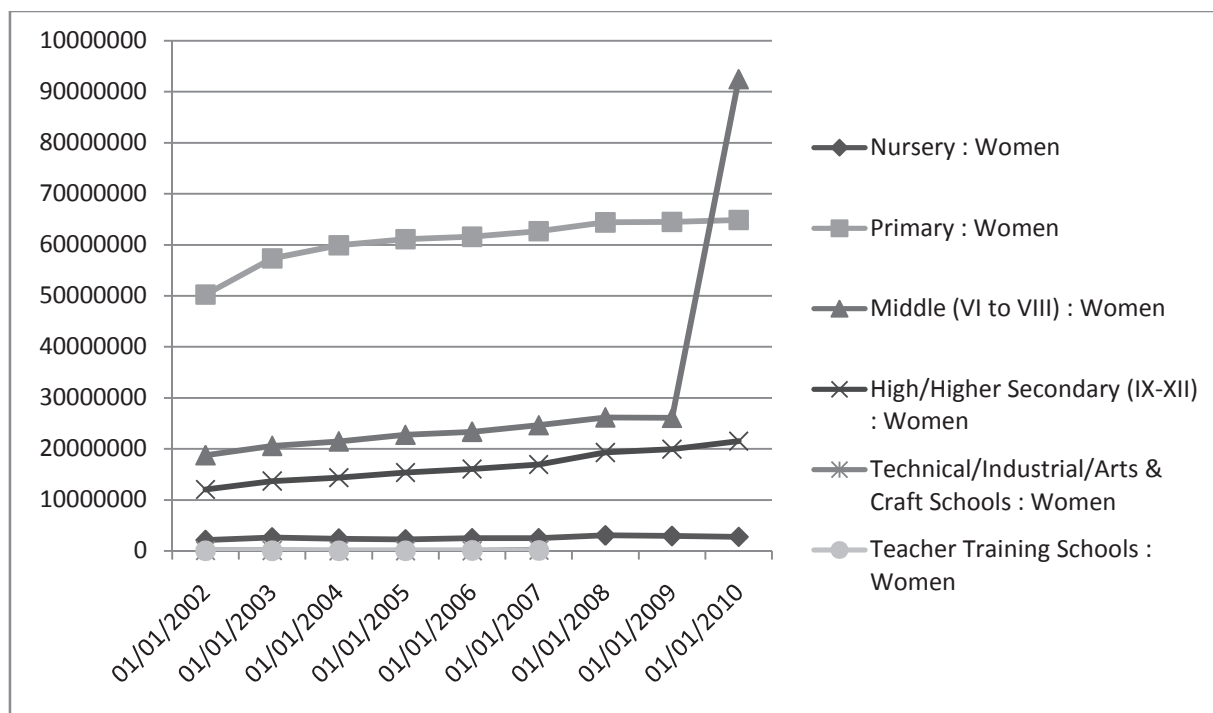
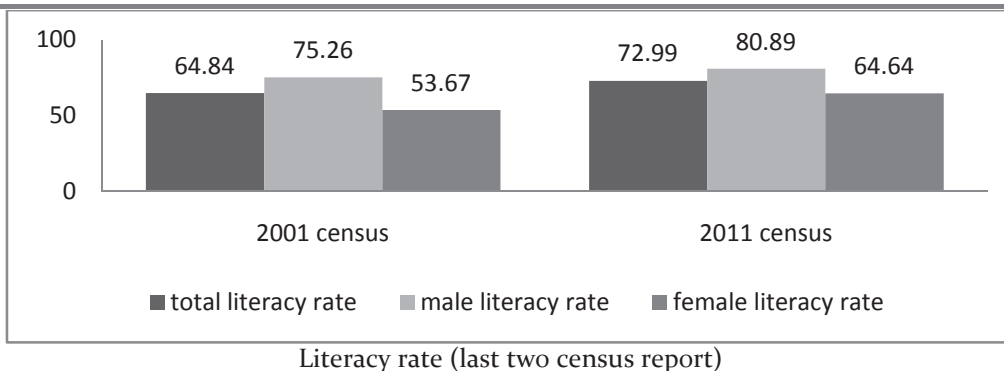
Since then, Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) has been working with other women's groups and non-governmental organizations throughout the world to empower women's leadership and integrate gender concerns in development policies and actions. Women have long been promoting solutions to sustainable development challenges. They have been promoting climate change adaptation and mitigation, protecting biodiversity and vital ecosystems, securing water access, and combating indoor air pollution.

As per the 2011 Indian census, the total population of the country is 1,210,569,573. The male constitutes 623,121,843 whereas the female population is 587,447,730. It means that there are 943 females per 1000 male, which is not at all a negligible number. So it is very much clear from the data that the women population also need to be uplifted for the sustainable development of the country.

It was also stated in the report of the census that the total number of literates is 763,498,517 among which the females are only 328,814,738. It shows only 64.64% females are literate. But the male literacy rate is 80.89% as of the 2011 census report. It is quite a positive sign that the female literacy rate has been increased since 2001 from 53.67% to the present rate. (Source: Census of India 2011 (Final Population Totals)). But it also shows that the growth rate of female literacy is slower than that of the male literacy. With only 64.64% female literates India cannot achieve sustainable development. Now the nation should strive for increasing female literates both in the urban and the rural areas.

According to the EFA (Education for All)-a movement led by the UNESCO, every citizen of the country should get equal access to education. EFA aimed at achieving the gender parity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005 and gender equality to all levels of education no later than 2015.

According to the Ministry Statistics India (as updated on 13th January, 2014) the total number of women enrolled in pre primary to class xii is 113952912, which is approximately 49% of the total population enrolled (243356708) as of 30th June 2010. The female literacy rate in rural areas is only 59% whereas male literacy rate is 79% and in the urban areas female literacy rate is only 80% in relation to the male literacy rate which is 90% as of 2011 (source: India-all education indicators).



Female enrolment ration (source: Ministry of Statistics India, as updated on 13th January, 2014.)

This scenario can easily reflect on the cause why women could not participate in the sustainable development to the utmost. Educational policy and educational plans have also limited the ability of women to fully utilise their intellectual energies in the management of their economies and in the broader sense to the development of the country. According to the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 52, 2008), “Biological differences between men and women are obvious and acknowledged by all, however the difference in roles within communities, access to information, economic and social factors have to be analysed for successful implementation of adaptation and mitigation measures. There is a need to differentiate between men and women as far as the climate change process is concerned because of the different roles the two sexes play in society today hence the different ways in

which they will be affected by the climate change policies designed.”

The World Summit on Sustainable Development (2002), The International Conference on Population and Development (1994), The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) and The 2005 World Summit all acknowledged the pivotal and important role women play in sustainable development.

Education for sustainable development means adopting a more holistic approach to education with the aim of “creating a better world for this generation and future generations of all living things on planet Earth.” Rio +20 key messages were that to make real and lasting change, we must strive to reduce poverty, improve health and education and achieve gender equality-with an emphasis on equity and reaching the world’s most vulnerable, including women and

children.

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stated in the World Economic Forum (January 2012) that the investment in the girls' education of the nation is very much important as it may be productive in life, society and their own family planning. Research shows that educated girls can take part in more productive work, can improve her health and also her children's health and in the broader sense can achieve economic independence. Studies also show that children whose mothers are educated are healthier and better nourished, and this leads to reduced infant mortality and lower reproduction rate. Thus the education of girls can have a major impact on the health and on the growth of a nation's population and thus on its economic prospects.

Why women education for sustainable development?

- Educated women create more equitable lives for their families
- Educated women can increase their participation in decision making
- They can work towards achieving local development and its sustainability
- More and more women employment can reduce the poverty.
- Educated women are more productive and in that way they help in the sustainability.
- Highly educated women can take leadership opportunities that can create sustainable agendas
- Educated women take part in family planning decisions that lead to reduce the number of unintended pregnancy and child birth and at the same time reduce the family size.
- Educated women increase women income, delays early marriage.

How to make women conducive to sustainable development:

The first and foremost duty of the nation is to reduce and gradually abolish the gender disparity. More funds should be allocated for female education especially for rural female population. More and more female students should be enrolled in the primary education and should continue education up to at least secondary level. Female dropout rates should be reduced and a serious measure should be taken to arrest this problem. The more educated women, the easier labour market -is the key word. That means women education and broadly speaking higher literacy rate has a positive effect on the labour market in terms of quality and structure. Families should be made aware of the needs of female education and proper infrastructure should be developed for this. Women should be made aware of the technologies which reduces the power misuse, environmental degradation and take

part in the development programme. Women should take active part in the national economy, not only for the increase of GNP but also for the betterment of their livelihood. They will take active part in the decision making and policy planning for sustainability. They should also take active part in the institutional system or in the leadership position in farms. Quality of higher education also has to be improved so the skilled personnel come out of this. But as sustainable development is a long term broad process, it needs time, patience and serious effort on every citizen's part to make it happen not only for this generation but also for our coming generations. Sustainable development of any country depends on the quality of human resources. So when educated women will take part in the development process more and more sustainability could be achieved. Women must be made aware of the need of sustainability. This awareness is only possible and fruitful through education. Proper education to women will make them aware of the family planning, so that the human population could be limited to a level of carrying capacity of the environment Particular attention and recognition should be given to the role and special situation of women living in rural areas and those working in the agricultural sector, where access to training, land, natural and productive resources, credit, development programmes and cooperative structures can help them increase their participation in sustainable development. Through their management and expertise, women provide sustenance to their families and communities. Women play an important role in promoting sustainable development through their concern for the quality and sustainability of life for present and future generations." (Beijing Platform for Action, Section K). Though women are the primary producers of crops they are more affected by food insecurity. Studies show that women account for nearly 80% of household purchases in developed countries. (Sustainable Development Insights, 2010) Women account for 70% of the world's hungry and are disproportionately affected by malnutrition, poverty, and food insecurity (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights-OHCHR, 2010). A global increase in food prices in 2010 has made women and girls even more vulnerable to hunger with the FAO food price index reaching its highest level since 2008. Women are more likely than men to be in vulnerable jobs, to be under-employed or without a job, to lack social protection, and to have limited access to and control over economic and financial resources." Sha Zukang, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs (UN report, Women Watch, 2009). If women had the same access to productive resources as men,

their yields could increase by 20-30%, raising total agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5-4%, reducing the total number of hungry people in the world by 12-17%. (Statement of Financial Activities-SOFA, 2011).

In spite of women participation in the small scale industry in the developing countries, their contribution is not appreciated and resourced properly. Access to resources means equal land rights and ability to hold property contracts, ability to own livestock and access to education, health, nutrition and all the basic needs for healthy life. If education is to relate with sustainable development, related developmental models should be included in every stage of education, starting from pre-primary up to higher level. Women must be empowered in distribution, use, ownership and conservation of resources like land, water, forest, technology and others which are tools of development, they should be given the scope to use and implement their skills gathered through education.

“The facts are clear: Bringing more women into the design and development of the green economy will result in a better, more sustainable, more just economy.” (Rogers, UNEP). UN Women’s Deputy Executive Director Lakshmi Puri stated, “It is clear that women’s participation in inclusive, sustainable and green growth can propel the growth of a green economy.

Involving women in community preparedness works towards multiple goals: it ensures that the unique needs of women and girls are included in disaster risk

management, thus minimising gender-based damage; it works towards improving communities’ overall ability to cope with and mitigate natural disasters; it empowers women and works towards gender equality more generally. “In the 90s, after the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992, education in its wider sense was recognised as one of the most important tools for the achievement of a sustainable world through the cultivation of new knowledge, abilities, values, and attitudes.” (Spiropoulou-2007). Education is often seen as the facilitating factor which allows people, specifically women and girls, to participate in and benefit from development. (SID1,2010).

To conclude we can mention that “Women have a vital role in environmental management and development. Their full participation is therefore essential to achieve sustainable development” (Principle 20, Rio Declaration). According to the Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women” (OSAGI 2001), “There is a dual rationale for promoting gender equality. Firstly, that equality between women and men - equal rights, opportunities and responsibilities - is a matter of human rights and social justice. And secondly, that greater equality between women and men is also a precondition for (and effective indicator of) sustainable people-centred development. The perceptions, interests, needs and priorities of both women and men must be taken into consideration not only as a matter of social justice but because they are necessary to enrich development processes”.

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Sucharita Roy Chowdhury/Residential Address: B-1/1/Purbasha Housing Estate/
160 Maniktala Main Road/Kol-700054/
Assistant Professor / Education Chittaranjan College (University of Calcutta)
Kolkata-700009/ sucharitaroychowdhury@gmail.com