



Health, Education and Women's Empowerment

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Abstract: *Health and education are treated as the main goals of development . Jean Dreze and Amaartya Sen explain that health and education are valuable for a person's freedom in five distinct ways. Health and education are valuable achievements in themselves and their presence and absence in a person directly affects his or her effective freedom. A healthy and educated person can lead life in a manner fulfilling to them.*

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Health and education are also valuable because of their enabling functions. They can bring economic opportunities of work and income, social status and participation in public life by an individual. A healthy society is capable of much greater achievements than one which has to deal with ill-health at mass level. Education enables greater participation among people in democratic processes, builds accountability, raises public awareness of utilization of services and also addresses the social issues like the threat of epidemics, environmental degradation and population growth.

Education and health are tools of empowerment for disadvantaged people who have to battle social oppression and exclusion. Greater literacy and educational attainment among such groups as adivasis, dalits and women equip them better to claim their positions and reduce social inequality. Social interventions in provision of health and education are required to overcome the market failures in supplying these resources universally. Private health care and education can reach only a section of the population while majority of population will remain untouched by it.. Public provision of social security, health and education is practiced by a state structure called welfare state. It is not a socialist state, but one that spends considerably from its national income on health and education of its people, besides taking care of the well being of elderly people. The expenditure is raised through taxation of the affluent people. Even in the so called market economies of North America and Europe, public expenditure accounts for nearly 35 to 40 percent of

the GDP. Western European countries are the early industrialised ones but they built a structure of high public expenditure in health and education. Even South East Asian countries like Korea, Taiwan and Malaysia which are late industrialised countries emphasized on these two crucial areas of development. As a result their labour productivity is very high and the high levels of human resource development have enabled the economies of these countries to surge ahead of others.

Empowerment of disadvantaged groups, particularly women, is a key element to fight against poverty in the process of development. Empowerment has been defined as 'the enhancement of assets and capabilities of diverse individuals and groups to engage, influence and hold accountable institutions which affect them. Social inclusion is the removal of institutional barriers and the enhancement of incentives to increase the access of diverse individuals and groups to assets and development opportunities.

Gender has become an important aspect of development after major international organizations have devoted attention to women's issues. Various studies have shown that investments in women yield high returns in productivity, child health and family welfare. Empowerment is a process through which one gets control over resources, opportunities to exercise political power to reach the goal. According to Kabeer choices comprise three interrelated components, namely resources, agency and achievement. Resources and agency are the two most common components of empowerment. There are plenty of variables which are often considered as proxies for empowerment. For instance, education and employment are described as enabling factors of empowerment. Achievements refer to welfare. The empowerment process cannot be put to practice without some achievements as the targeted goal. In the context of evaluation, achievements are best treated as may be seen in women's status, strategic positions of welfare. Agency is the essence of women's empowerment which can help to improve their positions through the actions of women themselves. Gender is an important aspect in understanding the socio-cultural, political and economic contexts in which development takes place. When women internalise their subordinate status and view themselves as persons of lesser value, the sense of their own rights and entitlements is diminished.

Conclusion: Health and education has contributed to overall welfare can be ascertained from the famous "Kerala Model" of development. With moderate levels of economic growth, Kerala is far ahead in social indicators--- while India's life expectancy is around 63 years which is much lower compared to China's 70 years, much higher than China's. Likewise, the infant mortality rate of 71 per thousand live births in India is quite higher than China's 30, however Kerala's rate is 14-much lower than China's while Kerala's figure remains significantly higher than China's. Even female literacy rate in Kerala is higher than even every individual province of China. Health, Education and women's empowerment are vital areas of development where there is a case for state intervention for public expenditure.