

Essay on Women in Development or Role of Women in the Development Process

Hints

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Introduction

Human resource is the most important among all sorts of resources and women are an essential part of human resources. We cannot think about the development of a nation without considering or involving women in the development process. This absolute truth has acquired worldwide recognition. In Bangladesh, policymakers have also realized this and they are thinking about the involvement of women in the development process positively.

What is development?

It is very difficult to define development by a single definition. According to Mahatma Gandhi, recognition of human potentials is development. In economics, development means proper distribution of income. Actually, development is equal distribution of power, right,s and opportunity.

Importance of women in development

About 50% of our population is women. It is quite impossible to develop a nation keeping half of its population out of the development process. To survive in this competitive world, it is essential to include women in the mainstream of all development

processes.

A woman can help in the development process in three ways. Firstly, a woman is a mother, and as a mother, she is a producer and builder of a new generation. Secondly, she is a housewife and as a housewife, her duties are very important. But, the third role of a woman, as a worker, has not been recognized like the first two roles. But, it is no less important at all. A woman can contribute significantly to development as a worker and decision-maker. They have already proved their skill as a leader, administrator, lawyer, worker, etc.

Past situation

In the past, women could contribute little to the development of a nation. The social system restricted women to participate in the development process in two ways. Firstly, every family was controlled by men. Secondly, women's position and status in society, like in the family, were also too weak to fight for their rights. Their participation in out-of-home work started in the mid 19th century in some European countries and the USA. But, they did not get reasonable returns according to their labor.

On the 8th March 1857, women workers of Needle Producing Factory of New York raised their voice against discrimination between male and female workers. In 1910, Clara Zetkin, a German women leader called the world community to observe the 8th March as "Women's Day".

Later in 1984, the UN declared 8th March as "International Women's Day". This agitation helped women to work outside the home with minimum acceptable status. Actually, the importance of women in economic, social, and political development started to realize after the Second World War. In 1970, Ester Bosraf's book on "Women's Role in Economic Development" influenced policymakers of the world widely.

Considering the importance of women in development United Nations declared 1975 as “Women’s Year” and the next ten years between 1975 and 1985 as “UN World Decade for Women”. In 1975 and 1980, the first two conferences were held in Mexico and Copenhagen. On December 18, 1979, UN General Assembly adopted the CEDAW (Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women) as an international bill on the rights of women. Bangladesh ratified this in November 1984. CEDAW has enhanced women’s opportunity to engage in development work. Since 1975 women’s opportunity for work has been increasing gradually.

Present situation

Women’s status has changed positively over time. Now, they are performing in every sector with firm confidence. In our country, their position has also changed. Their participation has increased both in the formal and non-formal sectors. According to World Bank’s Report, the participation of women in the workforce is 67% in rural areas and 27% in urban areas. In various developed countries like China and Japan, women are working all day and contributing a major portion to GDP. In Bangladesh, most of the garments involve women and this sector is contributing 90% to female employment. A large number of women are working in many other industries i.e. textile etc. Besides, now women are performing well in many other recognized professions, such as law, engineering, medical science, banking, teaching, etc.

By participating in politics women are now changed from housewives to policymakers. In Bangladesh, the two main leaders are women and in the parliament, women’s portion is not dis-satisfactory. A separate ministry for women was created in 1989. Besides, the Department of Women’s Affairs has been established as the principal field office of the Ministry of Women Affairs. National women organization,

“Bangladesh Jatiya Mahila Sangstha” was established in 1976 and nationalized in 1991.

The literacy rate of women has also increased significantly during the last three decades though it is comparatively less than that of males. Now, education up to HSC has been made tuition-free for girl students. Besides, a monthly stipend is given to them. Our policymakers are always maintaining conformity with UN policies and principles. Our constitution has clearly denied any discrimination between men and women. The govt. has enacted several laws, rules, acts, etc. to stop violence and repression against women and to ensure their safe living and working life. The Muslim Family Law Ordinance, Child Marriage Restriction Act (Amendment) Ordinance, the establishment of Family Court, etc. are various examples of govt. steps to ensure women’s rights. Recently, Child and Women Repression Act has been passed which is a milestone in the history of the Bangladesh constitution.

Some suggestions to engage women in the development process fully

To use women’s ability fully in the development process, we have to modernize our social framework including the legal framework. Some suggestions are following in this respect:

- a. We have to eliminate all sorts of discrimination against women.
- b. We have to motivate women and female children for greater participation in education. Special incentives may be given to those female students who will perform better.
- c. UN should introduce “Uniform Law for Women” which will be accepted and implemented by all member countries.

- d. All UN member countries will enact a law in conformity with the law enacted by the UN.
- e. Increasing women's participation as decision-makers.
- f. Expanding training facilities for women.
- g. Encouraging them to be self-employed and loan facilities should be increased to achieve this target.
- h. We have to ensure more jobs for women. Some sectors can be specialized for women like teaching.
- I. Taking proper health care.
- j. Eliminating discrimination in social life including recreation.

Conclusion

Though some limitations are existing in involving women in the development process, we cannot deny that a radical change has taken place during the last few years. If we can use women's skills, no doubt, our country will go ahead competing with the world in this era of globalization. So, we should ensure the best use of human resources which obviously includes women.