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RESEARCH ARTICLE

GENDER SENSITIZATION A PILLAR TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Gender sensitization is the process of changing the stereotype mind set of men and women, a mindset that strongly believes that men and women are unequal entities and hence have to function in different socio- economic space. Women play an essential role in the management of natural resources, including soil, water, forests, energy and often have a profound traditional and contemporary knowledge of the natural world around them. Sustainable development strategies must aim to foster women's empowerment and effective participation. The study revealed that in both rural and urban areas the medieval mindset and gender bias prevails in our society. Gender discrimination is an enormous problem in Indian society. Traditional patriarchal norms have placed women to secondary status within the household and workplace. Implementing curriculums on gender sensitization which will enable students to learn that gender roles are interchangeable and that they are free to choose what they want to become or do depending on their likes rather their biological make up.

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INTRODUCTION

Gender sensitization is by far the most effective and non-confrontationist approach of reforming the society. Gender sensitization is the process of changing the stereotype mind set of men and women, a mindset that strongly believes that men and women are unequal entities and hence have to function in different socio- economic space. Gender sensitization intends to change the perception that men and women have of each other. It creates a mindset in men that no longer sees in women the stereotypical image. Rather they are seen as responsible and equal partners in socio- economic development. The general perception of men and women on the rigid gender division of labour and other orthodox practices related to gender begin to die down. Women also tend to develop the perception that they are no subordinate to men and they have an equally important role to play in decision making at household, community and organization level. The men, who are reluctant to acknowledge women's contribution, come forward under the influence of sensitization to recognize their contribution. In recent decades gender equality, women's empowerment and the realization of women's rights is worth pursuing; as women's empowerment is a means to promoting sustainable human development.

The continued existence of disparities between women and men in access and control over resources, and the overt discrimination against women throughout history, are now seen as an obstacle in the wheel of national and international development agendas.¹ The achievement of gender equality is very important to reach the goals of sustainable development, such as good governance, human rights, environmental sustainability, and poverty reduction. Women's empowerment is a means to promoting sustainable human development. This recognition is evident in a number of international norms and agreements, including principle 20 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, adopted in 1992, the full participation of women being essential to achieving sustainable development. In the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted by Member States in 1995, governments were called upon to integrate gender concerns and perspectives into policies and programmes for sustainable development.² Women play an essential role in the management of natural resources, including soil, water, forests and energy and often have a profound knowledge of the natural world around them. The environment today is a pressing global challenge facing our world, and therefore it is essential to focus on advocacy towards understanding the linkages between gender and a variety of

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¹ Abe, A., Gender and Development, 2010

² Adams, V., M. Murphy and A. E. Clarke., Anticipation: technoscience, life, affect, temporality. Subjectivity, vol. 28, No. 1, 2009

environmental/sustainable development topics i.e. the differential cause and effect of environmental degradation on men and women and importantly, the role of women as agents of change in regards to mitigation and adaptation to the changing environment. Sustainable development strategies must aim to foster women's empowerment and effective participation. This implies involving women and men as partners and allies in formulating and pursuing strategies for more equal societies. The attainment of sustainable development and gender equality potentially involves trade-offs that need to be openly discussed. Achieving sustainable development means not only reconciling economic and environmental sustainability, but also prioritizing social sustainability. The realization of women's human rights, capabilities and well-being now and in the future requires paying specific attention. Declines in ecosystem services and productive capacity destabilize people's livelihoods and health, both in the present and for future generations. Women's knowledge, agency and collective action are central to finding, demonstrating and building more economically, socially and environmentally sustainable pathways to manage local landscapes; adapt to climate change; produce and access food; and secure sustainable water, sanitation and energy services. There is gender discrimination in the society due to lack of sensitivity on gender issues which has affected the overall development of the society. Gender sensitivity impedes efforts towards the attainment of sustainable state and national development. Gender sensitization will increase the sensitivity of people at large towards women and their problems and can be a key factor for the attainment of economic and social development of a state. Individuals exposed to gender sensitization will start behaving differently as they will look at the positively endowed qualities of women. Male folk will begin to recognize the virtues of women and their importance to the family and society. Gender sensitization can reduce the chances of gender conflict and promote gender harmony thereby creating a congenial climate where in both men and women play their role.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The paper is based on an extensive literature review of programme/project documentation. A broad range of gender-related documents produced by different institutions was selected and analyzed for the purpose of the present study.

Primary Data Collection

Data obtained through personal interview with villagers from Sarsuna West Bengal and daily wage earners from Shillong city.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Personal interview was conducted for collection of primary data from ladies working in beedi making and making sal leaf plates in Ghosh Para, Behala. To overcome poverty, these women are engaging in income generating activities. The respondents were randomly selected. The ladies face a lot of difficulty for e.g. there are no permanent job and they are paid meagerly which leads to poor living conditions and are ignored due to illiteracy. They suffer from various diseases and health problems. Most women have multiple roles to perform within their family and community. Social and cultural atmosphere of the rural Bengal at which men mainly play a dominating role,

most of them spend their earnings for the purpose of their own. They mainly spend money drinking alcohol at night and morning. In this region women are considered as burden to their parents and husbands. Another common problem for women is sex discrimination which they face from their birth and continues till their death. Illiteracy, lack of proper education, responsible for household works, rape, sexual harassment at workplace are some big issues for the women. Women face a lot of challenges because of the existence of patriarchal society. One promising business in Bengal is tea leaf cultivation. Tea states are gradually sinking to various problems for e.g. low wages, poor infrastructure, poor housing, health issues and lack of avenues for social mobility. In recent years a number of tea gardens have closed down due to multiple problems e.g. Dharanpur, Bundari of Doors and Raipur tea states in West Bengal. These tea states were well known for its export quality tea, with the closedown of the garden production of tea is low which ultimately affects the economy of the state hampering sustainable development.

Consequences of closing down

Between 2000 to 2015, more than 1400 people have been reported to have died in the gardens in West Bengal. The main cause of death was malnutrition. My study revealed that in both rural and urban areas the medieval mindset and gender bias prevails in our society. The problem with India is that there has been a complete lack of formal education on moral values and ethics. Our educational curriculum is being restricted to academic subjects only. Thus the responsibility of teaching children moral values lies with the parents or family as a whole and the teachers in educational institutions.

Management of natural resources

In almost all developing regions, women are often the primary users and managers of land, forest, water and other natural resources. Women in rural areas of developing regions spend major parts of their day growing food, gathering fuel wood, cooking and carrying water. Women are responsible for most local food production in different parts of India. Consequently, they are responsible for the selection of seeds, fertilizers and pesticides and the maintenance of productive soil to nourish seedlings and plants. Women are also users, preservers and managers of biodiversity. Research on 10 home gardens in West Bengal has 20 different species - many of which had been rescued from a neighboring forest before it was cleared. Indigenous women have a special relationship to natural resources. Their cultures and practices promote a balanced, respectful use and preservation of natural resources so that future generations can meet their needs. Yet most development schemes today ignore the needs and practices of indigenous peoples. Approximately about half of Meghalaya's population lives below the poverty line according to the Meghalaya State Planning Board (MSPB), 2009. If the Millennium Development Goal of reducing the poverty level by half by 2015 are to be achieved and improving the basic services and welfare of the people residing in rural villages, it is important to adopt a forward looking approach for making optimum and productive utilization of the State's natural resources, viz., 'Water', 'Land' and 'Biotic Resources'. The rural population of the state seeks their livelihood support from natural resources and depends heavily on it. Environmental degradation, increased need and unsustainable resource utilization has affected the forest boundaries and churned our clear stream

into muddy water. Strategies to cope with climate change are the need of the hour. A broad platform of better governance, better convergence and a high level of community participation must be set up to create new and holistic initiatives to address the problem of unchecked deforestation, mining and water pollution. We must go to the grass root level for improving the well being and quality of life of the people. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base. In Garo Hills rearing of eri, muga and mulberry is being practiced by the rural people of the state, mostly by women. As there is a very good scope for development of sericulture enterprises in Meghalaya and entrepreneurship development is a probable solution for growing unemployment among farm women. Study reveals that the major technical problems related to sericulture enterprise was lack of training on sericulture (76.31%) and lack of experience in managing sericulture based enterprise (78.94%) is the prominent managerial problems. The major socio-personal problem was lack of support from other community members (68.42%).

Women and water

Women are the managers of water resources in rural areas in developing countries, often walking miles to fetch water for basic household chores. In some parts of Africa, women and children spend eight hours a day collecting water. The proportion of rural women affected by water scarcity is estimated at 55 per cent in Africa, 32 per cent in Asia and 45 per cent in Latin America. Access to safe water is also an issue of increasing concern for urban women and families. Poor water access and quality affect not only women's crop and livestock production and the amount of labour they must spend to collect, store and distribute water, but also their health and that of their families. Water-borne diseases such as cholera, dysentery, typhoid, malaria and diarrhoea claim millions of lives each year. Parasitic diseases, such as onchocerciasis (river blindness), are also spread through contaminated water. However, despite their responsibility for water collection and sanitation management, women rarely participate in decision-making when the construction of facilities is planned. All too often they have no say about the location of a pump or the design of latrines. It is now recognized that the exclusion of women from the planning of water supply and sanitation schemes is a major cause of their high rate of failure.

In order to improve health and quality of life for women, water and sanitation programmes must concentrate on reducing the time and energy women expend in water collection, and increasing women's participation in community decision-making regarding water and sanitation. Meghalaya Institute of Entrepreneurship aims to be among the very best in the world in the area of entrepreneurship development and model entrepreneurial services, through creativity and innovation, application of skills and technological inputs for harnessing rich potential of sub sectors, with focus on agriculture, horticulture, floriculture, pisciculture, aromatic and medicinal plantations, animal husbandry and other locally viable, remunerative, and income generation activities. By drawing women and men into environmental management and understanding their different needs and perspectives, policies can be developed that meet the needs of entire communities without compromising the sustainability of the resources. Gender equality contributes to economic development by

making use of both women's and men's potential. As per The Economic Times 1 April 2016 "India said it is fully committed to the promotion of gender equality and utilizing information technologies for the empowerment of women". Mainstreaming gender equality is indeed central to the ideal of development. Gender equality and empowerment of women have a critical role to play in the development process particularly through multiplier effect. Achieving gender equity is critical to sustainable development. In all societies women's and men's roles are socially constructed, but all too frequently gender-based inequality exist that disadvantage women; this restricts their development and hence that of humankind. Gender discrimination is an enormous problem in Indian society. Traditional patriarchal norms have placed women to secondary status within the household and workplace. Women in India still suffer from gender inequality because of the lack of gender sensitization on part of males. We blame the degradation of values and ethics amongst the youths but the main root cause of such problem is lack of gender sensitization. The case of eve teasing, domestic violence or case of brutal rape has increased in India. Gender sensitization workshops are being organized in different institution. A training on gender sensitization was held on 6 January 2016 at Ambedkar Nagar by M Pratishtha Arora. The focus of this training with 700 boys was to familiarize with the key issues of gender sensitization, domestic violence, eve teasing, theft, murder etc. The aim of this session was to make the participants aware of their duty towards the women which is to see them as equal beings with decision making power and not as people who should be teased and humiliated. The training ended with a positive note where the boys want to make a change in their surroundings. A research report of 10 February 2016 by Deputy Director of Karnataka Police Academy Dharani Devi Malagatti said increasing crime and violence is due to unequal power relation between the dominant and weak, male and female and privileged and the marginalized. Human activities have become key drivers of earth system processes and are manifested in the depletion and degradation of natural resources; the loss of key ecosystems, habitats and biodiversity; the pollution of land, oceans and the atmosphere; and in climate change, with concomitant severe and unpredictable weather effects. In recent years such processes have produced unprecedented shocks and stresses, reflected in floods, droughts, devastated urban and rural landscapes and livelihoods, with many people and places suffering from shortage of food, climate change and financial crises. These crises of unsustainability potentially affect all and carry profound risks for future generations. The underlying causes and consequences of unsustainability and gender inequality are deeply intertwined and rooted in the dominant economic models.

Women's knowledge, agency and collective action are central to finding, demonstrating and building more economically, socially and environmentally sustainable pathways to manage local landscapes; adapt to climate change; produce and access food; and secure sustainable water, sanitation and energy services. For example women's decisive involvement in community forest management bodies yields positive outcomes for both forest sustainability and gender equality. Thus governments and donor agencies must target women as critical agents of sustainable food production; and through limiting their reproductive rights, as the answer to population environment problems. Policies that are based on stereotypical assumptions regarding women's caring role in the family,

community and environment treat women as a homogeneous category. Women have been and can be central actors in pathways to sustainability and green transformation. Human development report of 2015 ranks India at a 130 out of 155 countries in the Gender Equality Index (GII). India trails behind most Asian countries for e.g. Bangladesh and Pakistan which rank 111 and 121 respectively. Gender Inequality Index reflects gender based inequalities on three vital parameters for e.g. reproductive health, empowerment and economic activity. Even educated urban women are unable to find opportunities that fit their profiles. 46 per cent of urban women have wages with no social security or employment benefits while 58 per cent have no written contract for their jobs. Women's unemployment and underemployment issues are deeply correlated with country's economy.

The key to gender parity is resources. We need gender responsive budgeting and money to be allocated and spent effectively on achieving these goals. Gender equality is bound up with all other goal of sustainable development such as good governance, human rights, environmental sustainability and poverty reduction. Over the past three decades gender concerns have become more prominent in international environmental law and related processes. Agenda 21 and debates from 1992 onwards recognized women as important actors in environmental protection and poverty alleviation, but tended to treat women in an instrumentalist way. Women were considered the primary users and effective managers and conservers of the environment at the local level. This underpinned the view that women should be harnessed as sustainability saviors, based on the assumption that women are especially close to nature. Women-environment connections, especially in domestic and subsistence activities such as collecting fuel wood, hauling water and cultivating food, were often presented as if they were natural and universal, rather than as the product of particular social and cultural norms and expectations. Women share the primary responsibility for nutrition, child care and household management in almost all countries. They are also active in environmental management. In most developing countries, women play a major role as farmers, animal tenders, and water and fuel collectors. Yet, despite their roles, women are not adequately represented in the decision-making processes related to the issues of environment and development at local, national or international levels. A part of world survey by the United States every five years highlights the links between the gender inequality and unsustainability.

Gender inequality primarily affects women, they experience poverty differently from men because they are denied equal rights and opportunities, lack access to resources and services and are excluded from important decisions that affect their life and development. Women are particularly reliant on the environment to meet their basic needs and play an essential role as managers i.e. use and control of natural resources. But women lack ownership and decision making power over the natural resources on which they depend. Population growth, changing climatic conditions and increasing pressure on resources leads to environmental degradation. The result is scarcity of resources and declining resource quality which affects livelihood. Water, fuel wood are the vital natural resources and their collection and use in the household is largely the responsibility of women and girls. Girls may be taken out of school to assist with these tasks and because they cannot complete their education their further prospects are

limited. Venturing into isolated areas in search of resources may also expose them to the added risk of gender based violence and its resulting consequences. The 2030 Agenda for sustainable development focuses on decision making with particular reference to participation of vulnerable groups, such as women, least developed countries to the decision making process. A number of studies indicate that gender inequality are extracting high economic costs and leading to social inequalities and environmental degradation around the world. Participation of women in decision making and policy formulation improvement in women's literacy enhancing in women's access to productive resources and opportunities and investment in women's health and nutrition significantly will enhance sustainable economic growth and reduce poverty.

Conclusion

It has been observed that the societies that discriminate against women have higher poverty and lower standard of living and economic growth comparatively. Institutes of higher learning play a critical role in shaping the lives of women across the country. Gender sensitization should spread at all levels at household, organization and institutions. With reference to India with a vast diversity we need to inculcate this sensitivity and highlight contribution of both the genders in creation and development of a well balanced society. By changing the mindset of the younger generations we can minimize gender issues. To do this we need teachers with sound knowledge of gender issues as teachers play a very important role in early upbringing of children. A sustainable development pathway must be established which has an explicit commitment to gender equality and seeks to enhance women's capabilities, respect and protect their rights and reduce and redistribute their unpaid care work. Women must have full and equal participation in decision making with regard to green economy and policy development to create a pathway to sustainable development. Women's contribution to sustainable development must be recognized. Women have a strong role in education and socializing their children, including teaching them care and responsibility with regard to the use and protection of natural resources. More capacity building programmes and training tailored to the needs of women are needed. In order to build women as catalyst for sustainable development, their role in family, community and society at large has to be free from socio-cultural and religious traditions that prevent women participation. There is need for change of mindset, especially of the males who dominate the scene. Sustainable agribusiness ventures can promote job-led economic growth in rural areas through harnessing science and technology for environmentally sustainable and socially equitable development. Entrepreneurship in sustainable agriculture is a key factor which has the potential to transform the face of rural India.

Recommendation

Schools, Colleges and Universities must strive to create an educational environment in which both men and women can learn to think critically, solve challenging problems and prepare to take their place in the community as productive citizens. The whole process must involve educating students about social issues such as sexual assault, domestic violence. Education is a major force that will help trigger change but this will occur only when teachers and learners are assisted in adopting classroom initiatives that reflect new images based on

a positive gender equity ideology. Education needs to be gender friendly and gender sensitive. Change the stereotype mindset in men that women are weak and unequal. Implementing curriculums on gender sensitization which will enable students to learn that gender roles are interchangeable and that they are free to choose what they want to become or do depending on their likes rather their biological make up. To ensure sustainable development it is important to recognize the importance of the two sexes (male and female). To increase sustainable income generating cultivation systems and establishment of micro/small scale/medium scale bio-industrial units.

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