

Globalization and Work Participation of Women in Developing Countries: An Analysis

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ABSTRACT

An attempt is made in this paper to analyze the economic impact of globalization on women in general and particularly on the work participation of women in the MNCs and TNCs. An in-depth analysis of the terms and conditions under which women are being employed in the Special Economic and Export Processing Zones in the developing countries is done in the paper. The reports of the International Labour Organisation, World Bank and the other organization of the United Nations Organization are cited on the short-comings of the global industry and its negative impacts on the work –participation of women in the developing countries. In the conclusion this paper suggests that the present form of globalization is aimed at maximization of profit and minimization of cost which results in the exploitation of the labour in general and women labour in particular. So this paper urges that for the sustainability the present norms of globalization are required to change with the humane norms which are based on the democratic principal of liberty, equality and justice.

1. Introduction

The advent of globalization has been predicted as a new era for the socio-economic and political development of the world in general and the developing economies in particular. The experts argue that the linking of world economy and opening of world-trade through the liberalization and privatization of the economies will not only affect different countries differently, but its impact will be different on different people and groups in the same country. Women constitute almost 50% of the world population and they are also considered as a group that is weak due to the marginalization of women in the socio-economic and political set-up of the world.

The promises and the efforts of the global governance are aimed to improve the condition of women across the globe. There is emerging trend of linking the women rights with human rights which demands equal and universal rights of women across the globe. The present international view holds that women shall be considered as one group, irrespective of their caste, colour, creed, language, social, political status or nationality and all the human rights shall also be provided to the women as they are provided to men. The post war efforts of the United Nations and the democratization of the world have led to the development and empowerment of women across the globe.ⁱ

The emphasis of the national and international governance is on the deepening of the democracy and expansion of the human rights to the every deprived strata of the society. The old concept of the national government and political control of the nation is now transforming with the new concept of good and human governance: which aims at the inclusion of the deprived sections into the mainstream.ⁱⁱ

The development of industry and trade in the developing countries is also viewed as the positive development for the women employment; the global industry is finding women as suitable employees. The free-flow of knowledge and information is also considered as a positive development to

enhance the education and skills of women. They provide the new horizons of knowledge and information to the women, which were lacking earlier. The enhanced knowledge will help them to grow socially, economically as well as politically. Now women can share their work experience with the other women and the democratic and global governance will help to develop and implement the policies of women groups at the local and global levels.

It is also argued that globalization will enhance the exploitation of women as privatization and liberalization are solely guided by the maximization of profit. The employment opportunities will be provided by development of industry and trade, guided by logic of maximization of profit and minimization of labour cost, but the new opportunities and employment of women will be provided only if the women prove themselves as cheap labour in comparison to male labour. The other observation is that the employment of women will be a double burden as social conservatism and patriarchal division of labour will force the women living in developing societies to do the house-hold chores along with their jobs. Thus the global flow of capital, technology and knowledge is also viewed as the double edge-sword.

The finding of the various national and international organizations and researchers shows that the global investment, technology and the free-flow of knowledge is helping the rich, educated and skilled women to enhance their skills and income; on the other hand it is marginalizing the poor women from the economic realm. As the absolute majority of poor women lack the technical skills to work in the modern industry. The marginalisation of the unskilled and semi-skilled labour from labour market will affect the poor women badly as their counterpart i.e. the male members also work as unskilled labour. The use of capital intensive techniques will reduce the demand of manual labour and it will force the poor strata to do the odd jobs for survival. The economic necessities may lead poor women to prostitution and other immoral economic activities.ⁱⁱⁱ

Women have entered the workforce in large numbers in the developing countries as the global investment has opened the doors of employment at the initial stage of the liberalization, privatization and globalization. The critics of liberalization, privatization argues that the foreign investment and the setting –up of the industrial plants in the developing countries are conditioned by the concept of the maximization of profit by the Multinational and Transnational Corporations. To allow the free entry of foreign corporations the developing countries have been forced to bring changes in national industry and labour policies. The cheap labour, liberal environment and labour laws of the developing countries have been traced as the major reason for the global investment in the developing countries.

2. Global Investment and Work Participation of Women in SEZ and EPZ

The use of the capital intensive techniques and acquiring of the big chunk of the agriculture and forest land under the policy of Special Economic Zones (SEZ) and Export Processing Zones (EPZ) in the developing nations has resulted in further marginalization of tribal's, rural and indigenous people along with unskilled labour from the market. The marginalization of the unskilled and indigenous labour from land definitely had an impact on the women lives.

Women unpaid work has increased because of privatization of economy and withering away of the welfare policies by the state in the developing countries. The private contractors and owners of the private firms don't follow the labour laws and thus workers are forced to work for longer hours and under the inhuman conditions. It is necessary to mention that the absolute majority of the worker that works in the unorganised sector of economy is constituted by women. The hire and fire policies which has been adopted by the industries in the liberalized and privatized economies has also forced the labour to dance on the tunes of the management as the unemployment level in the developing countries is very high as compared to the developed countries.^{iv}

Initially women dominate the workforce in EPZs in most developing countries. For instance, in Philippines the share of women workers in total EPZ workforce was 74 per cent in 1980. It remained the same in 1994. In Korea, it was 70 per cent in 1990. It declined to 60 per cent by 1993. In Dominican Republic, it was 60 per cent in 1995. In Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, it has been above 70 per cent. Some argue that the high proportion of female employment implies that the creation of SEZs does not reduce the local unemployment rate. This is because prior to being employed in the SEZs majority of them were not part of the labour force.^v

Some of the studies argue that increased employment opportunities have empowered women and have made them more independent improving their relative status and bargaining power within household. Madani in Dominican Republic found that SEZ wages were the main source of income for 38 per cent of women working in these zones and that almost half of them were single, divorced or widows.^{vi} According to Dunn many of the women workers were bread winners for their household as well. ILO in 1998 reports that in Guatemala 45 per cent and in Honduras 22 per cent of women reported that they were only bread winner of the family. It has been established in the literature that the economic participation of women—their presence in the workforce in

quantitative terms is important not only for lowering the disproportionate levels of poverty among women, but also for raising household income and encouraging economic development in countries as a whole.^{vii}

SEZ and EPZ have been providing job opportunities to many young women from rural and adjoining areas that have been instrumental in reducing poverty in these regions. But there are several reports indicating exploitation of women is done due to SEZs.

The vast majority of workers in SEZ firms are young women aged 16–25 years. It is found that women are paid less than men for similar jobs^{viii} and are subjected to sexual harassment and violence. Further, there is evidence that the type of the employment generated in SEZ is generally poor. Female employment is concentrated in low paying and low productive jobs. As the nature of employment in SEZs evolves higher technology inputs, women are thrown out of employment. It has been observed that the proportion of women in SEZs has declined over time in many countries.^{ix} As wages rise, more men are attracted to SEZ employment and as production requirements increase (such as supervisors or skilled workers), demand for male workers increases. Thus SEZs and EPZ become an organized mechanism for the exploitation women, though country-specific experiences may vary. ILO in 1998 concludes that SEZs do play an important role in employment generation in developing countries. But employment generation by itself does not ensure human development and poverty alleviation. Thus crucial questions is whether employment in SEZ and EPZs results in higher wages, better working conditions and higher levels of living.

The general perception is that minimum wages paid in the zones are lower than those paid outside the zones. This is because labour laws are not extended to the zone firms and where these laws are applicable they are not enforced strictly.

In 2000, the Beijing+5 Document, while reviewing progress of women under the new world order since 1995, noted that globalization presents opportunities to some women but leads to the marginalization of many and thus it advocated that gender mainstreaming be done in order to achieve gender equality. The report of United Nations Development Fund for Women's observed that in the past two decades the process of globalisation has contributed in the widening of inequality within and among countries.^x

Women constitute half of the world population as well as of Indian population. The development and empowerment of women is on the top agenda of the global governance as well on the agenda of the government of India. Women comprise an average of 43 % of the agricultural labour force in developing countries, varying considerably across regions from 20 % or less in Latin America to 50 per cent or more in parts of Asia and Africa.^{xi} Despite the regional and sub-regional variation, women make an essential contribution to agriculture across the developing world. Women farmers control less land than do men, and also have limited access to inputs, seeds, credits, and extension services. Less than 20 % of landholders are women.^{xii} Gender differences in access to land and credit affect the relative ability of female and male farmers and entrepreneurs to invest operate and benefit from new economic opportunities.^{xiii}

Women are responsible for household and food preparation in 85-90 % of cases as per the record of surveys of

World Health Organisation conducted in a wide range of countries. Women and children bear the main negative impacts of fuel, water collection and transport, with women in many developing countries spending from 1 to 4 hours a day collecting biomass for fuel.^{xiv} A study of time and water scarcity in 25 sub-Saharan African countries estimated that women spend at least 16 million hours a day collecting drinking water; men spend 6 million hours; and children 4 million hours. Gender gaps in domestic and household work, including time spent obtaining water and fuel and processing food, are intensified in contexts of economic crisis, environmental degradation, natural disasters, and inadequate infrastructure and services.^{xv}

Women continue to participate in labour markets on an unequal basis with men. In 2013, the male population ratio stood at 72.2 %, while the ratio for females was 47.1 %. Globally, women are paid less than men. Women in most countries earn, on average, only 60 to 75 % of men's wages.^{xvi} Contributing factors include the fact that women are more likely to be wage workers and unpaid family workers; that women are more likely to engage in low-productivity activities and to work in the informal sector, with less mobility to the formal sector than men;^{xvii} the view of women as economic dependents; and the likelihood that women are in unorganized sectors or not represented in the unions.^{xviii}

Women bear disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care work. Women devote 1 to 3 hours more a day to housework than men; 2 to 10 times the amount of time a day to care (for children, elderly, and the sick), and 1 to 4 hours less a day to market activities.^{xix} In the European Union for example, 25 % of women report care of other family members and personal responsibilities as the reason for not being in the labour force, versus only three per cent of men.^{xx} This directly and negatively impacts women's participation in the labour force. Women are more likely than men to work in informal employment. In South Asia, over 80 % of women in non-agricultural jobs are in informal employment, in sub-Saharan Africa, 74 %, and in Latin America and the Caribbean, 54 %. In rural areas, many women derive their livelihoods from small-scale farming, almost always informal and often unpaid.

More women than men work in vulnerable, low-paid, or undervalued jobs.^{xxi} As of 2013, 49.1 % of the world's working women were in vulnerable employment, often unprotected by labour legislation, compared to 46.9 % of men. Women were far more likely than men to be in vulnerable employment in East Asia (50.3 % versus 42.3 %), South-East Asia and the Pacific (63.1 % versus 56 %), South Asia (80.9 % versus 74.4 %), North Africa (54.7 % the Middle East (33.2 % versus 23.7 %) and Sub-Saharan Africa (nearly 85.5 % versus 70.5 %).^{xxii}

3. Conclusion

Gender differences in laws affect both developing and developed economies, and women in all regions. Almost 90 % of 143 economies studied by World Bank show at least one legal difference restricting women's economic opportunities.^{xxiii} Of those, 79 economies have laws that restrict the types of jobs that women can do^{xxiv} and husbands can object to their wives working and prevent them from accepting jobs in 15 economies.^{xxv}

Despite the hard facts presented on women's conditions in the liberalised and privatised global world. The economic position of women has improved relatively; however, liberalisation and privatization have marginalized women from the mainstream labour market due to the lack of skill and education backwardness. Simultaneously, educated and urbanite women are taking the full advantage of job opportunities, which are provided by the investors and companies.

The new international economic order has not only changed international rules of trade and tariffs but it has also changed the life cycle of people across the globe. It has been noticed that the people of the same nation have different experiences of globalization in relation to their socio, economic, political, geographical and personal skill positions. The present form of liberalization, privatization and globalization has come under the tough criticism due to lack of the principles of its social-justice and sustainable development. The emphasis of the critiques of the globalization is that the welfare measures and policy initiative of the state should protect the vulnerable section of the society from the negative impacts of globalization.

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