



# Women's Education And Empowerment-III

Parvez Bahul

It has been conservatively estimated that about 250 million women are at risk of iodine deficiency disorders and almost two million were visually impaired due to vitamin A deficiency. Around half of all adult women in developing countries (745 million) are anemic. Deficiencies of iodine and iron are known to affect females throughout infancy and childhood disproportionately, as well as before and during pregnancy.

Women are more at risk of HIV infection during unprotected vaginal intercourse is between two and four times higher for women than for men. Socio culturally, women are more susceptible to HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) because the norm of virginity restricts adolescent girls' access to information about

sex and increases risk of sexual coercion. Male power is often manifested in sexual violence. Women's economic vulnerability increases pressures for them to exchange sex for food or money. Direct actions complement the struggle for achieving long-term goals of gender equity and women's empowerment.

Family and kinship ties can generate social, capital empowerment. Marital status is an important factor in shaping participation. In some societies, husbands can refuse their wives to permit to occupy decision-making positions or to attend decision-making meetings. In this situation, family and kinship ties are not necessarily empowering to women, but may actually constrain women's ability to develop

their own networks and to construct and benefit from social capital. A women's group in Bangladesh reported that a major benefit of working with an NGO group for vegetable production was that they could negotiate with traders more confidentially.

Among financial institutions serving poor households around the world, micro-finance programs have emerged as important players. Women are thought to make better borrowers than men: timely repayment of loans is more likely to take place when women borrow. An IFPRI study in 1997 shows that Bangladeshi groups with a higher proportion of women had significantly better repayment rates. Loans are not simple handouts. Development goals related to women's

empowerment and improved household welfare are self-financing and no subsidies are required.

Women's empowerment requires fundamental changes in society that call for more direct policy instruments. New policies should renegotiate-property rights, replace rules sustaining gender inequality and improve access to quality education.

"As long as women do not have the same rights in law as men, as long as the birth of a girl does not receive the same welcome as that of a boy, so long we should know that India (or any country) is suffering from partial paralysis. Suppression of women is inconsistent with principles of *ahimsa* (non-violence)". -*Mahatma Gandhi*, Harijan, August 18, 1940.