

How Empowered are the Women of the NER of India?

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Abstract:

Women empowerment is crucial for achieving gender equality and sustainable development. This paper aims at assessing economic empowerment of women in the North-east region (NER) of India and also highlights differences of economic empowerment of women among the eight NER states. The study is based on data available from the National Family and Health Survey (NFHS-4) 2015-16. The study shows that gender disparity exists in all the states of NER, starting from employment to household purchase related decision making, house and land ownership, control on own earning etc. This disparity in economic aspects of women empowerment needs to be addressed to promote economic empowerment of women and to foster sustainable development in the region.

Introduction

Empowerment and human development are related to each other. The concept of human development suggests development of multidimensional aspects of quality of life, viz. education, health and sanitation, housing, banking etc. and the concept of empowerment encompass removing the barriers in the way of achieving quality of life. Gender based inequalities that are observed in societies create barriers in achieving quality of life or development and this necessitates identification of gender based differences and discriminations in society. Women's position and status in a society is often inquired to understand the gender based inequalities in various socio-economic aspects. Gender based inequalities are perceived as high in socio-economically backward regions.

The North-East region (NER) of India lag behind in many development Indicators from rest of India. Wide disparities in the socio-economic development of the NER states of India is documented in earlier studies (Sharma, 2012). The NER of India being a socio-economically backward region, it is very likely that women in this region are in less advantage position than the men. However, historically, women's position in the NER of India known to be better than the rest of India. Gait (2008) in his book on Assam history written that in social life women were never placed in disadvantage. Earlier studies also found women's status in NER region is better than the rest of India (Das, 2013). With 3.78% of India's total population the North-East region of India comprises eight states, viz. Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, and Sikkim. With a number of different ethnic groups, the people of NER of India are oriented to diverse culture and tradition. The NER shares borders with several neighbouring countries, namely China, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan. In the last couple of years, it attracts attention of the policymakers as India's Look-East connectivity projects connect Northeast India to East Asia and ASEAN. It brought potential for developing the region and its people by developing the infrastructure and connection to the ASEAN market. In this transition of the economy it is pertinent to

inquire how empowered are the women of the NER of India. Thus, this paper is going to specifically study the economic status or economic empowerment of women of NER of India.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the present study are:

1. To study the economic empowerment of women of NER of India.
2. To understand inter-state difference in economic empowerment of women of the NER of India.

Materials and methods

This study is descriptive in nature and it is based on secondary data. The data is sourced from National Family and Health Survey (NFHS-4), 2015-16. The data relating to the indicators of empowerment and decision making are sourced for the eight NER states of India. The concept of economic empowerment is operationalized based on the empowerment indicators available in the NFHS-4 data. While choosing the indicators of economic empowerment the author has followed the discussion of Ibrahim & Alkire, (2007). They have done a detailed discussion of various definitions on empowerment and make a list of all those indicators that have been used for measuring empowerment in various studies in various countries. The indicators in the present study are chosen relating to only the economic empowerment dimension. The indicators are employment rate of women, having control upon one’s own earning and spouse’s earning, decision making relating to major household purchases, owning cash and decision relating to spending, access to bank account, access to information, asset ownership. An indicator-wise analysis is carried out for the eight states of India and the inter-state comparison of the NER states are conducted by ranking method.

Analysis and Discussion

Employment among currently married women and men in NER of India:

Table 1 below shows employment percentage among currently married women and men of 15-49 year age. It shows wide gender difference in employment. It also shows that there are wide differences among the NER states. In all the eight states the percentage of currently married employed women is lower than the percentage of currently married employed men and the percentage of employed with cash earning is also lower among the women. Among the eight states, Assam is found with lowest percentage (16.7) of employed women, whereas, Manipur is found with highest percentage (54.4) of currently married employed women. Assam secures the lowest in rank because of highest gender difference and Manipur secures top rank among the eight NER states with lowest gender difference in employment. It is to be noted that except Assam and Sikkim, other six states are above the all India percentage in currently married employed women which suggest women in these NER states are in a better position in terms of employment. However, if employment with cash earning is compared, Assam exhibit lowest gender difference, whereas, Arunachal Pradesh shows highest gender difference.

Table1: Employed among currently married women and men of 15-49 year age

	Women		Men		Gender difference			
Arunachal Pradesh	36.6	48.7	92.3	79.5	55.7	4	30.8	8
Assam	16.7	90.7	98.9	95.0	82.2	8	4.3	1
Manipur	54.4	79.0	98.0	93.1	43.6	1	14.1	4

Meghalaya	46.4	82.4	98.7	95.2	52.3	3	12.8	3
Mizoram	49.1	60.9	97.0	87.3	47.9	2	26.4	7
Nagaland	35.8	62.9	97.3	81.0	61.5	5	18.1	5
Sikkim	22.1	88.1	95.9	97.8	73.8	7	9.7	2
Tripura	33.1	79.8	99.4	100.0	66.3	6	20.2	6
All India	30.6	80.0	97.5	91.1	-	-	-	-

Source: NFHS-4,2015-16

Women’s control over earning:

Having control over ones’ own earning and over spouse’s earning is an indication of autonomy and involvement in decisions relating to household earnings and spending. Joint consultation of couples in financial matters improves decision making.

In Table 2, a comparison of NER states in women and men’s control over their own earning and spouse’s earning is done by ranking the states. State with the highest percentage in the chosen criteria is given first rank. It is observed that in all the states the percentage of women in involvement in decision relating to their own earning is higher than the involvement in the decision relating to their husband earning. It is found that Nagaland is in top position among the eight NER states with respect to women’s alone or joint decision with their husband relating to their wife’s earning, whereas Assam is in last position with difference of 11.8 percentage points with the top rank state. Again men’s involvement in their wife’s earning is higher in the NER states except, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Sikkim.

Table2: Women’s control over own earning and spouses earning

States	Women’s involvement				Men’s involvement	
	Alone or joint with their spouse in their own earning	Rank	Alone or joint with their spouse in their spouse’s earning	Rank	Alone or joint in their spouse’s earning	
Arunachal Pradesh	88.7	7	76.7	6	78.2	
Assam	85.5	8	73.6	7	81.9	
Manipur	90.5	5	82.3	4	86.5	
Meghalaya	89.8	6	80.4	5	75.9	
Mizoram	94.1	2	83.3	3	90.3	
Nagaland	97.3	1	91.0	1	87.4	
Sikkim	92.2	3	85.6	2	57.2	
Tripura	91.0	4	73.4	8	88.0	
All India	82.1	-	70.7	-	80.4	

Source: NFHS-4,2015-16

Access to bank account, mobile phone, involvement in major purchases:

Having access to bank account provide opportunity to avail various formal financial services. Studies shows increase ownership of bank account has much potential for mitigating poverty in society. Similarly access to mobile phone provides for information resources. Again involvement in decision relating to major purchases indicates involvement in major household decisions. Table 3 shows the percentage of women in the respective NER states in the chosen criteria of access and involvement in decisions. It is

observed that Nagaland secures top rank with 93.9 percentage of women involve in decisions relating to purchase of major household goods. It is followed by Sikkim, Mizoram and Tripura. Again Assam secures the last rank with lowest percentage of women involve in decisions relating to major household purchases. All the eight NER states shows higher percentage of women involve in decision relating to major household purchases in comparison to percentage of women at the all India level. The similarities of order of the States in control over their own earning (in Table 2) and decision relating to major household purchases are notable. It indicates that relatedness of control over own earning and involvement in major household decisions. With respect to percentage of women who have money that they can decide how to use, the top three states are Tripura (54.9), Sikkim (49.1) and Meghalaya (48.1) and these are only states showing higher percentage than the all India percentage in this indicator. With respect to ownership of bank accounts that women themselves use, Sikkim (63.5), Tripura (59.2), Mizoram (57.1), Arunachal Pradesh (56.6), Meghalaya (54.4) secure first five ranks and their percentages are higher than all India percentage. Manipur and Nagaland, Assam secure the lowest ranks. In women’s access to mobile phone Sikkim, Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya secure the first four ranks.

Table 3: Involvement in major purchase decisions, spending decision, access to bank account, mobile phone

States	Women's Decision in purchase of major household	Percentage of women who have money that they can decide how to use	Percentage of women who have bank or savings account that they	Percentage of women having a mobile phone that they themselves use	Rank in women's involvement in major	rank in women's autonomy in using money	Rank in bank account ownership	Rank in access to mobile phone
Arunachal Pradesh	83.6	41.4	56.6	59.8	6	4	4	6
Assam	80.5	25.2	45.4	46.0	8	7	6	7
Manipur	84.5	32.4	34.8	63.1	4	5	8	5
Meghalaya	83.6	48.1	54.4	64.3	6	3	5	4
Mizoram	89.8	22.9	57.1	77.0	3	8	3	2
Nagaland	93.9	31.8	38.8	70.4	1	6	7	3
Sikkim	92.1	49.1	63.5	79.8	2	2	1	1
Tripura	84.5	54.9	59.2	43.9	4	1	2	8
All India	73.4	41.7	53.0	46.0	-	-	-	-

Source: NFHS-4,2015-16

Gender difference in house ownership and land ownership:

Possession of physical assets like land, house etc. are very important. Meghalaya, Tripura, Manipur are the top three states with lowest gender differences in percentages of ownership of house alone or jointly with spouse. With respect to land ownership Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram secure the first three ranks with lower gender differences. Sikkim and Assam are lowest ranks states with highest gender difference in both house ownership and land ownership. When the gender difference in house ownership is 28

percentage points at the all India level, Sikkim and Assam respectively shows 54.5 and 32.3 percentage points difference. With respect to the gender difference in land ownership, at the all India level it is 20.7 points, whereas Sikkim and Assam shows 53.8 points and 32.8 points difference.

Table 4: Gender difference in House ownership and Land ownership

States	% of Women		% of Men		Gender difference		Ranks of States	
	Own a house alone or jointly	Own land alone or jointly	Own a house alone or jointly	Own land alone or jointly	House ownership	Land ownership	Gender diff in house ownership	Gender diff in land ownership
Arunachal Pradesh	58.6	49.8	80.2	76.7	21.6	26.9	4	5
Assam	51.6	45.3	83.9	78.1	32.3	32.8	7	7
Manipur	66.8	37.0	79.9	54.7	13.1	17.7	3	4
Meghalaya	56.8	42.5	58.7	45.6	1.9	3.1	1	1
Mizoram	17.8	14.8	42.3	27.7	24.5	12.9	5	3
Nagaland	33.5	25.3	62.7	58.0	29.2	32.7	6	6
Sikkim	24.1	20.6	78.6	74.4	54.5	53.8	8	8
Tripura	56.2	33.8	65.4	43.7	9.2	9.9	2	2
All India	37.1	28.3	65.1	49.0	28.0	20.7	-	-

Source: NFHS-4,2015-16

Conclusion

The present study reveals the NER of India is not exception with respect to gender differences in economic status. Percentage of women are found lower in all the indicators of economic empowerment in comparison to men. In employment, the gender difference varies among the eight NER states between 43.6 to 82.2 percentage points. With respect to women’s control over own earning and spouse’s earning, women’s involvement in major household purchases all the states in NER shows higher percentage which suggest better position of women in the NER of India. However, there are wide differences among the NER states. In access to bank account, Nagaland, Manipur, Assam shows lower percentage than the all India average. With respect to house ownership and land ownership the gender difference is varies between 1.9 points to 54.5 percentage points. Meghalaya secure the top rank in both house ownership and land ownership with lowest gender difference. This result is very likely for Meghalaya because Meghalaya has Matrilineal society. A notable point in the present study is that Assam although the largest NER state in terms of population and area, this State is securing lower position in many of the indicators, viz. employment, control in own earnings, ownership of house and land etc. Although NER region of India is perceived as better in women’s position in society it is not observed in economic front. The gender differences which are found in the present study must be eliminated to bring the NER states in the better

socio-economic position in the country. There is need of framing integrated strategy for skill development of women. There is also need of providing entrepreneurial support for generating employment through entrepreneurship among women of NER of India.

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