

Linkage between Human Development & Women Empowerment

An Assamese Experience

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Introduction:

Concept of Human Development:

The concept of human development has evolved out as broader measure of socioeconomic progress of the nation. Since its launch in 1990 Human Development Report by UNDP defined human development as a process of enlarging people's choices, the choices covered social political psychological and other aspects of human life. Human Development is measured in the form of composite index called Human Development Index (HDI) which is an average of three indices viz health, education and income index. Although HDI was widely extolled as a major policy instrument and a useful policy tool a few years after its emergence, it was recognized first as a measure of average achievements in human development. It neither reflects the deprivation nor the distributional aspect of development particularly in the issue of inequality. The current focus on human development has however served to highlight the gender dimension and continuing inequalities confronting women. In 1995, The Human Development Report introduced the concept of gender related development index (GDI) including other indices such as Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM).GDI while measures the achievements in the same dimensions and variables as the HDI, it also takes into account inequalities in achievement between men and women.[Anand & Sen,1995]

Concept of Women Empowerment:

The concept of women empowerment has undergone a sea change from welfare oriented approach of empowerment to equity approach. Today empowering women means not only to improve their material wellbeing but also an active participation in the developmental process. The concept of women in development emerged at that point of time shifting attention to enhancement of role and status of women. Then equity and empowerment approach merged to form the gender and development concept [George Mathew, 2003] Although many researchers made attempt to explain the concept of empowerment the most relevant definition is one provided by Sen and Batliwala(2000). According to them "Empowerment is the process by which the powerless gain greater control over the circumstances of their lives. It includes both control over resources and over ideology... [Includes, in addition to extrinsic control] a growing intrinsic capability, greater self confidence and an inner transformation of one's consciousness that enables one to overcome external barriers [Quoted by Kishor & Gupta (2004)]. This definition mainly emphasized on two important aspects. Firstly empowerment is not a power over others but it is a power to achieve certain desired goals. Secondly the idea of empowerment is more applicable to those who are powerless irrespective of sex, caste or class. So the concept is not specific to women alone. Nonetheless, women's empowerment or lack of it is unique in

that it cuts all types of class and caste, and unlike class and caste powerlessness, is played out within families and households. [Malhotra et al, 2002] Empowerment is also defined as a change in the context of a women's life, which enables her to leading a fulfilling human life. It gets reflected in the external qualities such as health mobility education and awareness, status in the family, participation in decision making and also in the level of material security. It also includes external qualities such as self awareness and self confidence. [Human Development in South Asia,2000, as quoted by Mathew(2003)]

Concept of Gender gap:

Gender is not synonymous with women, nor is it a zero-sum game implying loss for men; rather, it refers to both women and men, and to their status, relative to each other. Gender equality refers to that stage of human social development at which the rights, responsibilities and opportunities of individuals will not be determined by the fact of being born male or female. Achieving gender equality, however, is a grindingly slow process, since it challenges one of the most deeply entrenched of all human attitudes.[world economic forum report 2005] Despite the intense efforts of many agencies and organizations, and numerous inspiring successes, the picture is still disheartening, as it takes far more than changes in law or stated policy to change practices in the home. So almost in every country there is a gap in between men and women in achievement in human development. This is called gender gap which mostly seen in five different areas viz economic participation, economic opportunity, political empowerment, access to education and reproductive health as mentioned in the report of world economic forum 2005.

Empirical Evidence of Gender gap in global scenario:

Evidence of gender gap is seen mostly in the report of World Economic Forum (2005) which is based on the findings of United Nations Development Fund for Women on global pattern of inequality between men and women. According to the report, the large populous nation such as India Pakistan Turkey and Egypt hold some of the lowest ranks in respect of gender gap. The study puts Sweden Norway Denmark and Iceland on the top of the list. These countries are characterized by strong liberal society, with an impressive record of openness and transparency in government and comprehensive safety net which provides security to vulnerable group of the population. As a result women of this part of the world enjoy greater access to education, work opportunity and a higher standard of living. Although no country has yet succeeded in eliminating the gap it is narrowed in case of Nordic countries. In case of China which is one of the highest ranking nations in Asia in respect of HDI and a neighbor to India the Chinese government's gender equality objective falls far short of expectations with a rank of 33 among 58 nations in gender gap study. Out of the seven predominantly Muslim nations covered by the study, Bangladesh (39) and Malaysia (40) outperform Indonesia (46), while Jordan (55), Pakistan (56), Turkey (57) and Egypt (58) occupy the bottom four ranks.

Human development& women empowerment: the linkage

Human development and women empowerment, both are mutually reinforcing. The Development theorist believes that a high level of human development would lead to empowerment of women and conversely a high level of women empowerment would bring high

level of human development through their contribution to the development process. Infact empowered women can contribute to human development through household and community activity and at the same time progress in human development is expected to promote women empowerment through improved health, nutrition, education, social security, political freedom, availability of employment and a decent standard of living. Female education is an important input of the production function, i.e., “Human Development Improvement Function” which explains the effectiveness of expenditure directed to human development. Female education has important bearings on child health and their survival. Moreover a study in Cote de Ivoire reveals that increased female share over household income leads to increased spending on human development enhancing items like food, healthcare etc and reduced spending on tobacco (Gustav Ranis et al., 2005). It is increasingly viewed that empowerment of women is an essential prerequisite for poverty alleviation and upholding human rights and for sustainable human development. When women have greater say and control over resources the family and even the entire society will be benefited by improved health status and better education. For instance an educated mother is more likely to take care of her family in issues like health care and sanitation. School dropout rate of girl child will be less if mothers are empowered. Regarding nutritional aspect of a child there is less gender biasness if mothers are empowered. Therefore strategy is needed to ensure that women’s empowerment and gender equality are activity pursued in the mainstream of all developmental objectives. But evidences show that a high level of human development in terms of HDI is not necessarily linked with highly empowered women. Many countries having high HDI are having low GDI. This reveals the fact that there is a gender gap in achievement in human development.

Area of Study:

Assam, a constituent State of India, is situated in North Eastern part of the country. The economy of Assam is mainly agrarian in nature. The population of the state is 26.66 million according to 2001 census of which 12.85 million are females. As regards sex ratio, it is 935 females per 1000 males. Basic data on the position of women in the state vis-à-vis men reveals that there is a glaring inequality between them. Although during 1991-2001, annual average growth rate of female literacy (1.3 per cent) was more than that of male literacy rate (0.997 per cent), the enrolment rate of women in higher education segment was less than 33 per cent. The female work participation rate which was 4.66 per cent in 1971 increased to 21.61 per cent in 1991 and declined to 20.71 percent in 2001 (Assam Human Development Report, 2003 and Govt. of Assam). When the GEI for India was 0.620 in early 80s it was below 0.499 in Assam (G.O.I., 2002). During 1990s the GEI for India was increased to 0.676 as against 0.575 in Assam. Thus position of the state of Assam and India as a whole improved marginally in terms of GEI in the above mentioned period. However close examination of figures reveals that both in 80s and 90s the position of Assam was far below the national average. Assam was ranked in 29th position among 32 States and Union Territories according to GEI measure and was ranked below Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland (Assam Human Development Report, 2003). This showed that women of Assam were more deprived than that of any other State in North Eastern Region and India as a whole. All these points again justified to undertake a study in Assam at the disaggregate level based on secondary data.

Objectives

The main objective of the present study is to explore the link between various dimensions of women empowerment with human development at disaggregated level in the state Assam.

Data and Methodology

The study is based on secondary data. Mainly the following documents are consulted:

1. Human Development Report of UNDP, National Human Development Report of Govt. of India and Assam Human Development Report.
2. Proceedings of various international conferences on women and human development.
3. Other Reports of Government, NGOs and various other agencies on women issues.

After collecting data, these were compared and analyzed in a suitable manner using simple statistical tools. The study area, Assam, though comprises 27 Districts, Information is not available for her newly formed districts under BTC area and Kamrup rural and Kamrup metro separately. Hence we had to use the old Classification of 23 Districts of Assam for our present study. To Study the linkage between HD and WE, we run regression on the cross sectional data.

Results and Findings:

To study the linkage between HDI and women empowerment we are using mainly three indicators of women empowerment viz female literacy rate, female work force participation and sex ratio at disaggregate level and run regression between HDI and the aforesaid three indicators of women empowerment. Let us now analyze the link between women empowerment and human development from the data presented in the table 1 using regression technique

Table 1: District wise HDI, FLR, FWPR and SR in Assam, 2001/2003

District	FLR	FWPR	SR	HDI
	2001	2001	2001	2003
DHUBRI	40.04	8.12	947	0.241
KOKRAJHAR	42.40	25.23	943	0.354
BONGAIGAON	50.44	15.46	945	0.263
GOALPARA	50.85	17.74	956	0.308
BARPETA	47.07	14.07	941	0.396
NALBARI	57.26	17.83	939	0.343
KAMRUP	66.31	14.66	901	0.575
DARRANG	46.40	19.38	944	0.259
SONITPUR	49.73	24.18	929	0.357
LAKHIMPUR	59.59	49.87	951	0.337
DHEMAJI	53.51	37.68	941	0.277
MORIGAON	51.51	16.54	946	0.494
NAGAON	54.74	12.55	944	0.356
GOLAGHAT	60.99	30.21	930	0.540

JORHAT	68.49	30.21	933	0.650
SIBSAGAR	66.81	29.72	928	0.469
DIBRUGARH	59.95	28.87	931	0.483
TINSUKIA	50.78	29.49	913	0.377
K ANGLONG	47.30	31.62	926	0.494
N.C.HILLS	58.39	24.56	884	0.363
KARIMGANJ	57.28	24.56	947	0.301
HAILAKANDI	50.46	11.67	935	0.363
CACHAR	59.41	16.53	945	0.402

Source : Assam Human Development Report 2003

To analyze the linkage we construct the simple linear regression equation as follows

$$(HDI)_i = b_0 + b_1(FL)_i + b_2(FWP)_i + b_3(SR)_i + U_i \dots\dots\dots(i)$$

The variables such as HDI, FL, FWP, SR and U respectively in the above equation refer to human development index, female literacy, their workforce participation rate, sex ratio and disturbance term. From the raw data as presented in the table the following estimates are made.

Regression summary

	b ₀	b ₁	b ₂	b ₃
coefficient	1.154	0.5790	-0.0400	-0.2000
Standard error	1.164	0.1944	0.1829	0.1832
t-value	0.9916	2.7981*	-0.2011	-1.0842
*Significant at 5% level of significance, R²= 0.4403, R²=0.3519, F= 4.982,				

Each point on the estimated regression line gives an estimate of the expected or mean value of HDI corresponding to the chosen value of FLR, FWPR, and SR. The beta value (b₁) which is 0.579 indicates that with 1 percent increase in female literacy rate, the HDI value increases by 0.6. Similarly from the value of b₂ and b₃ we can say that with 1 percent increase in FWPR and sex ratio the value of HDI decreases by 0.04 and 0.2 respectively. The R² value indicates that 44% of the variation of HDI value can be explained by FL, FWP and sex ratio.

Thus we find that female literacy rate is positively related with human development while female work participation and sex ratio are negatively linked with human development and could not proved to be statistically significant. This is perhaps because in Assam where economy is mainly agrarian in nature, women engaged in work only when their families are not economically sound. So we get negative relationship between FWPR and HDI. Similar tendency is seen in case of sex ratio, probably because when people become more educated and economically affluent they switch to one or two child norms and in such case male child gets preference. Or it may be the case that most of the women in the state could not contribute to the development process.

Similarly if we compare the HDI and GDI ranks of various districts in Assam we find that gender gap is there in the level of achievement in various spheres of life. The values of HDI and GDI in all 23 districts of Assam and their corresponding ranks are presented in the table 2

Table 2: HDI and GDI in Assam 2003

district	HDI		GDI		Difference of rank between HDI/GDI
	value	rank	value	rank	
JORHAT	0.650	1	0.701	3	-2
KAMRUP	0.575	2	0.642	4	-2
GOLAGHAT	0.540	3	0.608	7	-4
MORIGOAN	0.494	4	0.759	2	2
K ANGLONG	0.494	5	0.260	20	-15
DIBRUGARH	0.483	6	0.642	4	2
SIBASAGAR	0.469	7	0.468	9	-2
CACHAR	0.402	8	0.409	14	-6
BARPETA	0.396	9	0.448	10	-1
TINSUKIA	0.377	10	0.300	19	-9
HAILAKANDI	0.363	11	0.609	6	5
N.C.HILLS	0.363	11	0.877	1	10
SONITPUR	0.357	13	0.397	15	-2
NAGAON	0.356	14	0.068	22	-8
KOKRAJHAR	0.354	15	0.418	11	4
NALBARI	0.343	16	0.357	17	-1
LAKHIMPUR	0.337	17	0.491	8	9
GOALPARA	0.308	18	0.413	12	6
KARIMGANJ	0.301	19	0.012	23	-4
DHEMAJI	0.277	20	0.410	13	7
BONGAIGAON	0.263	21	0.376	16	5
DARRANG	0.259	22	0.317	18	4
DHUBRI	0.214	23	0.206	21	2
ASSAM	0.407	---	0.537	---	---

Source : Assam Human Development Report 2003

The HDI value ranges from 0.650 to 0.214 and that of GDI ranges from 0.877 to 0.012. As compared to HDI deviation is widespread in GDI throughout the districts. The table also presents the difference between HDI rank and GDI rank. Any difference between these ranks in a particular district indicates greater gender disparity in that district. The table shows that some of the districts like Jorhat, Kamrup, Dibrugarh, Sivasagar, and Morigaon etc are having both high HDI and GDI. Inequalities exist between men and women as revealed by the difference in the ranks. Karbi Anglong has the highest disparity. Its rank is 4 in HDI. This means that Karbi Anglong is quite successful in translating the fruits of development into well being of its people. But its rank (20) in terms of GDI speaks disadvantageous position of women as against men. Similarly N.C.Hills has the highest rank in GDI but comparatively lower rank(11) in HDI.

Conclusion:

As we know that a higher level of human development creates an enabling environment for empowerment by providing access to education employment health facilities etc these are only enabling factor or catalyst in the process of empowerment. But these cannot be considered as

evidence of empowerment because there is no guarantee that powerless will use or in a position to use these tools to become empowered(Kishor& Gupta,2004)Various studies suggested that in case of women, rising income does not necessarily translate into improved status. Sometimes economic prosperity resulting in higher social class status brings even greater seclusion, rigidly defined gender rolee particularly from the point of view of control over sexuality and mobility(Clerk,2003). Thus although a cause and effect relationship exist between women empowerment and human development the strength of the relationship depends upon socio cultural and economic background of the individuals as well as of the society.

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