CHAPTER 1

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1.1 Need for empowerment

Development is an integrated process of economic growth and social progress. Development is human oriented and equal participation of both men and women is an important precondition for the attainment of meaningful development and well being of all people. The position of women and their role in the context of development are particularly important not only because they contribute half of the human resources but more so because they have to bear the brunt of the daily struggle for survival. The experiences of planned development of the community suggest that benefits of development are not equally shared by all sections of people. It is now widely recognised and increasingly emphasised that success of development efforts would be achieved only when women would be significant partners in the process and the development process becomes unjust and inequitable when women are excluded or denied participation. Any attempt at improving the economic performance of the economy; reducing poverty or slowing down population growth or even arresting environmental degradation, require sincere and sustained efforts to involve women in the process of economic development through their empowerment.
1.2 Meaning of empowerment

Empowerment is a multidimensional process which enables an individual to realise his/her full identity and power in all spheres of life. Power itself can be simply defined as control over resources and control over ideology. Those who have power and those who have control over resources, knowledge and ideology, which govern life, are in a position to make decisions which benefit themselves. The extent of power of an individual is correlated to as many kinds of resources as he/she can command and control. This control gives decision making power which is used to increase access to and control over resources. Thus the process of gaining the control over the self, over ideology and the control over resources which determines power may be termed as empowerment. Empowering women is development of skills and abilities of women to enable them to manage better have say in or negotiate with the existing development delivery system. This empowerment is a process, not a product. Again, the empowerment process encompasses several mutually re-enforcing components. It begins with and supported by economic independence which implies access to and control over productive resources, knowledge and awareness, self image and autonomy. The process of empowerment begins in the mind, from women’s consciousness; from her beliefs about herself and her rights, capacities and potential; from her self image and awareness of how gender as well as other
socio-economic forces are acting on her, from breaking free of the senses of inferiority which has been imprinted since earliest childhood; from recognising her strengths, her knowledge, intelligence and skills and above all from believing in her innate right to dignity and justice and realising that it is she who must assert that right for no one who holds power will give it away willingly. Therefore, empowerment process is one where women find time and space of their own and begin to re-examine their lives critically and collectively. It enables women to look at old problems in new ways, analyse their environment and situation, recognise their strengths, alter their self image, acquire new skills and initiate action, aim at gaining greater control over resources of various kinds. This is a spiral not a cycle which leads to greater and greater changes and more and more empowerment. Empowerment is thus mainly the change of mind set, a visible demonstration of that change which the world around is forced to acknowledge, respond to and accommodate as best it can. Armed with their growing collective strength, women begin to assert their rights to control resources and participate equally in matters of decision making with the family, community and society at large. Empowerment of women in a society begins when its members recognise and oppose the forces that deny access to resources and power on the basis of gender. Thus empowerment of women can be described as women’s active participation and equitable access to
resources, power and decision making process resulting in equitable distribution of power between men and women in the society.

1.3 Indicators of empowerment

The empowerment of women reflects their status inside and outside the home. Various factors contributing towards empowerment of women have been suggested by several studies. Such indicators are mutually re-enforcing in nature. Some of the broad indicators of empowerment of women are enumerated below:

- Visible and quantifiable increase in women's' income, and in their share of the household income.
- Women's greater awareness of their economic contribution and strength as workers and producers.
- Women's improved health and nutrition status due to enhanced earning capacity.
- Women's enhanced ability in and knowledge of, marketing methods, bargaining power, negotiations etc.
- Rising self-esteem and confidence often resulting in confronting oppressive practices and customs within and outside the home.
- Women's greater participation in decision making within and outside the home.
Decline of family violence against women.

Increasing literacy among women with more and more enrollment and retention of girl children in schools.

Visible increase in women's ability to independently analyse, criticise and reach out to information and knowledge.

Judged in terms of these indicators of empowerment, there is a widespread feeling that women in our society particularly the rural women are disempowered. Theoretically the constitution of India has explicitly conferred on women equal rights and opportunities in political, social, educational and employment sphere. But as observed in Human Development Report, 1997, there are wide range of bias in the society which often result in women having fewer opportunity all over the world and more so in developing countries. Because of several factors like oppressive traditions, superstition, exploitation, a great majority of Indian women are not allowed in practice to enjoy the rights and opportunities bestowed upon them by the constitution. The National Prospective Plan for women, 1988 to 2000 AD, observed that there is continued inequality and vulnerability of women in all sectors - economic, social, political, educational, health care, nutrition and legal. This inequality and vulnerability of women is still more in the rural sector. According to estimates
available, about 50 percent of population in rural areas lived below poverty line in 1993-94 as against 41.6 percent in urban areas. Poor families generally follow a strategy of inequitable allocation of resources, with preference for those members who are deemed capable of supporting the family in future. Gender inequity within the family in allocation of resources in the sphere of education is reflected in a wide gap in the literacy rate. The female literacy rate in Orissa in 1997 is estimated to be 38 percent as against the male literacy rate of 64 percent as per NSSO data.

While the scarce resource are preferentially allocated to men and boys in the families, time consuming tasks and responsibilities on the other hand are more often allocated to women and girls. On an average, women in rural area work longer than men, as revealed in several studies. The inequity in allocation of resources is extended beyond the household to the society, in the provision of job opportunities. Employment of women in organised sector is very low and in Orissa hardly 10 percent of total numbers of employees in organised sector are said to be women.

The consequences of intra household inequities that lead to lesser access of women not only to education or job but even to food and health care are far reaching in terms of perpetuation of poverty. The poor rural women with work overload often use their daughters’ labour for survival and thus deprive them of access to education.
and training that could help them to escape from poverty in future, with the result that poverty is perpetuated from generation to generation. Women are central and critical agents to the success of poverty alleviation efforts because they use their income to meet the basic household needs and to help in breaking the vicious circle of poverty from generation to generation. It is shown in several studies that women contribute a larger share of their earnings than men to the basic family maintenance and thus increase in women's income translate more directly to better child health and nutrition.

An increase in earnings of women is therefore considered essential to change the scenario of rural economy, bring a qualitative improvement in the living standard of rural households. Even though rural women are observed to be working longer, most of their work being invisible is unpaid for and their dependence on men continues, with the result that they occupy a lower status. The work participation rate among women in Orissa is estimated to be around 23 percent as against 53 percent for men. Again, of the women working about 90 percent are working in unorganised sector like agriculture, construction, household and cottage industries, where the earnings are meager. Because women's economic position is weak both within the family and outside and they are viewed more as liabilities than assets, they are unable
to assert themselves or demand a just share of resources in their household as well as community.

1.4 Strategies of empowerment

To help women to attain economic independence is the first priority for empowering women, because when she attains economic independence, she naturally becomes the mistress of her own body and author of her own decisions. Creation of self-esteem and confidence among women, improvement in their nutrition and health status are closely linked with an improvement in their earning. In view of the fact that there is already a huge amount of disguised unemployment existing in the agricultural sector in rural areas and with the introduction of improved farming system women are being marginalised, there is need for alternative employment avenues for women in the rural sector. It is not only men who need to be transferred from farming to non-farming for solving the problems associated with crowding in agriculture, off farm employment opportunities have also to be created for women in rural areas for achieving a visible and quantifiable increase in their income. Given the infrastructure facilities available in rural sector and given the level of education and skill with women, encouraging them to start their own microenterprise offers an opportunity for empowerment of rural women.
Power is not a commodity to be transacted. It cannot be distributed among women as alms. Power has to be acquired, and once acquired it needs to be exercised, sustained and preserved. Women have to empower themselves and this involves basically a change in attitude among the rural women besides their capacity to earn. Entrepreneurship is a challenging job and requires capacity to take proper decisions and responsibilities. Entering into entrepreneurship independently could bring the desired change in attitude among the rural women, make them conscious of their oppression and induce them to take initiative and seize the opportunities.

To draw clear-cut strategies for rural women empowerment is really a uphill task. Still in a development paradigm the provision for economic interventions, with awareness, training and resource support, would be able to tackle both general poverty and gender discrimination which will lead to empowerment of rural women in the process. The basic strategy in this connection therefore comprises a combination of some or all of the following key activities.

- Organising women and creating awareness about their economic position, nature and causes of exploitation etc.;
- Credit related schemes to ensure women’s access to low interest/interest free loans in appropriate amounts;
- Training and skill development either to enhance existing skills or develop new skills;
• Setting of production centres or producers/worker cooperatives;

• Providing or enabling women to set up forward and backward linkages viz. marketing, access to new markets, raw materials, pricing, and new technologies etc.;

• Providing continual support to women until their economic activities become viable and also for growth and expansion;

• Setting up other support systems such as childcare, health services, literacy, legal education etc.;

• Formation of women’s worker union or association;

• Creating critical consciousness about structures of inequality by initiating dialogues, discussions, analysis of issues and problems raised by women i.e. lack of water, employment, low wages, alcoholism, child care, violence against women in or outside the family, health problems etc.; and

• Propagation of mass education and attitudinal changes of male members in the home and the society at large.

1.5 Empowerment through microenterprises

Microenterprises in rural sector which have vast and unexplored potentialities in absorbing the large army of rural women and in offering opportunities covering
wide range of activities, including food stuffs and beverage processing, producing and trading art and painting based goods, forest based goods hold promise for empowerment of rural women. The significant and regular flow of income to the hands of microentrepreneurs would enable them to contribute a greater share towards their family income pool. The command and contribution of women over family’s income will determine the power and control over resources and involve them in decision making process of the family.

No systematic study has been made in Orissa on empowerment of rural women through microenterprises and there is need for such studies. In this backdrop it is proposed to undertake a study on empowering rural women through microenterprise i.e. a single managed micro business, assisted partially by family members. Two districts, one comparatively developed and the other comparatively backward are covered under the study to reflect the picture of Orissa. The broad objective in undertaking the study is to find out how far rural women entering into microentrepreneurship have been able to empower themselves vis-a-vis housewives and women who are working in other sectors.

The proposed study has been organised under six chapters viz.:

(1) Introduction

(2) Research Design

(3) Review of Literatures
The subject matter of the first chapter is the definition and statement of the problem i.e. need for and meaning of empowerment of women, indicators of empowerment, strategies for empowerment and microenterprise as a means to empowering rural women.

The broad objective proposed under the study, the hypotheses framed in undertaking the study, method of data collection, statistical tools and the procedure of analysis, operational definitions used in the study and the limitations of the study have been dealt with in the second chapter.

The review of literatures is presented in the third chapter, which includes literatures on theoretical discussions and empirical studies on women. It covers the six different areas which has link with empowerment such as work participation and dual role, education, health, decision making and control over resources, socio-cultural factors and entrepreneurship.

Chapter four gives in brief the profile of the study area and socio-economic profile of the respondents covered under the study.
The fifth chapter discusses in details, the attitude of rural women towards gender equity in the context of child preference at birth, child preference to free education, child preference to employment and the extent of gender inequity in control over resources, work load, consumption pattern, women involvement in the decision making process of the family, suitability of microenterprises in rural areas and the role of training on microentrepreneurs in enhancing the economic independence of rural women.

Summary of findings, conclusions emerging from the analysis and strategic interventions and suggestions to empower rural women are the contents of the last and sixth chapter.

Bibliography cited in the text of the thesis have been appended at the end of the final chapter under the caption ‘Bibliography’, after which appendices are given.

With this introduction to the study, an attempt is made in the next chapter to give an outline of objectives, hypotheses and methodology followed in the study.