

# Empower women at the grassroots level



SHAIFALIKA PANDA

## Empowering women at grassroots creates a multiplier impact on health, education and livelihood outcomes across communities

India has made significant strides in gender equality over the years, yet women in the country continue to face numerous challenges. Despite being half of the population, women in India often face discrimination, particularly in rural areas where they are most vulnerable. Women are significant contributors to the rural economy as wage earners, farmers, and entrepreneurs.



Women from indigenous and grassroots communities are frequently considered as the keepers of traditional knowledge, which is an essential part of their society. Yet, these women are restrained from pursuing economic activities due to social norms. Empowering women at the grassroots level means providing them with the necessary resources, tools, and knowledge to take control of their lives and make informed decisions. It involves breaking down the barriers that prevent women from accessing education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. When women are empowered, they can actively participate in their communities

and contribute to their social and economic development. There are various social barriers for women, which makes it extremely important to educate people on the need for women's empowerment, especially in remote areas. India's development needs women's participation, which can solely be achieved by uplifting them.

Women's contribution to India's GDP is 18% and that is quite low compared to the global average of 37%. Women do not lack desire or ambition, but several structural and societal restrictions, including gender stereotypes, unequal access to finance, and a lack of family support, are the key reasons for their lesser participation in economic and community affairs. A

key part of women's empowerment is through economic independence and education. This includes the freedom to manage their schedules, finances, and the ability to equally participate in the country's development. When women earn income, they are more likely to invest in their families' well-being, including education and healthcare. Education plays a major role in the overall empowerment of women. Educated women are more likely to send their children to school, which can break the cycle of poverty and improve the prospects of future generations.

They are also better equipped to advocate for their children's education and to ensure that their children receive a quality education. In addition, empowering women can lead to an increase in female teachers and educators, which can help create a more gender-sensitive education system. When women are educated, they are better able to participate in decision-making processes, including those related to education policy and programming. Therefore, it would not be wrong to say that education is

not just directly proportional to the physical health of women but also their children's life outcomes. They are also better informed about preventive measures, such as immunizations and prenatal care. Women's political empowerment can lead to increased participation in decision-making processes and policies that affect their lives and the lives of their communities. This can lead to more inclusive and equitable policies that benefit everyone in the country. India has acknowledged that empowering women at the grassroots will be central to our efforts to achieving SDGs.

For India to take a progressive step forward in achieving gender parity and create a positive impact on the health, education and livelihood of communities, we will need to address patriarchal and patrilineal traditions that are ingrained in our society and simultaneously create an inclusive environment for every woman to learn, grow and progress, without barriers.

*(The writer is trustee and Founder CEO of Bansidhar and Ila Panda Foundation)*