

# Understanding of Women Empowerment and Socio-economic Development: A Conceptual Analysis.

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## Abstract

*Empowerment is defined as the authority or power that given to someone to do something. Women empowerment is the strategies of women to increase their control of resources and generate decision making capacity. Socio-economic development is the process of social and economic development in a society. Women are the essential part of our society and half of the total population, the sustainable development of a country depends on the maximum utilization and equal participation of both women and men. Development of a nation could only be achieved if women are empowered, and their social and economic status is improved; it is possible only by adopting definite social and economic policies with a view of total development of women. The purpose of this paper is to understand women empowerment and socio-economic development conceptually. This paper is descriptive and qualitative and based on secondary data.*

**Key words:** Development, Empowerment, Socio-economic, Women.

## Introduction and Background of the study

Empowerment is the process whereby the less powerful members of the society gain access and control over resources, knowledge, challenges and ideologies of discrimination and subordination, and transform the structures and institutions through which unequal access and control over resources is sustained and perpetuated (Batliwala, 1995 cited in Danjuma et al. 2013). Women empowerment means giving power and authority to the women, it is the process of empowerment which required transformation of structure of sub ordinance, control over material and intellectual recourses, gaining decisions, making authority and reduction of gender inequality. Development is defined as a process of transformation of a particular system to better forms and optimal stated through a set of quantitative and qualitative changes (Słodowa-Helpa, 2015). Kartick Das (2016) mentions, "Empowerment of women through gainful employment is a constituent and instrument of development in any country" he also mentioned that women's lack of economic empowerment not only impedes growth and poverty reduction, but also has a host of other negative impacts including less favorable education and health outcomes for children thus, it is extremely important to ensure that women are economically, socially and politically empowered.

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Social development is the structure of norms, a general rules and a level of quality that govern human interactions, it is a comprehensive social improvement strategy that seeks to make the lives better for all citizens and there is a particular emphasis on making the lives better of people who are poor or otherwise needy. This phenomenon is associated with qualitative changes in social structure. It changed the opportunities of individuals whose goal is to achieve higher social status (Fritz, 2004). Economic development is a policy intervention aimed to improve the well-being of people's growth; it is a phenomenon of market productivity and increased in GDP. According to economist Amartya Sen, "Economic growth is one aspect of the process of economic development". Economists primarily focus on the growth aspect and the economy at large whereas researchers of community economic development concerned with socio-economic development. The definition of economic development has been contested, economists in the 20<sup>th</sup> century viewed development primarily in terms of economic growth sociologist instead emphasized broader processes of change and modernization (Jaffee, Davi, 1998).

Socio-economic development is a factor that is preferred the definition of development which influenced a way of understanding of considered phenomenon, has documented of international institutions and declarations of a country and cooperated in order to achieve development goals (Bellu, 2011). For example, Millennium Development Goals proposed by UNDP (2000) encompassed reduction of poverty, health, sustainable use of resources, education, food security and good governance. Considerations of development are no longer taken, mainly in the context of poverty alleviation in lagging regions (Massey, 1988). Socio-economic development is associated with growing meaning of humanitarianism but also philosophical and sociological ideas concerning equality of possibilities, popularity of taking care of environment and realizing of the role of social capital are significant factors too (Fritz, 2004).

Though women are half of the total population in a country but they are lag behind from various opportunities. It is need to provide some equal opportunities in economic, social, political, educational, religious and legal spheres. It must be kept in mind that gender equity is the realization of complete equality in all aspects of the social order regardless of gender (Aspy & Sandhu, 1999). For achieving complete equality between two genders, it is necessary to eliminate all kinds of domination, oppression and discrimination in the society. I think that Nepal will prosper and achieve its necessary goal with accessible, co-operation and active participation of both men and women in all spheres of developmental activities. If a woman is empowered, then the development could possible micro level to macro level. Without empowering women, socio-economic development is not possible. Swami Vivekananda said that nation which does not respect the women will never become great now and nor will ever in future. Therefore, women empowerment is the necessary phenomena to development.

## Objectives

The general objective of the study is to analyze conceptual understanding of women empowerment and socio-economic development,

The specific objectives are:

1. To analyze women's empowerment and Socio-economic development,
2. To analyze the Conceptual framework of women empowerment and socio-economic development,
3. To analyze the relationship between women empowerment and socio-economic development.

## Research Method

To fulfill the achievement of this paper, this study completely depends upon the secondary literature. As per the fulfillment, to get depth knowledge conceptually, empirically I go through on secondary sources of relevant literatures, which are more multifaceted, multi-sector, and time sequences. The present study is based on qualitative methods of social science research and completely secondary in nature. To find out the literature relevant to this study, I have gone through the various sources, electronic sources like Google, Google scholar, Academia, JOSTR etc. Various research information that is collected from different books, articles, journals, historical accounts, officially published data, research work of other researchers, published documents and electronic sources, relevant government departments, NGOs and INGO labor force surveys, economic surveys; census reports, household surveys, as well as statistical surveys. I have organized all relevant literatures with priority and utility. The data used in this study are based on secondary sources. Descriptive and exploratory research design has been used.

## Conceptual Understanding of Women Empowerment and Socio-economic Development

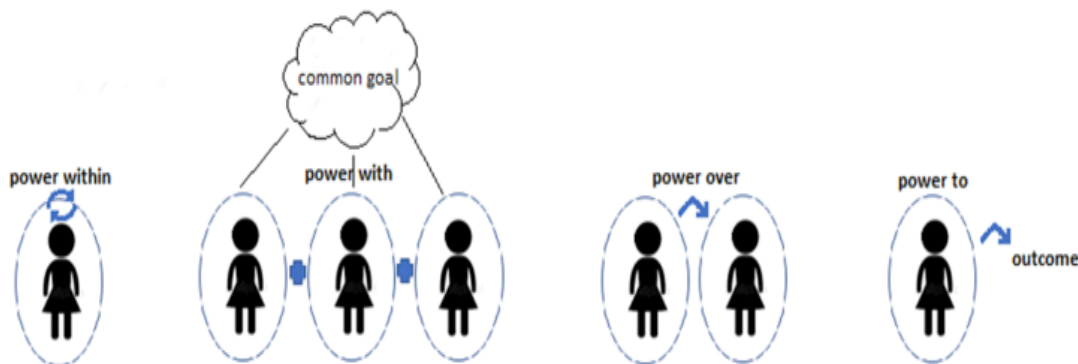
The concept of women empowerment seems to have been used in the 1980s by third world feminists to address the issue of gender differences that exist in the control and distribution of resources (Datta & Kornberg, 2002). Women's empowerment came to be articulated in the 1980s and 1990s as a radical approach concerned with transforming power relations in favor of women's rights and greater equality between women and men (Batliwala, 1993, 2007). According to Datta and Kornberg (2002), women empowerment refers to strategies that women use to increase their control of resources and generate decision making capacity. According to Batliwala, (1994) empowerment is the process of challenging existing power relations and of gaining greater control over the sources of power'. Women's development and women's empowerment are two contemporary perspectives on the modalities of gender equity. The development strategy has come under severe interrogation not only for its failure to deliver its promise but also for working against the interest of womankind (Sharma, 2000).

Consequently, the decade of 90s has witnessed the rise of women's empowerment perspective which shot into prominence at Beijing Conference. Pedagogy of the Oppressed the book of Paulo Freire (1996) has discussed 'Empowerment' in a formal way

for the first time in 1970s. After him, many scholars discussed it as human potential especially for women empowerment. Empowerment has been variously used by writers and researchers, in a variety of context’ (Rowland, 1997). According to Caroline Moser, (1993), empowerment is defined as redistribution of power. The word ‘Empowerment’ captured the sense of gaining control of participation in decision-making (Marilee Karl, 1995). According to Rowland, to understand the process of empowerment, there is a need to be aware that power can take in many different forms. He explained power as four ways

- a. Power over-Controlling power that is related to weaken processes of victimization or manipulation.
- b. Power to- Generative or productive power which is incorporated or manifested as forms of resistance or manipulation that is created new possibilities and actions without domination.
- c. Power with- a sense of the whole, being greater than the sum of the individuals especially when a group tackle problem together.
- d. Power from within- the spiritual strength and uniqueness that inhabited in each one of us and made a true human and it is based on self-acceptance and self-respect, which extended in turn to respect for and acceptance of others as equals.

Figure 1. Understanding the process of empowerment



Source: Author Estimations

Empowerment which implied that empowerment is about changing the balance of power in a given society, which is defined as control over resources and ideology (S. Batliwala, 1993). Likewise, Empowerment that seeks to change society through a rearrangement of power’ (Beteille, 1999). Srilata Batliwala has pointed out that empowerment is a process that involves a redistribution of power, particularly within the household. Similarly, Naila Kabeer (1989) interpreted empowerment as a radical transformation of power relations between women and men so that women have greater power over their own lives and men have less power over women’s lives. According to Kabeer (1994), empowerment strategies for women must build on ‘the power within’ as a necessary adjunct to improving their ability to control resources, to determine agendas and make decisions; it needs ‘experiential recognition and analysis’ of issues to do with women’s own subordination and how it is maintained, such power cannot be given; it has to be self-generated (Kabeer, 1994). Moreover, John Friedman’s (1992) explains empowerment as social power, which can be translated into political power and which consequently expedites and strengthens the process of psychological, social and political empowerment.

According to Kate Young (1993), empowerment enables women to take control of their own lives, set their own agenda, organize to help each other and make demands on the state for support and on the society itself for change'. According to Hashemi (1993), empowerment is as a process-and also as the result of the process-whereby the powerless or less powerful members of society and the women gain greater access and control over material and intellectual resources, and challenge the ideologies of discrimination and subordination, which justify this unequal distribution (Vinod,2004). On the other hand, economist Bina Agarwal define, "Empowerment as a process that enhances the ability of disadvantaged and powerless individuals or groups to challenge and change in their favor, existing power relationship that places them in subordinate economic, social and political positions". Women's empowerment is a process of personal and social change, interlinked and mutually reinforces psychological, political, social and economic domains, and through which women individually and collectively gain power, meaningful choices and control over their lives (O'Neil et al., 2014). Empowerment is not a linear, uncontested process characterized by negotiation and compromise, and uncertain outcomes (Cornwall & Edwards, 2016). It is the capacity of a person to make effective choices and transform them into desired actions and outcomes (Alsop, R., & Heinsohn, N. 2005).

There are many terms for understanding the process of development, the crucial concepts of development are as follows- economic growth which is encompassed quantitative changes are considered as a reproduction in material sphere; increase of volume of goods and services that are produced. Economic development which is more complex process than economic growth it encompassed both quantitative and qualitative changes such as transformation of production structure, implementation of new methods of management of resources, economic development, increased opportunities of economic growth as it allowed to achieve higher approach of the latter (Kubiczek, 2014, Fritz, 2004). Socio-economic development is made up of processes caused by exo- and endogenous factors which determined the course and direction of the development. These processes do not work in isolation from other processes and that usually proceeded by, or is the consequence of, other processes. Factors of socio-economic development themselves cannot be described closer in general terms because they differ depending on the set of conditions produced by a concrete historical and geographical situation in which socio-economic changes take place.

Socio-economic development is a key concept and central aspect of change in the socio-economic sphere. The concept of development functions as both, a product of an optimistic vision and an articulation of social interests, and a tool of analysis (Stemplowski,1987). Chojnick (2010) focuses on the construction of the concept of socio-economic development based on two issues-(a) the scope of the concept of socio-economic development and its reference and (b) the nature of socio-economic development. According to them socio-economic development embraces changes taking place in the social sphere, mostly of an economic nature also economic aspects come to the fore in the research on change in the economy, and they cannot be isolated from social aspects. The change and the development are where 'change and socio-economic

development’ combine two aspects. According to Chołaj (1998), the science of economics distinguishes political economy in the classic sense which concerned the economic aspects of a society’s life. This theory is interested in the types of socio-economic systems, ownership relations, and interests and motivation behind economic activity”. Social reality is a system approach and a dynamic approach. System approach consists in viewing reality in systemic terms. Social reality is then seen as made up of various social systems occurring at a variety of complexity levels, performing different functions, and assuming a diversity of forms.

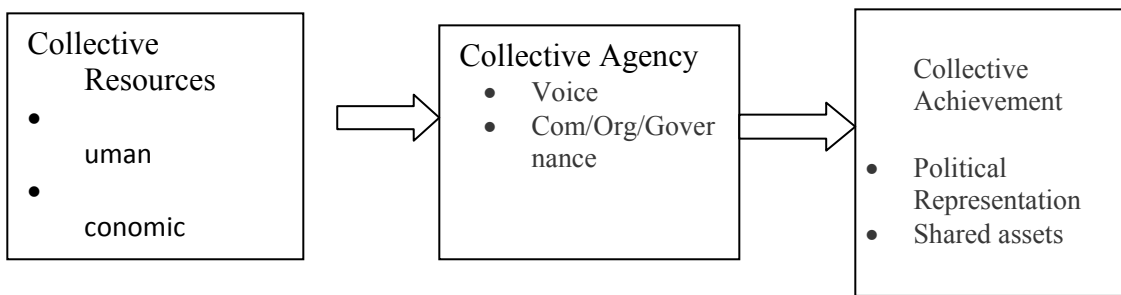
Social systems emerge, change and disappear as a result of operation of a variety of processes, both social and natural. A classification of social systems is a highly complex and complicated matter, Chojnick (2010) presents territorial social systems, it is defined as a social system in which a human community occupied, developed and controlled a specific area on the Earth’s surface, a territory on a permanent basis (Chojnicki 1988, 1999). An insight into changes in social systems, especially territorial social systems, is particularly difficult owing to their huge complexity, internal and external structural entanglement, and an uneven rate of change in their components. The dynamic approach is treated as complementary to the systems provided a basis for a holistic treatment of social systems. On the one hand, no system has a static, immutable character, and on the other hand, a system approach to objects allows a better insight into and representation of the complexity, the various aspects and mutual relations occurring in the course of their change. Generally, the dynamic approach addresses changes in systems. This does not only concern changes in the global properties, components and structure of the systems, but also in their surroundings and external links.

**Conceptualizing Women’s Empowerment**

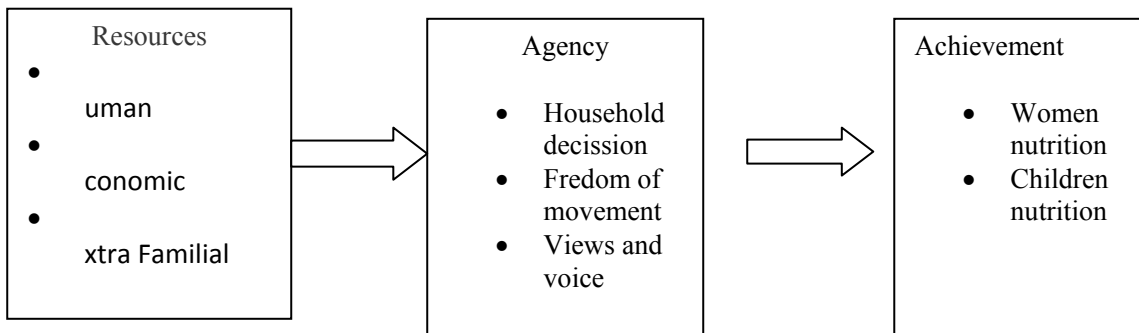
Women empowerment is a multidimensional and complex process and it is difficult to conceptualize but I have conceptualized women’s empowerment that is based on a framework developed by (Kabeer, 1999). In this framework, empowerment which is illustrated as a dynamic process where women acquire resources that enable them to develop voice, the capacity to articulate preferences, and agency, the capacity to make decisions, to fulfill their own aspirations. These resources included human resources like schooling attainment, skill development, and self-efficacy; social resources such as participation in organizations, access to peer networks, and access to role models outside the family; and economic resources or material assets such as earnings, property, and land.

Figure 2: Conceptual framework of women empowerment:

Community Level of Processes



Individual Level Processes



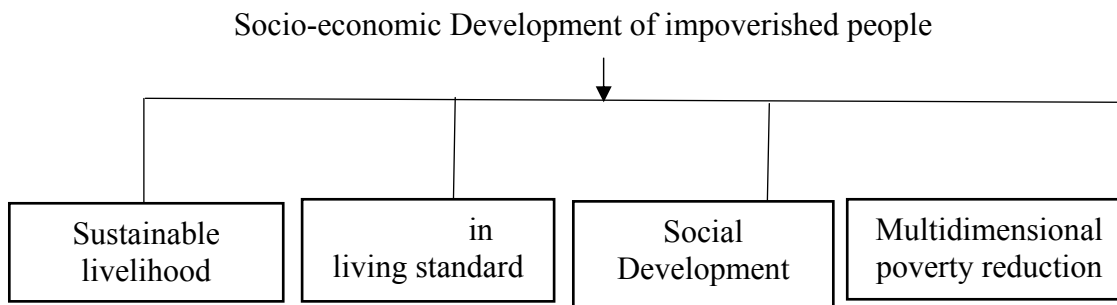
Source: Dr. Yount's conceptual framework for women's empowerment, elaborated from Kabeer (1999).

Despite of available resources women could not empower because of the broader structural and normative environment. From the theoretical point of view, the ability of women to become empowered at the individual level depends on the environment in where she lives. In disempowered community it is difficult for women to gain access to the resources, to develop voice and agency. Therefore, it is important for communities to develop all kinds of opportunities for women.

**Conceptualizing Socio-economic Development**

Socio-economic development of an individual is assessed through multiple proxies' such as sustainable livelihood, social development, growth in living standards, and multidimensional poverty reduction are included in order to conceptualize the overall socio-economic development of impoverished people.

Figure 3: Conceptualization of socio-economic development-



Source: Author Estimations.

**Relationship between women empowerment and socio-economic development**

Women's empowerment and achieving gender equality helps society ensure the sustainable development of a country. Many world leaders and scholars have argued that sustainable development is impossible without gender equality and women's empowerment (Corcoran, Mary, 2000). Sustainable development accepted environmental

protection, social and economic development, including women's empowerment. In the context of women and development, empowerment must have included more choices for women to make on their own (Mehra, Rekha, 1997). There is the aspect relationship between economic development and women's empowerment which is defined as improving the ability of women to access the constituents of development, particularly health, education, earning opportunities, rights, and political participation. In one direction, development alone can play a major role in driving down inequality between men and women; in another direction, continuing discrimination against women can hinder development argued by Amartya Sen. By her first relationship argued that gender equality improved when poverty declined, also argued that policymakers should therefore focused on creating the conditions for economic growth and prosperity.

In contrast, more emphasis has been given on the second relationship, from empowerment to development. The Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, argued that "achieving gender equality is a "prerequisite" to achieving the other Millennium Development Goals (MDG)", including eliminating poverty, reducing infant mortality, achieving universal education, and eliminating the gender gap in education by 2015 United Nations, (2005). In this report, "Engendering Development," the World Bank" (2001) calls for policies to address gender imbalance in "rights, resources, and voice," and recommends that institutional structures be overhauled to promote equality, and that specific measures, such as girls' scholarships and quotas for women in parliament, be adopted. These measures are justified, according to the report, not only because they promote equity, but also because they are necessary to accelerate development. Interestingly, the 2012 World Development Report (World Bank, 2011) adopts a much more nuanced message. While it emphasized the "business case" for women empowerment, it mainly has given the equality between women and men are a desirable goal in itself, and policies should aim to achieve that goal.

Economic development reduced poverty, improved the conditions of women on two counts: first, "when poverty is reduced the condition of everyone including women improved", and second, "when the gender inequality declined as poverty declined, so the conditions of women improved more than that of men with development". Economic development, however, is not enough to bring about complete equality between men and women. Policy action is still necessary to achieve equality between genders; such policy action would be unambiguously justified if empowerment of women also stimulates further development, starting a virtuous cycle.

### **Conclusion**

It is assumed that women empowerment is a multidimensional process there is no specific definition of women empowerment it is related to the power; it is the phenomena that look for to change society through a rearrangement of power' and refers to the expansion of freedom of choice and action in all spheres such as economic, political, social, cultural, personal and familial to shape one's life. Empowerment can have understood in different contexts by different people due to geographical, cultural, economic, social, political,



environmental and technological backgrounds. Sustainable development is a multidimensional concept; it embraces social and economic development as well as environmental protection. Attaining development among all the pillars of sustainable development is incredible without empowering women and obtaining gender equality, thereby using the entire potential of the country. Socio-economic development is the process of social and economic development in a society that is measured with indicators. Without active participants of women in the economic, social, political, cultural, and other arenas of the country the development cannot be achieved.

Finally, the pillars of sustainable development are impossible without empowering women thus, the government needs to work hard to change the existing position of women and achieve development which will have a positive spillover effect on empower women and improve their socio-economic growth to the sustainable development nationally and internationally. This paper will help readers to know the conceptual understanding of women empowerment and socio-economic development to the researchers, the policy makers could take this paper as a baseline to get better understanding about women empowerment and socio-economic development.

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