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Women empowerment through sports

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Abstract

Gender discrimination have long been a part of our societies and even sports is also affected by it till date after so many efforts. Gender inequality in sports was such an important issue that even UNISCO recognised Sports and Physical Activity as Human Right in 1978. In the year 1995, The Fourth World Conference on Women was held in Beijing proposed that the key strategy for the reduction of discrimination/inequalities between men and women is Gender Mainstreaming. It is “the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action including legislation, policies and programmes, in any idea and at all levels”. It is an approach for the development of policies that considers interests and concerns of both men and women. Gender Mainstreaming follows the principle that the sustainable development of the society is possible only if there is no discrimination on the basis of gender in the society. Participation in sports is equally beneficial for women as it is for men, providing those opportunities to develop leadership skills, developing their fitness standards, providing a boost to their self-esteem and self-stabilization. Despite of the obstacles that are faced by the women due to gender discrimination, many women are leading in sports and serving as the source of inspiration to other women across the country to overcome all the odds and also to work for the gender equality.

Keywords: Gender discrimination, gender mainstreaming, leadership skills, self-esteem, fitness, gender equality

Introduction

Gender discrimination is prevailing in many aspects throughout the globe and is a deciding factor in many problems being faced today, the major problems amongst them being poverty, education and health problems. Women throughout the world are living in more extreme poverty situations than men and the major underlining factor being education. Globally there is dominance of boys in achieving education and the women makes upto two- thirds of the world illiterate adults. Such disparities have important health consequences. Girls and women are more likely to suffer than boys largely because of their poverty and lack of power in the society. They are more involved in sex work there by becoming a major source of spreading HIV and AIDS and are more vulnerable to health issues related to sexual and reproductive health. Due to the lack of health education and health care, women suffer from unwanted pregnancies and premature births and deaths of babies in womb that may even prove fatal for themselves.

This inter- relationship between gender, poverty, health and education has marked the importance for all the nations to attain Millennium Development goals(MDGs).The efforts of different countries made internationally have helped to improve the status of women in society. Since 1979, after the adoption of US convention on the elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women, the status of women have greatly evolved. In many regions, girls and women now have the access to education, medical facilities, employment, labour force, government and private sectors. Moreover now a days different departments and sectors have reserved seats for women. Different policies have to be framed in all the areas for gender equality and employment of women. This practice of framing the Policies concerning both male and female is known as gender mainstreaming. Following are the procedure or steps involved in Gender Mainstreaming:

- Identification of gender perspectives of sector area or issue, for example gender analysis that is based on issues of representation and content as well.
- Identification the important requirements for effectively promoting gender equality.

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- Identification of different opportunities that exists in different work tasks and some other additional actions may also be taken.
- Development of a well-knit plan for actions to be taken with objectives, activities and expected outcomes, including the progress measuring indicators.
- Involvement of this plan in overall planning documents involving medium term plans, budget for program and performance evaluation.

Considerable amount of knowledge, commitment, awareness and skills are required for attaining the goals of Gender Mainstreaming.

The State of Women Worldwide

- **Income:** Of the world's one billion poorest people living on less than one dollar per day, more than two thirds are women and children majority of them belonging to rural areas.
- **Political participation:** The global average of women in parliament counts to only 16 percentage of parliamentarians.
- **Access to resources:** 60-80 percentage of food production in developing countries is done by women. Desperate of their huge contribution, many developing countries have prohibited women from owning or disposing any land without the consent of their husbands.
- **Violence:** Evidences from different countries reveals that women from rural areas suffer more violence than adolescent girls. Up to 50 percentage of adult women experience violence at the hands of their intimate partners.
- **Literacy:** Almost twice as many women as men worldwide are illiterate (600 million women to 320 million men). 70 percentage of 130 million children who are not able to attend the schools are girls.

Sports as a tool for Gender Mainstreaming

Dating back to the existence of earliest civilizations, Sports have always been an integral part of the culture of every nation. Every sphere of human life may it be employment, health, participating in any activity like politics, sports etc is affected by the gender discrimination. Women in sports have always suffered a lot due to gender biased nature of the patriarchy dominant society. Gender stereotypes and prejudice are the parents to gender inequality in sports. When the Modern Olympics were held for the very first time in 1896, women were not even allowed to watch the games and events. Women events for sports and games were introduced for the very first time in Olympics in the year 1900. Women participation in sports is recessive due to a number of reasons such as poverty, safety concerns, heavy domestic demands, social and cultural prejudices and restrictions, lack of proper facilities and skill development programmes.

Many international bodies are working for equal access and opportunities for women in sports by enforcing certain laws. Many countries have made it mandatory to have a certain percentage of women in the governing organisations that are responsible for overall development of performance and status of games and sports in the country. Many researches have been done on sports, participation of women in sports, gender equality etc that can benefit girls and women in various ways such as:

- Boosting the confidence level
- Development of leadership skills

- Promoting mental and physical health
- Challenging gender stereotypes and discriminations
- Developing group identity and solidarity
- Fostering positive embodiment, facilitating social inclusion and integration.

Sports leads you to the way of self realisation and self-actualization, it helps you to know yourself more, to grind your potentials and capabilities. Sports serve as a means for women empowerment by development of various systematic and planned programs to make women more physically and mentally strong. Sports provides a platform for education providing important health instructions, developing skills and strategies to reduce health risk related to their sexual and reproductive health. Many regional bodies are also working to promote gender equality in sports by providing a role to women in decision making and designing the program, by providing training and opportunities to develop their leadership skills thereby making them well equipped to take important decisions of their own life and controlling it positively and efficiently.

Sports programs for women creates an environment in which they can flourish their social networks, provide social support and safe places to gather, help in the development of their communication skills, provides them knowledge about health education and employment services, provided them a platform to discuss and work on the problems being faced by women in the society and also to educate other women to take the necessary steps for their social and economic upliftment. Despite of the fact that sports is a major tool for attaining gender equality, there are certain challenges and obstacles that should be given faced. Women athletes are under the hand of male coaches or trainers and are also surrounded by male co athletes, so it is essential to safeguard their security and also to maintain a positive environment where they can practice freely without any worries of sexual harassment, male dominance and also to ensure that they get equal opportunities and facilities as their male co athletes. Sports have the ability to empower the women in their own society. We have seen many examples where the female athletes were first prohibited to take part in the sports due to cultural and traditional barriers but are now supported by their own society after they won medals and made their families and communities proud. There was a time when the state like Sports have transformed the outlook of the society towards women. Phogat family had set an example of Women Empowerment for the society in Haryana producing wrestlers like Geeta Phogat, vaneeta Phogat, Babita Phogat, Ritu Phogat, Sangeeta Phogat who have brought many international medals for our country.

We have so many such examples to show women empowerment by sports. Kerala is fascinating everyone by its unique talent of women athletes. It is the only state where women are doing better in every domain such as social, economic, political and sports. Kerala have produced athletes like PT Usha, Shiny Wilson, Rosa Kutty, Anju Bobby George, Chitra Soman and so many others who have received national and international medals. Tintu Luka, the third Indian women to enter the semi-finals of an Olympic event is also from Kerala. Kerala shows its pride by great number of female Arjuna Awardees (14 out of 16 Arjuna Award winners in Kerala are females). This medal hunt of female athletes in Kerala is a whole new source of inspiration for the women in the country.

From not allowing women to watch the Olympics to nearly

equal participation of women in Rio Olympics 2016, sports have come a long way on the path of gender equality and serve as a tool for Gender Mainstreaming.

Millennium Development Goals

In September 2000, UN Millennium Summit established eight Millennium development goals with the aim to eradicate or reduce poverty, hunger, disease and child mortality, gender equality, promote education, maternal health, environmental sustainability and global partnership.

Sports, gender equality and Millennium Development Goals

Sports has been recognised to effectively and practically assist in attaining the Millennium development goals. Sports provides a working platform to all these MDGs. Role of sports in attaining MDGs is as under.

Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

- Sports keep people mentally and physically fit to face the challenges of hard laboured and mentally stressing jobs
- Sports provides the opportunity of jobs in many arenas.
- The construction of sports infrastructure and equipments also provide wages and jobs.
- Sports also help in developing communication and leadership skills, boosting self-esteem and confidence, reduced social stigmas and barriers leading to increased access to employment.
- Sports also helps in learning of vocational skills, thereby helping many people to earn their livelihood.
- Sports is also promoting handicapped students and players to participate in many events especially designed for them such as Paralympics which is an excellent source of income and self dependence for them.

Achieve Universal Primary Education

- Many sports programs provide incentives to support education for girls. Infact there are many sports centres and sports schools providing education to the female athletes.
- Sports is curing the stigma of preventing the disabled students to enter the school to learn.
- Participation in school sports events and programmes have enhanced the attendance and enrolments.
- Sports is eroding the stigma of girls attending the schools.

Promote Gender Equality and empower women

- Sports ensure safety of women participating in games
- Improves the mental and physical health of the females around the globe to face the challenges of gender discrimination.
- Improves the communication and leadership skills of women to safeguard their status in the society.
- Sports have increased the access of social interaction serving as a tool to promote the gender equality.
- Sports have transformed the gender norms, helped in crossing the social and cultural barriers providing more opportunities to women to control and stabilise their own lives.
- Sports serve as a tool for providing instructions about health education. Educating females about their sexual and reproductive health, do's and don'ts during their monthly cycle and also to maintain their intimate hygiene to avoid certain infections.

Reduce child mortality

- Sports based vaccination drives and prevention campaigns have helped in reduction in child deaths and disability from polio, malaria etc.
- Sports have reduced the stigma of female infanticide and communities are proudly accepting the female child.
- Sports based education programs have helped in reduction of adolescent pregnancies in some cases.
- Health instructions provided to the young mothers have helped in healthy gestation period and child births.
- Participation in Physical activities have increased the immunity of young children against various diseases.

Improve maternal health

Health instruction programmes for women have provided reproductive health information and services.

- Sports also help in postpartum recovery and strengthening. 6. Combat HIV and AIDS, malaria and other diseases.
- Sports programs aiming at preventive education and empowerment of women providing information about HIV and AIDS have reduced the risks of infections.
- Sports have helped in inclusion of women suffering from HIV and AIDS and thereby reduced social stigma of excluding or boycotting such females.
- Sports can be used to increase the vaccination drives against measles, polio and other viral and bacterial infections.
- Use of mass media, mass sports events, disease prevention campaigns, fitness campaigns such as fit India campaign and involvement of various celebrity athletes have helped in providing awareness against various diseases such as tuberculosis, malaria etc.

Ensure Environmental sustainability

- Several tournaments and championships are organised to raise awareness towards environmental protection and sustainability. Various fund raising campaigns are also organised to use the funds collected for environmental protection.
- Sports based local information programs are organised to raise awareness about environment and motivate people to participate in environmental protection and improvements mobilisation drives.

Develop a global partnership for development

- Sports works under the banner of world peace and brotherhood thereby fostering a global partnership for world peace and development.
- Sports serve as a channel for exchange of ideas, culture and traditions amongst different countries participating in various international tournaments providing chances for the people of different countries to interact with each other and developing a feeling of brotherhood and empathy for each other.

Conclusion

Sports have played an important role in streamlining the gender perspectives of the people around the globe. It has completely changed the outlook of the people towards the gender based discrimination prevailing in different sectors of the society. Sports has strengthened the people will to fight against this pandemic of gender inequality and motivated many organisations to work for the pursuit of gender inequality free society. Sports and games provide a platform

for the positive transformation of the life of people. Culture, customs and traditional barriers are the major obstacles that are to be encountered to have equity and equality in the society and to improve the quality of life of women globally.

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