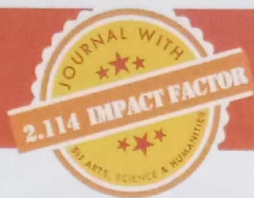




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ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN THROUGH ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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Introduction

In the 21st century, women enjoy more freedom and power than ever before. However, they are still disadvantaged when compared to men in virtually all aspects of life. Women are deprived of equal access to education, health care, capital, and decision making powers in the political, social, and business sectors. Whereas men are credited with performing three quarters of all economic activities in developing countries, women actually perform 53 percent of the work, according to the United Nations. The 1995 UN Human Development Report, states that "an estimated \$16 trillion in global output is currently 'invisible,' of which \$11 trillion is estimated to be produced by women."

The world has recognized the vital importance of education as a main aspect of human security and as a means to empower women. According to the UNDP Human Development Report, women in Africa represent 52 per cent of the total population, contribute approximately 75 percent of the agricultural work, and produce 60 to 80 percent of the food. Yet they earn only 10 percent of African incomes and own just 1 per cent of the continent's assets. These numbers indicate the tremendous challenges women face on their road to gender equality. Despite repeated efforts made by governments, NGOs, and multilateral development agencies, the majority of women in the developing world are still relegated to micro enterprises and informal tasks.

In addition, women still make-up the majority of part-time and temporary workers in developed countries. Consequently, these women working in informal economies are likely to have less access to basic health care services, education, financial capital, political appointments, employee rights, and land ownership.

However, there is wide consensus that investment in the economic empowerment of women can and will help reverse these trends. Increased income controlled by women gives them self confidence, which helps them obtain a voice and vote in:

- Household decisions such as domestic well-being decisions. For instance, women tend to use income clout for more equitable decisions about sons and daughters' diet, education and health.
- Economic decisions: acquiring, allocating, and selling assets.
- Fertility decisions: economically empowered women tend to have fewer children