Gender and Development: Emerging issues and Challenges

(A Concept Note)

The concept “development” is gender invariant. It is considered to be the manifestation of progressive realization of the capabilities, abilities and talents of each individual for his/her own satisfaction and enhancement of social goods. Amartya Sen in his book Development as Freedom stated that development consists of the removal of various types of unfreedom namely deprivation, destitution and oppression and overcoming these problems is a central part of the exercise of development. Gender equality is considered to be essential for growth and poverty reduction, and it is the key in reaching Millennium Development goals, especially through empowering women. Women are increasingly seen as active agent of change, the dynamic promoters of social transformation that can alter the lives of both women and man. However, in developing world, women suffer disproportionately from poverty and its related ills, such as malnutrition, poor health and illiteracy. This phenomenon came to be known as Feminization of Poverty. The persistence of gender inequality is strikingly revealed by Amartya Sen in his concept of Missing Women, missing in the sense of being dead as a result of gender bias in the distribution of health care and basic necessities of life. More deadly manifestation of Gender inequality is reflected in the ‘Violence against Women’. Physical violence in the form of blows of various intensity, burns, attempted hanging, sexual abuse and rape; psychological violence-insult, humiliation, emotional threats etc. are ever-increasing phenomena. In many cases cultural and social factors are observed to be interlinked with the development and propagation of violent behaviour. However, no society can make any claim of development in case one half of its population-the women section of the society- continues to live in the shackles of socio-economic exploitation, suppression and domination.

The role of women in the society has been a controversial issue of debate over the decades. The portrayal of women in any society demands analysis from an inter-disciplinary perspective. Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995) identified 12 platforms for changing the lives of women including the issues of poverty, education, health, violence, human
rights, economic participation, ecology, environment etc. Accordingly, attempts have been made across the world to highlight the gender issues through the gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting. However, the experience of different countries of the world revealed the fact that without focusing on the central issue, states went in a roundabout manner, equating women’s problems with general poverty and did not make any strong efforts to reducing the forces of oppression in society. Under this backdrop, there is need to give a fresh look into the issues of women oppression and empowerment and to evolve an appropriate strategy for bringing about a gender invariant society so as to achieve the objective of inclusive balanced development. The forthcoming refresher course is likely to address a rich diversity of viewpoint on the aspects of women’s empowerment, gender discrimination, violence against women and role of women in protection and conservation of bio-diversity and environment. This course is also expected to provide an insight into the important areas of women’s health, education, legal rights, and religious issues including the roles of media and literature in combating the emerging concerns of gender and development.

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