



## Collaborating for Women's Economic, Social and Political Empowerment: India and Africa

### BACKGROUND

Women make up one half of the world's human capital and yet women continue to be deprived of control and access to resources and decision making. Thus, empowering and educating girls and women and leveraging their talent and leadership fully in the global economy, polity and society emerges as a development imperative. Development experts and policy analysts have claimed that empowering women and girls is quintessential to promoting quick and equitable economic growth and long-term stability. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which all 193 UN member-states endorsed, included promoting gender equality and empowering women as its Goal 3. According to the MDG Report 2012 – "Assessing the Progress in Africa towards the MDGs", the consequences to society of not investing in gender equality and female empowerment can be heavy.

Over one third of the world's poor reside in Africa and though over the last century African countries have made significant strides in promoting gender equity, the equality in society in terms of access and control over family, society, economic and political goods are yet to be achieved. While there has been notable success in some countries in achieving equality in primary education, lot needs to be done to enhance livelihood options and provide space for women in political decision making. In politics, Africa needs to move beyond women's participation to improving their capacity for contributing to development discussions and outcomes.

In India too, the gender divide especially in rural areas, is quite intense and women are often subjected to various kinds of discrimination and denial of rights. Women bear a disproportionate brunt of poverty which forces them into increasing drudgery, longer hours of work under conditions of poor nutrition, food insecurity and falling health.

The entrenched socio-economic prejudices results in progressive marginalisation of women's role in household, neighbourhood and in the community. However, despite these limitations, India has achieved some noteworthy success in women empowerment and poverty reduction.

Over the years various efforts have been made by many Government and Non-Government Organizations to promote women empowerment especially in rural areas. One of the important steps in the direction was the formation of Self Help Groups (SHGs). Linkage between SHGs and microfinance institutions further galvanized the process. By the end of year 2000, microfinance services had reached to over 79 million poor, especially women. Microfinance Institutions have served as an instrument for empowerment to SHGs formed by poor women by extending credit facility, encouraging savings by the groups and promoting social networking and involvement.



SHGs have played a major role in poverty alleviation in many countries. More equitable access to assets and services – land, water, credit, banking and financial services strengthens women's rights and promotes economic growth. This would go a long way in ensuring sustainable development.

### Countering Gender Inequality: The Common Aspiration

Several indicators of human development and gender parity reflect that India compared to other Low Income Countries (LICs) has achieved success over the years. In 2013, India fell under the Medium Human Development category, while a majority of the countries in Africa fell under the Low Human Development category, with the Gender Inequality Index value ranging from as low as 0.410 to 0.591 demonstrating that a lot can be done to empower women in Africa who face high levels of inequality and discrimination. India's movement from LIC to MHD status was made possible with conscious efforts through programmes and policies to bridge the gender gap.

Table: Gender Inequality Index

HDI rank	Country	Gender Inequality Index Value, 2013	Gender Inequality Index Rank, 2013	Share of seats in parliament, 2013
<b>Medium human development</b>				
135	India	0.563	127	10.9
<b>Low human development</b>				
147	Kenya	0.548	122	19.9
151	Rwanda	0.410	79	51.9
159	Tanzania (United Republic)	0.553	124	36.0
164	Uganda	0.529	115	35.0
173	Ethiopia	0.547	121	25.5
174	Malawi	0.591	131	22.3

Source: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/table-4-gender-inequality-index>

One of the most striking aspects of SHG movement in India has been the sheer scale in which this model has grown over the past two decade. It started with 300 SHGs in 1986 which crossed a million by 2004 and, as of March 2014, there are 7.43 million SHG groups in India with 97 million members, 84 percent of which are women that are mostly poor.

In this context, since the early 1990s, SHGs in India have emerged as a dominant 'community based institutional model' that provides basic financial services to its member and helps them progressively reduce social and financial vulnerability, expand livelihood opportunity and achieve socio-economic and political empowerment. Initially visualised as a platform for financial intermediation, over the past decades, the SHG movement in India has emerged as an effective institution to address socio-economic empowerment of women.

One of the most successful programmes on the SHG model is the Kerala based mission – Kudumbashree, which emphasises on political empowerment as a key result area and has adopted rights based approach where members of the programme proactively seek various social and economic entitlements. In other models, empowerment may not be the explicit aim but the assumption is - access to finance would invariably lead pathways to all forms of empowerment. While the context, coverage and approach of different models of SHG's varies, studies find that SHGs in general have made a positive impact on socio-economic condition of its women members and their households. It has also reportedly empowered women members substantially and contributed to increased self-confidence and positive behavioural changes.

#### SHG as a tool for Economic and Social Empowerment of Women in India and Africa

As developing regions with high potential for cooperation on social, economic and political matters, India and Africa can mutually benefit each other through collaborations around knowledge sharing and capacity building. India's success in achieving poverty reduction and socio-economic empowerment of poor women can in part be attributed to convenient and simple local level access of savings and credit services to marginalised communities through the formation of SHGs. Over the years women empowerment in India has made huge strides and the SHG movement has been a significant factor promoting this empowerment.

#### Impact of SHGs

- Significant impact on poverty reduction
- Enhanced ability of members to leverage finance for investment, consumption
- Cascading impact on choices for credit sources available to members' households
- Increase in access to formal institutions such as banking/ insurance/ credit sector

### Promoting Partnerships for Women's Empowerment in India and Africa

The Government of UK's Department for International Development (DFID) through its Knowledge Partnership Programme (KPP), implemented by IPE Global aims at producing and disseminating high quality research, sharing Indian and global evidence on policies that impact development outcomes and supporting advocacy towards strengthening policy and programmes in many African countries such as Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda, and Tanzania.

Within the ambit of the KPP, IPE Global commissioned a study to analyse the impact of SHG on the socio-economic empowerment of women in India and consolidate the lessons from these SHG models with a view to replicate such learning in the context of the Low Income Countries (LIC). The study focused on selected government led SHG models that have achieved scale in their respective geography.

### The Milestones of the India - Ethiopia Partnership

#### February 2014

As a part of a Workshop organised by Digital Green, with DFID support, in Addis Ababa, a session was dedicated to women empowerment under KPP, in which successful women empowerment models were presented. This included Kudumbashree, Jevika and Society for Elimination Rural Poverty (SERP). Ethiopian policy makers and other participants at the workshop felt that the Indian women empowerment models presented had potential to empower women in Ethiopia as well.

Subsequently, the Hon'ble Minister of Women Children and Youth Affairs (MoWCYA) expressed keen interest in piloting some of these women economic empowerment models through SHGs in Ethiopia. It was suggested that a high level Ethiopian delegation and other relevant stakeholders visit India, to understand the policy initiatives and other factors contributing for the success of these models.



### A successful example of India- Africa cooperation on women's empowerment: An initiate under the KPP – sharing learnings with Ethiopia

The Ethiopian microfinance sector is characterized by its rapid growth, an aggressive drive to achieve scale, a broad geographic coverage, a dominance of government backed Microfinance Institutions (MFIs), an emphasis on rural households, the promotion of both credit and savings products, a strong focus on sustainability and by the fact that the sector is Ethiopian owned and driven (Deribie et al, 2013). After the 1996, Proclamation on "Licensing and Supervision of the Business of Micro Financing Institutions", various institutions have legally been registered and have also started delivering microfinance services.

Today, the MFIs in Ethiopia are motivated to extend the frontier of financial intermediation to those traditionally excluded from conventional financial markets, the poor. This backdrop of SHG and microfinance in Ethiopia created an ideal situation for collaboration and cooperation with India.

#### October 2014

A high level delegation representing various stakeholders such as National Banks, Women Regional Bureaus, MoWCYA, NGOs working with SHGs, etc., from Ethiopia visited India from October 9-19, 2014.

The visit exposed the team of Ethiopian delegates to the various aspects of financial inclusion and social protection in India. The delegates visited government Ministries' in New Delhi to get an idea of how flagship programmes have contributed to financial empowerment of women in the country. They also visited Trivandrum and Kochi to study the ground realities of Self Help Groups and understand the integration process of Kudumbashree and local self-government institutions.

#### Key Outcomes:

- Agreement on a team of experts from India visiting Ethiopia to support the preparation of an action plan to formalise steps in adopting the Kudumbashree model in Ethiopia
- Government of Ethiopia to constitute two or three working groups / task forces to work on creating enabling environment and implementation strategies.

### April 2015

A team from India consisting of experts from Kudumbashree, DFID India and KPP visited Ethiopia from 1st to 3rd April, 2015. The main achievement of this consultation was the firming up of next steps between Kudumbashree and MoWCYA.

#### Key Outcomes:

- Discussion on the Memorandum of Understand (MOU) between Government of Ethiopia & Kudumbashree
- Agreement on implementing a Pilot Project in two regions of Ethiopia by active involvement and participation of Kudumbashree team and the Women, Children and Youth Affairs Ministry, Ethiopia
- Implementation process to be divided in two phases. Each phase to involve two regions and a total of 4 Kebeles

### August 2015

Kudumbashree organised its first International Conference on "Poverty Eradication, Women's Empowerment and Local Self-governments" from 20<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> August, 2015 in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala. KPP facilitated the participation of Her Excellency, Ms Zenebu Tadesse Woldetsadik (Minister of Women, Children and Youth Affairs, Ethiopia) in the event. The Kudumbashree- MoWCYA ties further strengthened with the inaugural address of the conference being delivered by the Minister.

#### Key Outcomes:

- Her Excellency spoke of the existing cultural and economic ties between India and Ethiopia and how she hoped that the two nations would further strengthen these ties by collaborating on women's issues.
- Highlighted visit of the Indian delegation to Ethiopia in April 2014
- Mentioned next steps on the MOU: discussion between the Ministry of External Affairs, India and Embassy of Federal Republic of Ethiopia

### September- November 2015: The Next Phase

Under the existing nexus between the KPP/ DFID- Kudumbashree- Government of Ethiopia, the following actions are planned for successfully adapting Kudumbashree model in Ethiopia:

- Scoping Study in selected regions in Ethiopia, to understand existing programmes and projects to develop need based pilot strategy to be conducted in the third week of October
- Signing of MoU

- Need based capacity building workshop for Local Government authorities with technical support for programme design and plan formulation
- Immersion training for key people in Kerala
- Community level orientation and training: On-site handholding support

The India-Ethiopia alliance on SHGs supported by Government of UK's Department for International Development (DFID) through its Knowledge Partnership Programme (KPP), implemented by IPE Global represents success story of mutual cooperation between two nations to benefit from each other's experience. This also reiterates the potential for cooperation and collaboration between nations in the global south to set their agenda and achieve sustainable development.

#### Select References

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*KPP is a South-South cooperation programme promoting knowledge sharing in the areas of Food Security, Resource Scarcity and Climate Change; Health and Disease Control; Trade and Investment; and Women and Girls. KPP is funded by the Government of UK's Department for International Development (DFID) and managed by a consortium led by IPE Global Private Limited under its Knowledge Initiative. The main objective of KPP is 'Gathering and uptake of evidence on issues central to India's national development that have potential for replication in LICs and impact on global poverty'.*

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