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WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONE IN INDIA: A CRITICAL APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

Since 1990's the structural reforms elevated India from import substitute to export promotion regime. In society to carry through this process of transformation, government of India has set up several export promotion zones (EPZ), superseded by the new industrial enclaves with more incentives and benefits to the stakeholders is termed as "Special Economic Zone". Prolonged growth in the pace of economic growth intensified the process of creation of SEZ throughout the state. The export performance of the SEZ increased from 5.08 billion USD to 82.35 USD from 2005-06 to 2013-14. The central sponsored SEZs units increased to seven and notified under SEZ Act 2005 increased to 69. The employment generation and investment rate improved significantly. Amidst of growth momentum, SEZs generated several human development events and challenges in India. In this setting the present article will trace the process of the development and its impact on women's development. Cross country references showed mixed facts on the same. Consequently, several sources have been referred to identify the events and challenges in the SEZs in India.

KEYWORDS: export promotion, growth, women empowerment, industrial land

SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONE

A special economic zone (SEZ) is a geographical region or serviced industrial land with total connectivity and infrastructure, governed by a comprehensive and integrated set of economic laws and regulations compatible with the World Trade Organization (WTO) and other liberal-trade agreements. Foreign and domestic investors lease land from the SEZ authority, which may be a public or private entity, to set up businesses within the SEZ and take advantage of tax and other incentive plans. Commodities produced in SEZs are a great deal, but not always, assigned for export. Common enterprise types in SEZs include light and heavy manufacturing, data and call centers, food processing, research and engineering, chemical industries, logistics and

maritime services, and others. Some zones have also evolved into high-tech parks, tourist centers, or sites for high-level financial and logistics coordination or scientific inquiry. (World Bank). The SEZ scheme introduced by the government of India in April 2000 has its genesis in the Export Processing Zone (EPZ) scheme. All EPZs are converted into SEZs. Every bit of 21st January 2015, 523 SEZs are approved, 352 are notified and 196 are operational in India. Maharashtra, Telangana, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Andrapradesh are the five countries which bear the highest share in the development of SEZs. Around 56066.69 hectares of land are identified for creation of SEZs. The land disputes and rehabilitation policy measures are still in contention due to various causes. The primary aim of the creation of SEZs is to attract

Foreign Direct Investment and employment generations. Under this consideration the cognitive operation of women empowerment also discussed. Any projects sponsored by the private or government agencies, should encourage women to participate as an economic agent will improve the socioeconomic condition of adult females.

ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN SEZs

One of the main objectives of SEZ policy is employment generation in India. In 1966, the only operating zone in India was the Kandla SEZ. Total usage in this zone amounted to 70 workers. The number of SEZs increased to 8 by 1998. As a consequence, the level of employment also increased to about 95000 by 1999. Thereafter, the level of employment declined marginally. Only subsequently the introduction of SEZ Bill 2004, SEZ activities showed improvement. A major push was turned over by the government to SEZs in 2006 when the SEZ Act was implemented in February. Since then, there has been rapid expansion in the SEZ sector.

Several research articles identified that women's participation in employment segments of SEZs is unique in its feature. The literature identifies numerical dominance of women in Special Economic Zone in across the macrocosm. Women mainly get employment in labor-intensive units like garment and electronic assembly units. The bulk of women workers are contract or casual workers and do not receive the legal benefits they are titled to. Written reports on Indian SEZs reveal that preference is granted to unmarried females in low-paying jobs like cutting, checking, and tamping, or as helpers (ILO).

A study led by Indian Council for Research on International Relations (ICRIER) titled Impact of SEZ's on Employment, Poverty and Human Development reveals that women's labor participation is higher in unorganized sector compare to organized sector. Institute of Developing Economies discussion paper reveals that the ratio of women actors in Indian SEZ is markedly lower than that in the Bangladesh EPZ's, and lower than in the EPZ's of many nations. The proportion of female workers varies among SEZs and the nature and benefits of the work is also differs men to adult females. The World Bank report reveals that, though the Indian SEZs shows dominance of women workers in SEZs, the socioeconomic status of women are not satisfied compared to international standard.

Benita Sharma in her Special Export Zones (SEZs) and its Pact on Women Workers in the Garment Manufacturing Industry in Andhra Pradesh says, though women workers did see more opportunities for work, they also faced the risk of relocations to SEZs also faced the extra risk of

layoffs. Trade policies formulated by committees have no women members, thus decisions are all run by humans. The social system and performance are also patriarchal hence the policy did not look at women in the informal sector. Hence, for gender equality, it is substantial that the structures, the functioning is revised in the light of gender inequalities arising out of women's unequal power relations. Finally, gender indicators assess gaps and achievements need to be fixed so that Trade policies become more gender sensitive and work towards achieving gender equality.

Indian SEZ's labor norms differs from the other nations. In that respect is less scope for grievances and deal. The JNU working paper on labor law and Special economic Zones in India reveals that SEZ Act 2005 is silent on labor laws regulating labor relations in the SEZs and an interrogation of the SEZ Act shows that the legal regime relating to labor has not been changed. Many sources on SEZs identifies that most of the employees under these units are contractual and denied with benefits and grievance mechanism for adult females. The pace of employment considerably not progressive for women workers in SEZs. Even there are state and private sponsored SEZs also demonstrates negative picture about women's participation in SEZs.

WOMEN WORK CONDITIONS

International experiences emphasizes on the dynamic participation of trade union and women's groups in all those industrial units where women labor participation is considerably high. Indian labor laws significantly justify welfare of the women workers, especially in Indian industries. The SEZ act 2005 much announced on women workers and women's work conditions, but Indian labor laws ratified along with the recommendation ILO. Though the similar pay structure and employment conditions for adult females with other benefits are prescribed, the implementation in SEZ are not progressive. Many SEZs are employing women for contract and following sub-standard labor norms. The faint presence of trade unions in SEZ units further weakened women's status in SEZs. The Act 2005 emphasis the women as an entrepreneur and advocate equal status for women investors.

The technological intervention in the industry improved the women work conditions and efficiency in the SEZs. But there are several unorganized and unskilled sectors undoubtedly reporting sexual harassment and unhealthy work conditions for women. This can be rectified only when local NGOs and other organizations participate in the awareness program for women workers. Secondly work family balance among women

workers is also important concern to be discussed. Most of the manufacturing and garment industries in SEZ enclaves facing this challenge. Therefore at the state level the issue to be discussed and accordingly amendments are prescribed to the board.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The gender issue in industrialisation, still in discussion, it is premature to comment on impact of special economic zone in India. But there are some policies measures which can improve the status of the women are as follows:

- Training to upgrade skills leading to job enrichment and enhancement, promotion etc.
- Women in supervisor positions...better management of women labor, reduction of harassment, less security issues
- Better facilities will lead to reduced turnover...security for women working night shifts, crèche, maternity leave, medical insurance
- Guidance and legal assistance to women to help them overcome harassment and other issues at home and at work
- Women organizations to particularly assist SEZ women employees
- Counseling and guidance to make them financially independent by having savings schemes through the organization
- Having different wing in the Labor union with women leaders
- Initiative on the part of women themselves to have a better lifestyle.

CONCLUSION

Special economic zones in India promoted export promotion and many more direct and indirect effect on human development and other developmental growth. Creation of employment and labor force participation varied from state to state and industry to industry. Women participation in zones demonstrated cross county trends only. In spite of the number dominance, women labour conditions need to be addressed. Government can frame better labour policy measures to empower women status in those zones.

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