The Importance of Women in Sustainable Development

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Sustainable development is defined as the "Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" in Brutland Report(1987).

The strategies focusing on women employment and reducing poverty lead to faster and stronger economic growth and sustainable development. Women’s education and their economic and social empowerment have very important effects on the policy of reducing poverty and their respectability in the society.

An increasing number of studies indicate that gender inequality brings higher economic costs and leads to social inequalities and environmental degradation around the world. Although the female presence in the workplace is growing, women do not take part in the economic and political decisions as expected. Women have made direct and indirect contributions to the economy. The direct contribution comes from their role as workers in the paid economy whereas the indirect one comes from their role as a mother in a family and in a society.

The progress in the level of education in women and their participation into work force bring an increase in the national income of countries as well as the competitiveness of them in international markets. Producing highly value-added goods will make a big contribution to the balance of payments of the related countries as well as to their economic growth rates. This can also contribute to solve the current deficit problems in the countries such as Turkey.

In summary, it can be said that an increase in women workforce brings a noticable increase in family welfare, national welfare and that of global welfare respectively.

Key words: Sustainable development, women employment, welfare

Introduction

The women employment has some certain similarities though the related countries have some differences due to their development levels and their social values. In fact, the restraints to the women employment have been discussed much more in the underdeveloped countries than the ones in the others by taking into account the gender, the wages, and the level of education. The other aspect of the women employment problem results from the women’s entrepreneurship, the increase in educational opportunities for the women and that of the women’s performance in business.

This study has three important aspects; the first one is the positive relationship between the increasing educational level and the women employment that emerges as a result of the economic progress. The second one is the social benefits created by the women besides the productivity that they deliver. The third and last one is the increasing national income resulting from the economic values created by the women work force. But, the existing problems regarding the women employment do not allow us to think that the economic growth can be performed or continue in a positive way. That is why there is not any model that does not take into account the women work force or that could be followed without it. The economic growth and sustainable development that could be resulted from training the women, having them be more productive and providing the positions with them without any gender discrimination will be based on a more powerful structure. The opposite will be one of the reasons of being

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undeveloped. For this reason, solving the problems related with the women employment is a key issue in order to achieve the aimed common economic growth and sustainable development. The progress in the level of education in women and their participation into work force bring an increase in the national income of countries as well as the competitiveness of them in international markets. Producing the high value-added goods will make a big contribution to the balance of payments of the related countries as well as to their economic growth rates.

It is accepted that women employment is one of the basic components of sustainable development. The participation of women into workforce and their social statue give an idea of the level of development of the related countries. The problems resulting from the women participation into workforce in developing countries, gender discrimination, and precarious employment have serious negative affects on development. The increase of quantity and quality in woman employment has a positive affect on development. The participation of women in economic activities increase their personal income at micro-level whereas it has a positive affect on the national income of a country. The role of women in the family and in the society get better because of their participation in economic activities. The employment of women, who constitute half of the population, has an important affect on a regular economic growth, increasing the development process and getting the development sustainable. On the other hand, women participation into workforce and social life is easier and less problematic in the developed countries when compared with the situation in the less developed countries. Women in developed countries often have more advanced rights.

Women employment is considered with its economic, social, lawful and physiological aspects, and it has a special importance regarding all the community because of its results. Women employment increases the productivity resulting in an increase of national income. The increase of national income makes families become happier in a country. Women employment also makes the people save more personally. That is the resource of the investment necessary for a sustainable development in a country. The income earned by being employed enables women become more powerful and economically-free in society. The relationship between women employment and education also helps them grow more qualified children. This constitutes an important dynamic of social development.

On the other hand, women are those who are not employed or fired from work at the time of economic crises. The role of a woman in the society is considered to be a mother and a wife. For this reason, the approach to the women employment, solving the existing problems and having them participate in the social life and become more productive is a social problem. So, it is necessary to solve the problems regarding their participation into workforce by taking into account their level of education and productivity for the competitiveness of a country. It is not possible to have a reasonable economic growth without solving the problems of the women constituting half of the society.

Some factors affecting women participation into workforce are industrialization, moving from the rural areas into the urban ones, increase in the level of education and policy of economic applications. But, women workforce is considered to be “the secondary workforce” and this leads to the structural problems in labor markets. For example, women face higher unemployment rates than men globally, with no improvements likely in the coming years, according to ILO (Global Employment Trends for Women, 2012).

**Development and The Structure of Employment**

Development, on one hand, is the increase in productivity and per capita income, and on the other hand, is the changes in economic and socio-cultural structure. Besides an increase in per
capita income, the structural changes such as efficiency of production factors and increase in quantity and increase in the percentage of industrial sector in export and national income are the basic components of development. (Han & Kaya, 2002:2).

The economic properties of less developed countries are;

• Low income per person, inequality in income distribution,
• Low level of savings and investments,
• The high level of the cost of food.
• The social properties of less developed countries are;
• Traditional social structure,
• The inequal and secondary position of women in social life,
• The existence of much more child labor force and that of the minor middle class,
• Educational system (Han & Kaya, 2004: 10-17).

The quality of the relationship between workforce, employment and economic development and its sustainability have some certain positive effects on development. Production is based on the use of production factors. Increase in employment is an important aspect of production and economic development. Economic growth results in less poverty and an increase in the welfare of the workers. On the other hand, each production factor that is not used, has a negative effect on potential increase in welfare. That is why, high level of qualified employment is a must for development and growth.

Sustainable and balanced growth should be based on the followings (Berber, 2011:8); 

• Encouraging employment,
• Giving a person the chance of self-determination
• Distributing resources fairly
• Enabling the social integration and interaction
• Encouraging permanent human relations

While taking measures to increase women employment, it is necessary to determine the barriers of women employment and to develop new policies to eliminate them. The contribution of women, who carry out the work at home, to the family welfare is not clearly realised. When they work out of home, welfare and economic income become embodied. The perception of this situation has a positive effect on the understanding of the society to the daughters. Otherwise, less educated women could not think that their daughters should participate into workforce because of low income. This relation is shown in the following figure 1.

Figure 1
Dilemma of Insufficient Participation
The possibility of employment of the less educated women in workforce necessary for patient and child care or cleaning services is very high since they earn less and the money they get is not enough to compensate their basic needs, and their participation into workforce is less than expected. Similarly, parents do not want to spend much money on their daughters’ education because they do not earn enough money if they have not got good education. This leads to some certain structural problem in workforce causing low salaries and chronic cases.  (DPT & WB, 2009: 29-30).

It is necessary to carry out the followings to eliminate those problems emerging from the dilemma;

- Subsidizing the social security support contribution for women,
- Widening child care and kindergarten facilities with low costs,
- Encouraging the vocational education and the courses necessary for vacant jobs,
- Increasing investment rate for education.

**Participation of Women to The Workforce**

The followings are the variables effecting someone’s participation into workforce;

- The most important one is the educational level (Personal capital) since it determines the income,
- The second one is the quantity of the services given at home. The necessity of giving services at home prevents someone participating into workforce. If they work at a place, they should buy the services necessary for the family,
- Third one is that if someone has social security due to the someone else, then it encourages that person not to work somewhere. But, if nobody works in a family, then everybody try to find out a job for their essentials.
- The fourth and last one is the prices of the goods and services produced at home. Decrease in the cost of child care and house work encourages the people to work outside. (DPT-DB, 2010:10-11).

The participation rate of women into workforce in agricultural societies is higher than in the industrialised ones in which it increase in time due to industrialization or urbanization. Especially, the participation rate of women into workforce increases on the basis of education level. Women get no payment for “unpaid family work” in agricultural societies whereas they earn some certain amount of money as “paid work” when they work in industry and services (Gürsel and Ulusoy, 1999: 40-58).

The term of “unprotected employment” means self-employed person or unpaid family work without any social securities or interactions, those who do not earn enough, and the ones having no basic employee rights. (ILO, 2010: 18). Disapproval of families, the social viewpoint, security problems and the role in the family are some social reasons causing women not to work. The economic barriers that prevent women from working are low salaries, economic crises, unlawful employment, the number of kindergardens, and long and difficult working conditions.

A micro-economic model related with the participation of women into workforce, a woman, especially, the married one has two choices to work:

1- Child care and doing housework by staying at home; women workforce is not included in workforce, has no economic values, and it is not taken into account when calculating the national income.

2- Working somewhere with a salary and compensate the expenses necessary for child care and house work with it.
The changing world system necessitates individuals and organizations to be familiar with it and it is necessary to build up an educational system and an employment policy for training individuals having competitive ideas.

The Importance of Women Employment In Economic Development

Employment is the first of the most important problems that underdeveloped countries come across. Employing someone who is old enough to work somewhere with a wage is a socio-economic aspect. The employment of the young and their participation into the economy directly effect the economic performance of that country. Even though less developed countries have a high percentage of birth rate, creating new jobs and participation into workforce is lower than expected.

One of the areas in which inequality appears is the gender inequality. It has a negative effect on economic growth and development. So, it is a must to solve this problem in order to balance the outcomes of economic growth and gender inequality (Pirmana, 2000:4). The inequality between men and women can clearly be seen in employment, working period and conditions, and mostly in their income.

Gender equality is very important for development. It is also important as a means of development. It is rationalism in economy; it helps the other development outcomes get better and increase the effectiveness of an economy by three ways.

- First, removing the barriers preventing women participation into education, economy, and productive inputs as men do makes women much more productive for a globalizing and more competitive world.
- Second, improving women’s statues helps them be better in other outputs as well as the ones related with their children.
- Third, creating an area of game enabling women and men to be socially and politically more active and to take decisions and put them into action equally will lead to more authorities in time, more involvements and paving the way for somebody else.

Therefore, the approach to the women employment and eliminating the existing problems and having women participate into economic life more productively are the social problems regarding economic development. Eliminating the barriers causing women participation into workforce and having them employed is essential for the countries in the period of global competition. So, it is not possible to have a balanced growth without solving the problems of women constituting half of population. The status of women and the different effects of development programs on women and men were pointed out in 1970s. (Başbakanlık Kadın Statüsü Genel Müdürlüğü, 2008:5).

The following factors are indicated by Adelman ve Yeldan (2000: 143) for a rapid economic growth necessary for increasing the life quality and a better international division of labor:

1. Sustainable development
2. Structural changes in production and consumption
3. Technological improvement
4. Social, political and organizational modernization
5. Improvement in life Standard

Women participation into workforce has a positive effect on public budget by decreasing dependency. The dependency rate as the ratio of population unemployed (aged 0-14 and over 65) to the employed ones (aged 15-64) is the proportion of inactive population to the active one. The rate of dependency is lower in the developed countries when compared with the ones with those less-developed countries where a person looks after 2 or 3 people together with oneself. (Han & Kaya,2004:109). The highness of this rate means the economic values created
by the people taking part in production is shared by those who do not part in production. This causes a decrease in the national income, per capita income and general welfare.

**Employing Women For A Sustainable Development**

The concept of per capita income and increasing welfare up to 1970s had been based on the development and growth. After 1970s, environment and natural resources had also been the focus of interest for social change and economic development besides economy. Following the idea of bringing the human beings into the forefront in development, UNDP(United Nations Development Programme) had developed a new strategy called “Sustainable Human Development” in 1994. This strategy had created “the Basic Needs Approach” for the basic needs of human beings for nutrition, health, housing, education and culture had become more crucial. This approach concentrates on human factor and income distribution for development as well as economic growth and development based on capital stock. According to the Basic Needs Approach, the very first aim of development should be nutrition, housing, clean water, energy, health, education and employment for a better life (Acar, 2008:120-121).

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According to the sustainable development approach, the main problem is the attitude of human being as consumers and producers. The most important subject discussed during the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janerio in 1992 was the role of production and consumption for a sustainable development. Rio Declaration on Environment and Development(Earth Chapter) includes 27 principles of a sustainable development. The other one is Agenda 21. According to those two documents, the essential barriers to development and the reasons of poverty and inequalities in developing countries are the traditional behaviours shown by people, especially the ones living in the developed countries (Earth Chapter/8, Agenda 21/sct.4.3). They also indicate that all the states should develop a policy of decreasing and eliminating unsustainable production and consumption methods by taking into account demographic structure.

UN reaffirm the vital role of women and the need for their full and equal participation and leadership in all areas of sustainable development, and decide to accelerate the implementation of our respective commitments in this regard as contained in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, as well as Agenda 21, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the United Nations Millennium Declaration.

Sustainable development is a political issue because it is about good governance, which will be hard to achieve until we get closer to gender parity. Gender-sensitive development assistance can be a powerful force for empowering women to compete in land, labor and product markets enabling them to make economic, social and environmental contributions to sustainable development. If women were in more productive and decision-making roles, we could be moving faster and more assuredly towards sustainability in the economic, social and environmental sense (Stevens,2010:1-8).

Five capital model is used for a sustainable development (Güvel,2011:148-149).

- Human capital,
- Social capital,
- Environmental capital,
- Financial capital,
- Tangible capital.
Women employment for a sustainable development should be taken into consideration in terms of political choices, education, financial support and social perception. The participation of women employment into workforce as human capital for a sustainable development is very important for acquiring the environmental and production perception, an increase in their income creating financial resources for saving and investment, and getting more respect in society.

Women education, women employment and their property rights have an important effect on the evaluation of social values and the relations in a family. Women also play an important role in a family when children or individuals are trained in their families for a continuous production and consumption. Moreover, they have the responsibility of growing their children as the ones respectful to environment, nature, history, cultural values and of being models to those children by doing the right things. The relationship between woman employment and five capital model is shown in the following figure 2.

Figure 2
Five – Woman Employment and Capital Model for a Sustainable Development
Today, women are not only the people who benefit from the resources and help increase the welfare, but also they are the dynamic actors of themselves, their families, their countries and that of the global welfare. This perception has continuously been accepted and it has been noted that increasing the level of welfare will also affect the future generations positively. The empirical studies carried out in the recent years show that the variables related with women employment, their income, finding out jobs out of their families, their rights of having property, their literacy, and the decisions taken together within the families have been affected positively (Sen, 2001:259-264).

Figure 3
The Importance of Women in Sustainable Development

The education and participation of women into workforce on equal basis increase their personal income. But, this step constitutes the foundation of a sustainable development besides a sustainable growth. That is why, an economic structure that does not solve the problems of women does not lead to a sustainable development program. Education enables women to acquire a vision leading to an increase in their productivity. Education and economic empowerment of women have significant potential to reduce poverty. The benefits of education passes to the next generation—mothers who have had an education are more than twice as likely to send their own children to school as mothers with no education. According to the International Planned Parenthood Federation, on average, women reinvest up to 90 percent of their incomes back into their own households, compared to that 30-40 percent by men. Currently, women’s unpaid labor is estimated to contribute up to 50 percent of GDP in some countries (Engelman and Sheffield, 2012).

Regrettably, the Rio+20 organizers’ omission of a strong focus on women and sustainability is not uncommon across the global community. Women support families through wage labor, preserve traditional knowledge, maintain biodiversity, and ensure household food security and nutrition. Despite these critical roles, women and young girls continue to suffer from the effects of poor healthcare, education, and discriminatory policies. Women produce 50 percent of agricultural output in Asia, and represent nearly 80 percent of the agricultural labor force in parts of Africa. If women had the same access as men to agricultural resources, production would increase by 20-30 percent, and has the potential to
reduce the number of hungry people in the world by 12-17 percent, according to research by the UN-FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization). Women participation into economic and social life has also had significant effects on the quality and course of development in all areas for a sustainable development.

Conclusion

Women continue to face many barriers that prevent them from realising their full economic potential While contributing to the economy, productivity and development. This does not only hold back women; it also holds back economic performance and growth. Policies to be followed for reducing gender gaps can significantly improve economic growth and standards of living, and in developing countries can be a major contribution to reduce poverty. Social protection measures to reduce women’s vulnerabilities, investments in skills and education, and policies to promote access to employment. A sustainable development and growth is the aim of all countries. Keeping the development and economic growth sustainable, using the resources effectively, and technology and increase in capital are very improtant for each country. It is necessary to invest for human resources to put those into practise. An increase in development is not possible without women as human being is thought to be the essential factor of production. Strengthening women’s position in societies should be one of the prior objectives. Women education and their participation into workforce are the factors to be given importance on. However, gender inequality should be eliminated in order to have women participate in the issues regarding development and growth. So, the developing countries should lead a policy of removing gender inequality related with economic, social, political and cultural issues. One of the factors necessary for women to enter into workforce is education. The most important parameter that motivates the social awareness and enables the future generations to live in a better world is the participation of educated women into workforce. If a country does not solve the existing problems related with women and does not give them the chance to participate into social and economic life actively, it is not possible for them to be one of the global actors. Women participation into workforce increase the level of competitiveness of those countries globally. The inevitable condition that enables a country to be a global power is to regulate its economic policy, education, social and political issues without gender discrimination in employment according to the women’ level of productivity and personal characteristics. The employment that includes and creates more jobs and production by means of women workforce can help the people in need to increase their incomes and make much use of economic growth. Using the human capital fully helps solving the unemploymnt problems and poverty resulted from economic issues besides those of the social problems such as one’s lack of confidence.

Resources

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