



Women's Empowerment in Higher Education Institutions from the Perspective of Gender Space: Educational Knowledge to Implementation

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Citation: Wang, S., Chan, K. L. G., Abdullah, A. (2024). Women's Empowerment in Higher Education Institutions from the Perspective of Gender Space: Educational Knowledge to Implementation. *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 30(3), 39-55. doi: 10.52152/kuey.v30i3.1016

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Received: 25 Jul 2023
Accepted: 24 Sep 2023

This article explores the idea of women's empowerment as a key element in such a philosophy. It outlines the four pillars of empowerment—economic, political, knowledge, and psychological—on the basis of empirical study. The most successful cases of emancipation via education have taken place in informal education programmes that aim to encourage critical thinking on gendered social norms and the encouragement of corrective measures. So, the paper says, both macro- and micro-level interventions are necessary to establish a changed gender division of labour, with the former focusing on the private sphere, which severely restricts women's availability and opportunities for transformational action. Women's empowerment relies heavily on the development of agency, both on an individual and collective scale. For this to work, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) led by women must be involved. Policy challenges are discussed in the last section of the article. This paper concluded that when compared to their male counterparts, female Chinese school leaders were more pessimistic about the progress towards gender parity in contemporary China. Despite this, many of our participants painted an optimistic picture of gender relations in Chinese schools, with many assuming they were working towards achieving gender parity for all of their pupils. Women's empowerment remains a promising theoretical premise that has not received concomitant operationalization and support to reach its full range of possibilities, so there is a need to challenge its normative meaning and demand that it be taken seriously as a theory of change in gender relations.

Keywords: Gender, Women's Empowerment, Private and Public Spaces, Schooling, Informal Education.

INTRODUCTION

Despite significant progress since its introduction three decades ago, the concept of women's empowerment is still far more commonly used in the women's movement and among international development organizations than it is in the academic community. Academic texts have largely ignored the issue of women's empowerment, despite the fact that international development organizations have made it a central part of their programs. The three leading comparative education journals combined to publish only three articles with the word "empowerment" in the title over the past decade (Comparative Education Review, Compare, and the European Journal of Education).

This article examines the concept of empowerment from both a theoretical and practical perspective, focusing on the experiences of women in both developing and industrialised countries. The first part provides a theoretical framework for understanding empowerment, while the second and third sections examine the role of formal and

informal education in empowering girls and working women, respectively; the fourth examines the role of women-led nongovernmental organizations in spreading the message of empowerment, and the fifth provides examples of how empowerment has been put into practice (Aguirre & Ferrari, 2014). In conclusion, this analysis assesses the potential benefits and drawbacks of empowering individuals in the real world.

Some researchers and activists have thought about what this concept of empowerment means in theory and in practice. It's viewed as a final destination by some, but merely the next step by others. There is no separating the means from the ends. I focus on three major theoretical frameworks. Theoretical attention to women's empowerment has been offered by Amartya Sen (1999), who calls it "one of the major concerns in the process of development for many nations around the world today" (Ballón & Valderrama, 2004). Sen argued that prior attempts at national development had rendered women "passive beneficiaries of welfare-enhancing support" by concentrating on indicators of material prosperity (Batliwala, 1994). Instead, he argued that women should be regarded as "active agents of change" who are instrumental in creating their own futures. When women gain "agency and voice," as Sen puts it, society benefits (Chioda & Verdú, 2011). These assertions, along with his concepts of capacities (a person's accumulated assets and knowledge that allow for agency, or the freedom to make decisions), and functionings (one's actualized ways of being and acting), highlight the importance of individual agency. Yet, he does not explain how his subjects might achieve "agency" in their lives or how his "capabilities" relate to gender.

In particular, Sen's capabilities approach does not consider the freedom to choose for oneself (DeKeseredy & Kelly, 1993). Iversen argues that women's problems are not caused by "what you're able to accomplish or be with the goods at your disposal," but rather by the fact that "your command over products may be restricted in the first place" (Cohen, 2004). Martha Nussbaum (2000) expands on Sen's work by listing ten concrete aspects of society that are essential to a decent life for women and men. Nussbaum, in contrast to Sen, does not emphasize women's particular needs or provide guidance on how these can be met. My proposed theoretical framework differs from the capabilities approach in two key respects: (1) it is not a set of social values but rather a set of empirically demonstrated conditions and sites for social change; and (2) it centres on the macro and micro dynamics that must be in place to enable women's individual and collective agency.

Women's empowerment theorist Naila Kabeer (1999) divides empowerment into three levels. The first, "deeper," requires an understanding of structural relations such as the interplay between class, caste, and gender. The second, "intermediate," requires an understanding of institutional rules and resources. The third, "immediate," requires an understanding of one's own resources, agency, and achievements (Connell, 2005). As a result, her proposal runs counter to the conventional wisdom of discussing empowerment solely in terms of its superficial effects. Kabeer incorporates the need for subsequent action into his concept of empowerment. Her definition of empowerment is "the increase in people's capacity to make strategic decisions in an environment where this ability was previously denied" (Dijkstra & Hammer, 2000). Education may play a pivotal role in the development of such "talent".

A comprehensive theory of women's empowerment is based on actual evidence from feminist studies and women's movements throughout the globe. It should be clear to the reader that education (knowledge) is only one consideration on my list. Therefore, emancipation always results in subsequent behaviour, both on an individual and a societal level. To me, women's empowerment is not a new form of dominance (women over men), but rather a resource, a bargaining chip that helps to establish and uphold gender equality. In an earlier conceptualization (Duflo, 2012), this review described the four interconnected dimensions of women's empowerment as follows: the economic dimension, or a certain amount of financial independence; the political dimension, or the ability to be represented or represent oneself at various venues of decision-making; the knowledge dimension, or awareness of one's awareness of one's reality, including possibilities and obstacles to women's equality; and the psychological dimension. This includes acknowledging the importance of both individual agency and collective forms of support, organization, and mobilization. When it comes to defining empowerment, the paper agrees with Srilatha Batliwala's (1994) "spiral process" that includes "changing awareness, identifying areas to target for change, preparing strategies, acting for change, and reviewing actions and consequences." While my proposed theory of empowerment still places a premium on schooling, stresses the significance of the dynamic between economic, political, and psychological factors (Eldred, 2013).

Transforming traditional gender roles is one form of gender liberation. To gain insight into the potential for changes in gender relations, any theory of social change must centre on shifts between oppressor and victimized groups. Redressing power imbalances, like any other form of human freedom, requires the active participation of those who are most negatively impacted by dominant groups (Marx, & Engels, 1969; Gramsci, 1973; Freire, 2020; Houston & Ngculu, 2014). Abolitionist Frederick Douglass (1857) said it best: "Power gives nothing without a demand." That didn't work before, and it won't work now, so it's up to women and other people who are

disadvantaged by the status quo to take the lead.

Gender studies is an academic discipline that seeks to understand the social and historical factors that contribute to the unequal treatment of women and men. [With the passage of time, it is only fair that the fight for gender equality be broadened to acknowledge the presence and the need for rights of other types of sexual identity] (i.e., gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer).

Given that the concept of empowerment originated in the women's movement rather than with feminist theorists, this study can say that it is an inductively constructed theory of change. The oppressed must empower themselves in order to confront the oppressor.

This review proposes that a theory of women's empowerment needs to take into account the private and public spheres as well as the material and ideological influences that contribute to the emergence, maintenance, and reproduction of gender inequalities in both. The private sphere includes the many recurrent activities related to cooking, washing, and caring for children.

The UNESCO data which does not include North American and many Western European country data map the rates of literacy for females. One can see a trend of low literacy through Central America, the sub-Saharan Africa (except South Africa) and the Indian subcontinent (**Figure 1**).

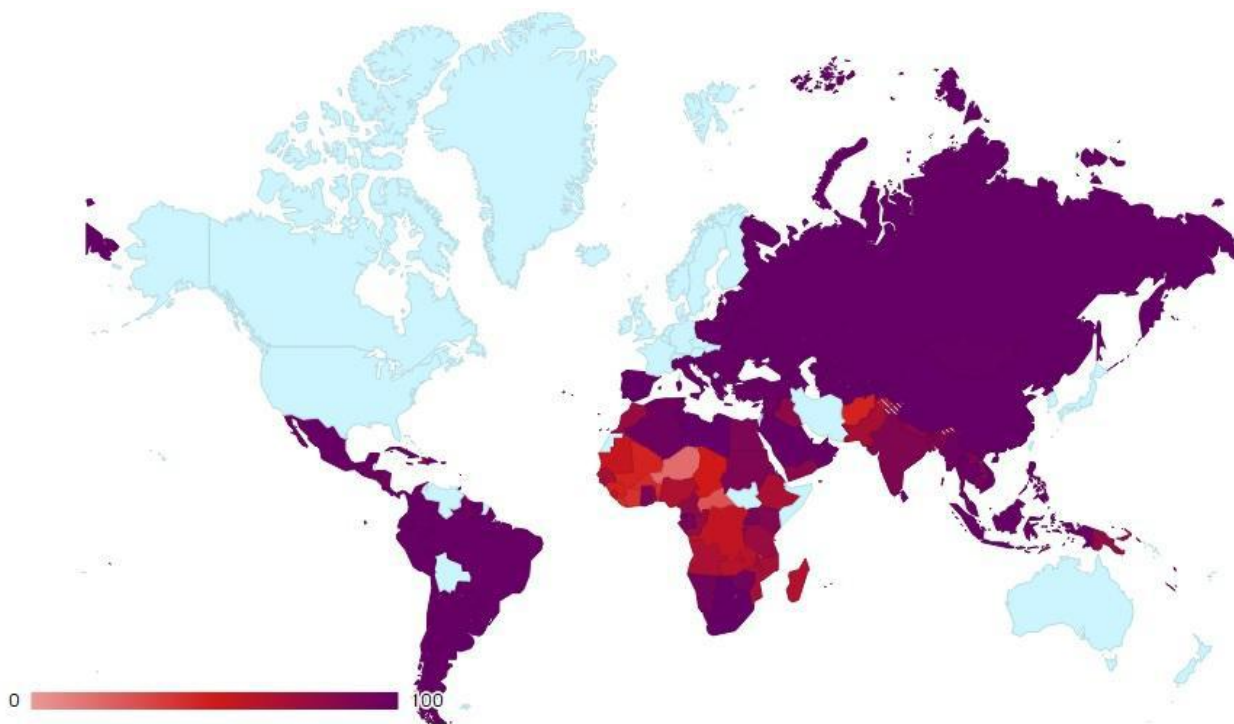


Figure 1. Global Female Literacy Rate

LITERATURE REVIEW

Among the many historical legacies that China has fulfilled is the influence of the ethical and intellectual worldview of Confucianism. Confucianism has unquestionably affected the conduct and social relationships of Chinese people for many thousand years and has helped keep Chinese society and families together. Human characteristics like as ren (kindness), Yi (integrity), li (manner), Zhi (intelligence), and Xin (trust) are what Confucianism brings to the table, and they will help create a peaceful society. While Confucianism has many positive aspects, it also has a negative one: the oppression of women. Women are subject to three subordinations and four virtues in Confucianism. Women were taught to respect their fathers, their husbands, and their sons once they became widows (the "three subordinations").

The "four qualities" consist of morality, speech, outward modesty (how women present themselves), and hard labour (which is traditionally done by women). Additionally, ladies often utilize it to restrict their mobility and social activities by binding their feet. An ancient Chinese Confucian saying states, "A woman without talent is a virtue," suggesting that girls were considered less deserving of an education than males were before the May 4th

Movement in 1919 and the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. For instance, the May Fourth Movement was a catalyst for the growth of the feminist movement. People are more likely to adopt and refine the concept of gender equality and equal rights under the impact of the May Fourth ideology (Goulden, Frasch, & Mason, 2009).

In addition, it prompted the National Party-controlled Congress in the late 1920s to approve a resolution called "Resolution on the Women's Movement," which established legal protections for women's financial independence. The ceremonial and customs system of the Zhou dynasty was recorded in the book of Liji, and it showed that women were not allowed to hold property or make choices about it (Ibrahim, 2006).

The act's passage was a symbolic demonstration of women's newfound freedom to make decisions about property ownership and alter their social standing. This measure has the backing of the law, but its implementation in China, particularly in rural regions, is complicated by the country's widening income divide. In the next paragraph, I will describe how the vast divide between rural and urban locations affects gender equality in higher education. China's higher education system has expanded and improved thanks to two initiatives. First, from 1949 and 1976, a plan called the "Great Leap Forward" was implemented, and by 1960, more than 1,060 new colleges and universities had been established (Iversen, 2003).

Nevertheless, the state government's lack of money, the economic crisis of 1960–1962, and the Cultural Revolution all contributed to the initiative's failure. Higher education in China shifted to a "user pays" model and efficiency-focused industries during Mao Zedong's last years in power. Second, in 1999, China attempted to increase access to higher education by raising tuition prices, promoting land grants, and leveraging bank lending. The action ended up being fruitful and long-lasting. China's gross enrollment rate in higher education peaked at 16% in 2002, up significantly from 1.55% in 1978. 54.4 per cent of Chinese citizens were enrolled in higher education in 2020, according to the Statistical Bulletin of National Education Development, up from 0.26% at the formation of modern China in 1949. There are now about 27 million people enrolled in higher education in China. The government recognises its effectiveness and backs the initiative to increase talent recruitment. If higher education is made more accessible, more young people will have the chance to pursue higher education. As a result, it's a fascinating thought experiment to speculate on whether or not China's dramatic rise in the college enrollment rate will help advance gender parity there. Despite a little improvement in women's position in society throughout the nineteenth century, this male-dominated pattern has persisted till the present day. In conclusion, China is a prime example of a nation profoundly influenced by Confucian thought. Confucius is credited with promoting certain admirable qualities. Moreover, it undermines women's rights by creating barriers to education and other areas where they need equal treatment. With the May Fourth Revolution in the 19th century, some scholars said, Confucius's negative reputation began to fade. The most important thing is that we can now look at whether or not there is a gender difference in China from a different angle, thanks to the expansion of higher education (Kelly, & Bhabha, 2014; Korenman, 2014).

The results of the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) plots as per the author reveal that females in China are presented in their higher education systems, This reflects that female participation in higher education has experienced a structural change in both expanding systems. Female students have become a critical mass in the higher education expansion process, while the gender gap in China still exists, regardless of the higher education expansion (**Figure 2**).



Figure 2. GER in China

METHODOLOGY

There are key considerations to keep in mind when assessing whether or not the rise of higher education has an effect on gender parity. To begin, there is a strong correlation between gender and socioeconomic status in the actual world. Inequality between classes, according to Sullivan and other academics, is significantly more widespread than the disparity between the sexes. Second, gender equality may be evaluated from a number of perspectives, such as industry, education level, and geographic region. Using gender as a social concept was shown to be difficult. As compared to male students, female students at universities have consistently grown and have now exceeded male students. In 2009, the number of college-aged women (10.82 million) outnumbered males (10.62 million) for the first time. National survey data collected between 2011 and 2012 demonstrated a narrowing of the gap between male and female admissions chances at all levels of higher education (key universities, no-key institutions, and colleges). A similar study was conducted by Yan and colleagues in 2012 to determine whether or not a gender gap exists in admissions to higher education at certain Chinese colleges. No significant gender gap was seen in their statistics for admission to elite universities, suggesting that Chinese female students enjoy equal access to higher education. Yan showed, however, that rural women are 66% less likely than rural males to attend top-tier institutions (Massolo, 2002; Murphy-Graham, 2012).

For people of colour, the odds for women are around 85% lower than those for males. In addition, Ro and her coworkers noted that a disproportionate number of female students from urban areas enrol in top universities (211 universities funded by the Chinese government and supported the founding of higher education through the construction of 100 universities) compared to their counterparts from rural areas. It's possible that the preference for sons and the greater emphasis on boys' education is to blame for the gender gap in rural regions. As a result, parents in rural areas of China are more inclined to invest in their boys than their daughters (Staudt, K., 2003).

Mothers demand higher financial help from their sons in rural areas, according to a study conducted in Yunnan Province. Investment in children's education and the expectation of future assistance were intertwined. In particular, women in the countryside can't count on any kind of help or assistance, and their families are less likely to provide financial resources for higher education. There is more evidence linking low income to unequal treatment of women in society. It stated that female education is a "luxury" that is less likely to be repaid than male education. Yet, Hannum discovered that females in affluent villages benefited more from education than boys did (Nabi, R., 2014).

While gender equality in China's universities has advanced, some women in rural areas still face obstacles in

furthering their education. Gender parity in China may be helped along by a few recommendations or policies. It will be separated into a governmental, community, and educational component. Gender studies should be included in the curriculum of secondary schools and universities. It's a great way to get kids thinking about gender early on, which lays the groundwork for a lifetime of curiosity and research. To better execute policies promoting gender equality, certain schools may need to do a more in-depth examination of patterns. Increasing the percentage of women working in STEM professions is the most efficient strategy for reducing gender disparity.

Nonetheless, there is a dearth of male students studying 'caring' disciplines like psychology, education, and languages. It suggested that men and women should be treated equally in certain sectors. Rural community workers should initiate conversations with some parents about their long-held stereotypes about males. They should take steps, like organising meetings or giving lectures, to foster an atmosphere of gender equality. To further disseminate the idea or the execution of gender equality, the community should urge certain groups to focus on it. As rural poverty may also result in fewer opportunities for women to attend school, governments should invest in subsidising education in rural regions. In addition, they need to consult with local community members and educators on how to best execute gender equality policies.

RESULTS

Economic Empowerment

Any discussion of women's economic empowerment must address the issue of access to goods and resources, both globally and locally. Since women's entry into the workforce, especially at the lower ends of the social hierarchy, tends to place them in stable positions, international development agencies (IDAs) reliance on macro-level indicators produces an incomplete and perhaps erroneous picture of women's economic empowerment.

Possessions are essential to the fulfillment of one's economic and social rights. Women gain greatly from economic development in areas such as property rights, access to bank loans, protection from assault, and abortion legislation (Duflo, 2012). For example, one author argues that "the gender disparity in ownership and control of property is the single most fundamental factor to the female inequality in economic well-being, social status, and empowerment" (Robeyns, 2003). Numerous pieces of evidence point to women reaping substantial benefits from technological developments made possible by advancing social and economic conditions. Industrialization helps women because they can devote less time to housework and more time to outside activities that pay the bills (World Bank, 2011; Duflo, 2012). Birth control, and especially birth control tablets, have given women more control over their bodies, though not all women (Vincent-Lancrin, 2008; Duflo, 2012). As heads of the most impoverished households and among their most vulnerable members, women stand to gain the most from efforts to alleviate poverty. However, economic development cannot remedy gender gaps on its own.

As a result of selective-sex abortions and infanticide, the birth rate for girls is lower than for boys in some of the world's most rapidly developing economies, including China. This is conclusive proof of the deplorable position of women in these countries.

The prevalence of women in non-farm wage employment is often cited as a proxy for women's economic autonomy (United Nations, 2008). Gender equality and social welfare both benefit greatly when women have control over and access to financial resources, as this puts them in a stronger position to do things like, for example, prevent domestic abuse (Dijkstra, & Hammer, 2000). Nonetheless, in several countries, women are overrepresented in low-paying and low-status jobs. No matter whether a profession is predominantly male or female, women's earnings are lower than men's everywhere in the world. This is the case even in countries where female workers constitute the majority. Men in the United States, for instance, earn more than women with a high school diploma or equivalent but less than those with a two-year college degree (an associate degree); men with a bachelor's degree earn the same as women with a master's degree but more than those with a doctorate; and so on (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). The gap has shrunk to only 83% (100% being parity; Gap, Global Gender, 2014) even among the best performers (all five Nordic countries). Despite the ongoing (albeit imperfect) difficulty in quantifying the gender gap within nations, this is the case (Nussbaum, 2003).

At the micro or household level, women achieve economic independence when they are able to become financially independent of their spouses through their own labour. Even among low-income women, who are overrepresented in the home's domestic division of labour, paid work often imposes double burdens, leading to survival strategies rather than circumstances that enable women to advance to higher employment categories or develop self-controlled micro-businesses. The unpaid work done inside the home is disregarded by public policymakers because the current neoliberal regime places a premium on economic transactions that result in profit. For effective economic empowerment strategies to be developed and implemented, this is a major obstacle

that must be surmounted.

This study focuses on the plots connected by each solid line corresponding to the coefficients of the interactions of the dummies of different birth cohorts in Eq.(1), controlling for birthplace-fixed effects, birth year-fixed effects, and exogenous covariates. The birth cohorts aged 19-20 years in 1999 are treated as the reference group; thus, the coefficient is plotted as zero. The dotted lines represent the corresponding 95% confidence intervals (**Figure 3**).

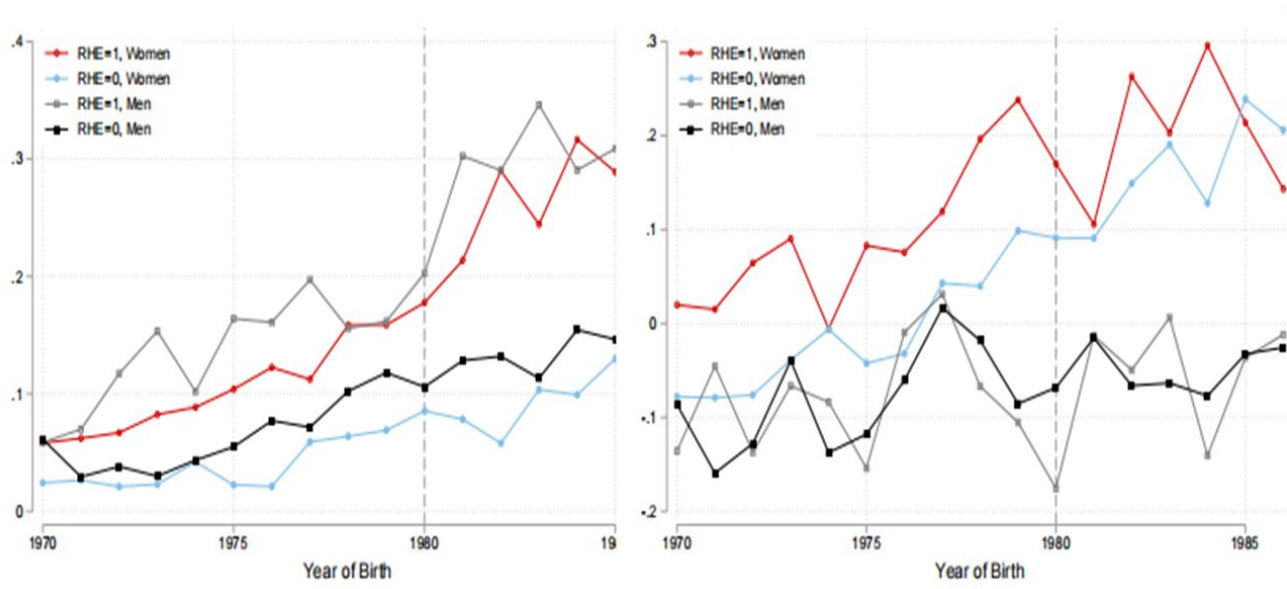


Figure 3. Higher Educational Attainment by Birth Cohort

Political Empowerment

Like economic empowerment, women's political empowerment requires looking at the big picture as well as the details. Being elected as a political representative at any level is a huge step forward for women's rights and gender equality. The political empowerment indicators utilized by IDAs are often too broad in scope.

Personal and household autonomy. Domestic work that is not compensated continues to be an important political issue. This was first recognised by feminist thought, but now economists are beginning to take notice as well (Cohen, 2004; Chioda, & Verdú, 2011; Duflo, 2012). Women perform more housework than males almost everywhere, and the gender disparity worsens as girls become older. Adolescents in rural India indicate that between the ages of 14 and 17, girls are doing anywhere from two to five times as much housework as males. In comparison, girls spend around half as much time as boys on schoolwork (Kelly, & Bhabha, 2014). Women have fewer chances to establish their own authority as adults in these contexts because of the extreme difficulties of navigating them and because mothers themselves maintain a strong sexual division of work among their children. This is a problem that exists even in advanced economies. A survey of men and women working in academia at a leading research institution in the United States found that family formation, including marriage and having children, is the main reason women leave the academic profession between receiving a PhD and attaining tenure in the sciences (Goulden et al., 2009).

Domestic violence is the most pervasive form of male dominance over women; unpaid work in the home makes women financially and emotionally dependent on male partners; women have less time to educate themselves, organize themselves, and mobilise for social change; and in many countries, women lack control over their bodies (in particular, when it comes to reproductive health). Here, it's crucial to remember that A. Sen does not comment on persistent ideological and material pressures across society that inhibit gender reform, although conceding that it will be required to modify "attitudes of the family... towards outside economic activity" (1999). This is a flaw in Sen's analysis of the micropolitical context that hinders women's empowerment.

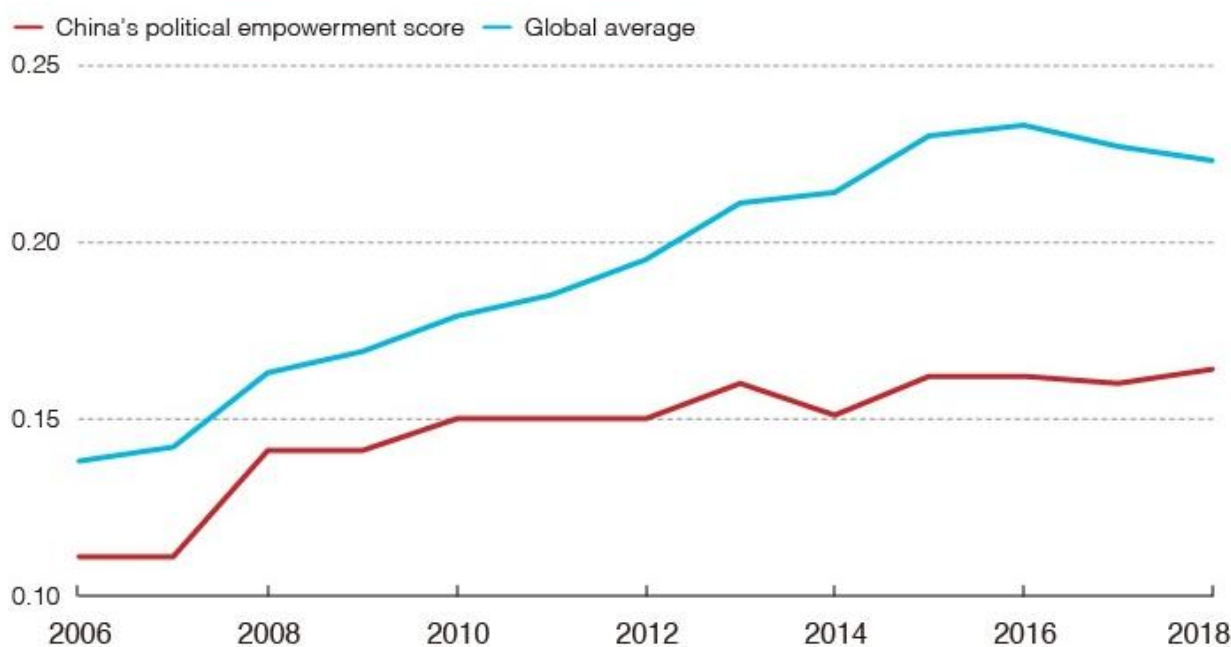
One of the most prominent contributors to the economic and social formation of gender disparities is the gendered division of labour (women performing most of the housekeeping and males doing most of the public jobs) (Cohen, 2004). Feminist scholars have recognised that caregiving is an intricate, complicated, and contradictory part of women's identities and gender parity. Caregiving is essential to social well-being, yet it may also cause stigma and social isolation (Biesecker et al., 2014). Feminists argue that significant changes are needed

to both unpaid and paid work for women if women are to gain more independence (Robeyns, 2003). These changes should promote a more equitable division of caring responsibilities between men and women, rather than a revaluation of care. The labour force participation rate of women in Central American countries increased when childcare options were made accessible to them (Vakis, Muoz, & Coello, 2011). The gender gap in housekeeping is narrowed for American families as a result of women's employment (Cohen, 2004).

The government and IDAs do not give low-income women, in particular, enough credit for the significant and recurring time restrictions they face. People's naivete about the relevance of domestic work to their overall lives contributes to this disdain. Since the term "keeping house" suggests leisure rather than work, women who worked from home were excluded from U.S. labour force statistics until 1993. (Cohen, 2004). The majority of caregiving and household responsibilities fall on women throughout all socioeconomic and industrialised global regions (Cohen, 2004; World Bank, 2011). Studies of how people spend their time show that women in Cambodia spend around 30% more time than men on housework, whereas in Sweden women spend 70% more time and Iraqi men spend 10 times as much time (Duflo, 2012; see also Aguirre & Ferrari, 2014). The majority of unpaid caregiving still falls on women, even in societies with high levels of gender equality such as Sweden. Additionally, the 2008 data from Colombia reveals that males with a university degree work considerably more hours per week in remunerated activities (45 vs. 40 hours) and much fewer hours per week in non-remunerated activities (10 vs. 25 hours) (Villamizar García-Herreros, 2011).

When looking at the lowest socioeconomic level (those who cannot read or write), women outnumber men in adult literacy courses in 95 nations (Medel-Añonuevo, 2013,). These statistics suggest that despite a high level of interest in and motivation for literacy programmes, many women confront barriers at home that prevent them from completing them.

According to the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, "the gender division of labour between women and men and the uneven utilization of time is a key factor for the economic, social, and political enslavement of women". The problem-solving "requires political will by government" claim puts the spotlight on government action while ignoring the potential impact of pressure from collective organizations like NGOs (NGOs). The home is where freedom of choice and action begins and ends. It is feasible for governments to intervene in support of women's independence, but such interventions are seldom effective (Figure 4).



Source: World Economic Forum

Figure 4. Political Empowerment Gap

Advocates for women's rights have had success framing gender inequity as a human rights problem, giving it moral authority that can be applied across borders and cultures. Human rights activism entails individuals or groups asking the government to safeguard their rights from being infringed upon. States actively contribute to

the social production of gender via their laws, rules, and regulations. Nonetheless, there is much data indicating that the state is not a neutral arbiter of social, economic, and political rights as they pertain to gender. Some governments are receptive to talking about women's human rights and recognising the existence of social and women's organizations (Cliché, Ranaboldo, & Serrano, 2015), but progress is slow. There is a mismatch between the legal features of nations and their actual behaviour, but this is often overlooked in efforts that place an inordinate amount of emphasis on women's human rights without providing sufficient support.

Knowledge Empowerment

The more you know, the more you can see the broader picture and the finer details of social processes. In order to expose oppressive groups and the many tools they use to exert social control, knowledge is essential. Nonetheless, this knowledge might be utilised to fight gender inequity, and it is not well known. These data should help us understand what factors contribute to women's oppression and how to counteract them. The two most common ways in which knowledge is systematically acquired and distributed are via formal education (also known as schooling) and nonformal education.

Educational structure. The accumulation of knowledge in the official school curriculum throughout time has ensured the progress and stability of society. Women benefit economically from education, but it also aids them in balancing their personal and professional lives. Nonetheless, it is suggested that vital knowledge about gender is not taught in schools from a transformational gender perspective. Why is this happening? One optimistic theory proposes that this setback arises when competing priorities take precedence; for example, as a result of globalisation forces, the emergence of the knowledge economy, and the presumed need for schools to produce workers, more emphasis is placed on scientific and technological knowledge than on social skills. For Freire (2020), the oppressor's interests lie in "changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the condition which oppresses them," a more gloomy take on the situation (Sen, G., Germain, A., & Chen, L. C. 1994).

Education experts and professionals believe that traditional schooling is ineffective in changing cultural mores and gender roles. According to American educator Ira Shor (1992), knowledge is the ability to know and grasp, but not always the ability to do or change. In spite of having one of the highest rates of women with college degrees, Japan is a depressing example since over 32% of Japanese women do not engage in the labour field due to cultural traditions that link women to the home and children. As Japanese women are prohibited from working in traditionally male professions, their college-educated peers earn 48% as much as males with the same level of education (OECD, 2014). If education is to contribute to the questioning of gender relations, it is essential that students have access to gender-related knowledge and classroom/school experiences that validate girls' identities and help an understanding of the unfair conditions affecting women and men. Kabeer's (1999) statement might be restated as follows: classes should include material that gives students of both sexes a more sophisticated grasp of the complex relationship between gender and society today. While many countries provide some kind of family life education and sex education, seldom do these programmes address issues of sexuality, sexual feelings, or even gendered norms and expectations. Gender-sensitive curricula should address issues such as sex education (including sexuality and contraceptives), the construction of masculinity and femininity, domestic violence, early and forced marriages (especially pressing in Africa and South Asia), male and female roles in childcare and household management, and an appreciation for the impact of gender ideologies (patriarchal norms and practises) on daily life. The influence of international treaties and conventions on gender issues, ranging from property rights to abortion, should be emphasised, as should knowledge of national law and its implementation (particularly the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in force since 1981). Ensuring that teaching practises and curricula do not reinforce negative stereotypes is an essential first step. The intervention of governments to alter curricula and offer gender training for school administrators and teachers is, however, far more significant.

Formal education directly targets students' minds and, indirectly, their emotions by boosting their sense of agency, competence, and optimism. Women with more education tend to make more well-informed decisions, both professionally and personally, according to a number of studies. The political and economic domains of women's lives are not appropriate for the social milieu of elementary and secondary school students. Yet, it is vital to recognise that for many young women, learning about gender in a formal context remains theoretical despite the fact that it may help them become more aware of concerns like domestic violence, rape, and the same right to property, land, and credit as males. The consequences of institutional barriers are felt most strongly by these young people. As they reach the university level, women have had more time to mature and process their gender identity. They might serve as excellent guinea pigs for studies aimed at improving people's gender literacy. Women in higher education, however, are less likely to take electives that deal with gender problems and more likely to focus on their major. Even though 11.7 million American women were enrolled in higher education in 2014, there are less than 900 gender studies programs at the university level. It has been shown that (Korenman,

2014). Given the small scale of these efforts, it's probably reasonable to infer that less than 1% of college-aged women enrol in gender-related courses, reducing their opportunities to develop greater gender consciousness.

It's common for students to feel safe trying out novel concepts and sharpening their critical thinking skills in an academic setting. Sexual harassment of female pupils is unfortunately common in schools and classrooms in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia. Schools have been identified as sites of violence in large-scale surveys conducted in five Asian countries (International Center for Research on Women, & Plan International, 2015). Student reports indicate that both girls and boys engage in and perpetrate acts of emotional and physical violence against one another. Since students' reactions to violence are so often apathy and denial, the topic is seldom addressed in classrooms or at home. Sexual assault on college campuses is a serious issue, as shown by a national survey (DeKeseredy, & Kelly, 1993) in Canada and growing attention in the news today, much of which focuses on incidents involving romantic partners. Nevertheless, policymakers often only see the bright side of girls and young women's experiences in conventional educational settings (Warner, Stobenau, & Glinski, 2014). Time use data are not included in current female indicators of empowerment, as pointed out by Dijkstra and Hammer. This is despite the fact that the number of years women spend in school relative to men is one of three key indicators of women's empowerment in the Millennium Development Goals (United Nations, 2008). The other two indicators are the "share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector" and the "proportion of seats held by women in national parliament".

Gender equality programmes help all women, regardless of their economic standing. In nonformal education programmes for adult women in developing countries, focusing on the poor, literacy is frequently considered as the entrance to the development of gender awareness. In the words of UNESCO, "literacy is a paradigm for inclusion and empowerment" (Medel-Añonuevo, 2013). The goal of UNESCO's Literacy Initiative for Empowerment is to help both women and men (LIFE, running from 2006-2015). Literacy courses may be a useful strategy in lowering the disproportionate weight of caring and housework that falls on women, provided they offer a secure atmosphere for students to ask questions and express their ideas (Nabi, 2014; Eldred, 2013). NFE courses generally touch the intellectual, political, and psychological parts since they often promote feelings of self-esteem and teach the skills for engaging in public forums. Economic issues are seldom addressed in these programmes. Most groundbreaking non-formal education programmes are managed by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and typically by women leaders.

Programs that foster participants' sense of autonomy and group cohesion, as well as those that foster a climate of open discussion and critical reflection on gender social norms, are particularly empowering for women (Warner et al., 2014). Having access to the public sphere and taking part in group chats allows for the sharing of personal experiences and the development of social networks. Women who take any reading-related action tend to feel better about themselves (Stromquist, 2007, showing findings from Brazil). Increased social interaction among programme participants, community members, and leaders "may increase information sharing and cause major changes in behaviours and attitudes," the study said (Vakis et al., 2011). The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning commissioned Eldred (2013) to conduct an updated study of literacy programmes in nine countries (Nepal, Indonesia, India, Sierra Leone, Senegal, Brazil, Pakistan, Turkey, and Bolivia) (Medel-Añonuevo, 2013). Eldred defines empowerment as the "process of supporting people to become more aware of power relationships and systems and understands that just and fair balances of power contribute to more rewarding relationships" (p. 13). Eldred found that literacy experiences did have positive outcomes (although empowerment was diffusely assessed through various accounts) and that valuing women's experience, discussion in circles, and sex equality all contributed to empowerment. Data from 55 programmes tackling gender issues in 15 countries were analysed for Pathways of Women's Empowerment (León, M., 1997).), and the authors discovered that the ability to organise and learn from experience was a key predictor of women's empowerment. Also identified as "important in developing gender justice constituency" were women's organizations (p. 9). According to research conducted in the United Kingdom, women who take part in adult education programmes are more likely to leave an abusive partner (Schuller, Preston, Hammond, Brassett-Grundy, & Bynner, 2004).

The government still pays little respect to literacy's liberatory power. In a recent study conducted by UNESCO, only 18 out of 129 countries reported implementing an empowerment/autonomy approach in their literacy efforts after the introduction of adult education policy (Medel-Añonuevo, 2013). According to the same research, the focus on "particular policy purposes and goals" leads to "a functionalist worldview with a heavy emphasis on the work sector and employability" (Medel-Añonuevo, 2013). In fact, however, government backing for emancipation via literacy is extremely low, with adult literacy efforts often receiving less than 1% of national budgets (UNESCO, 2012). Governments and aid organizations have made improving literacy a top goal, but they need to see results quickly. The long-term advantages of literacy, however, have been shown in research conducted in a variety of countries. Women now have more power in the house and may negotiate with men, in-laws, and even strangers (Nabi, 2014).

Psychological Empowerment

It may appear that psychological agency doesn't need its own investigation since it cuts over many other factors, but this is far from the case. Women need to have self-confidence, self-esteem, and assertiveness if they are to advocate for change and feel comfortable enough to engage in public life. It is crucial for women to share these characteristics in order to challenge prevailing power relations. How can women acquire such moral fortitude? Only via working together on a project and seeing it through to a successful end, according to actual evidence, can they be formed. The significance of one's immediate surroundings in shaping one's mental fortitude is shown by this (Figure 5).

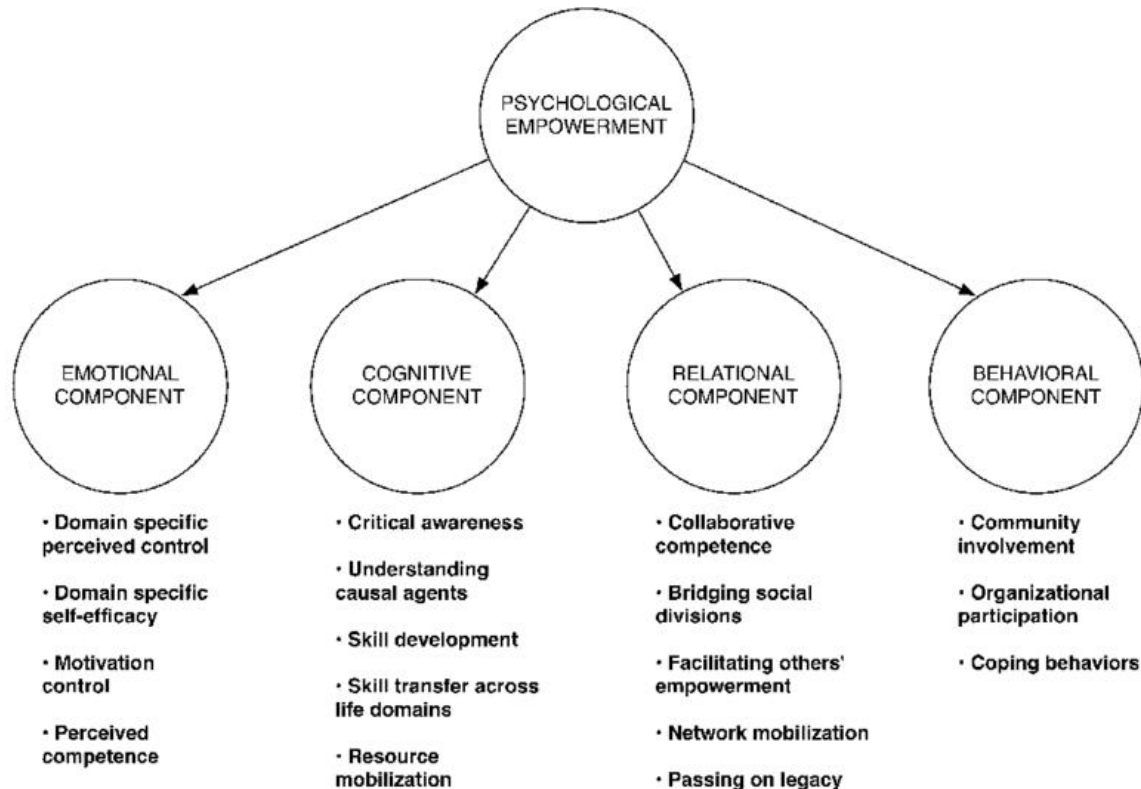


Figure 5. Psychological Empowerment

Social geographers who have studied the topic for a while have come to the conclusion that the level at which newly integrated social players may have the most influence is the local one. Because of the practical advantages of having events close to home, this is particularly true for women. Agendas at local events are also becoming more participatory (Cliché et al., 2013; Massolo, 2002). Women-led NGOs in the community will have a better chance to launch and thrive as a consequence of grassroots initiatives. Women's challenges may be articulated outside of partisan politics and administration thanks to the work of such organizations, which also provide invaluable learning experiences via NFE (Oxaal & Baden, 1997).

DISCUSSION

Consequently, empowering women is a multidimensional endeavour that requires action on several fronts to achieve meaningful and enduring results. It requires extensive planning and execution. Involvement from organizations with a proven history of promoting women's empowerment is crucial for this joint effort to result in concrete policy changes. Institutional change, as well as changes in everyday life and human behaviour, benefit greatly from organisational engagement (Connell, 2005; Ibrahim & Tiwari, 2014).

Notwithstanding their differences, women-led NGOs and feminist organizations are essential to empowerment initiatives and provide a counterbalance to inadequate official responses (Sen & Grown, 1987). Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are well-known for their work on both a global and a national/local level. On a local, national, or international basis, many individuals are struggling financially. Empowerment comes from a variety of places, and that's why there are so many different resources out there. Amartya Sen's beliefs on development as human freedom and the vital role of capabilities have contributed to the recognition of the

fundamental importance of agency. Yet he doesn't consider the possibility that society's collective agency emerges from the sum of its members' individual abilities (Parpart, Rai, & Staudt, 2003; Ibrahim, 2006).

As NGO employees are not democratically elected, many individuals think they have no authority to speak on behalf of the people they claim to represent. In response to this critique, Ballón and Valderrama (2004) (p. 22, quoting Chiriboga) suggest that representation may come from one of two sources: (1) a political mandate, or (2) a dedication to promoting and defending a specific public good. Legitimacy is gained for such representation because it speaks for those who cannot and because the organization's special characteristics help influence public policy, even if it is not earned via the democratic process. Of course, just as with every voting system, there is always a risk of misuse with any kind of representation. The second kind of representation is useful for underrepresented groups, and here is where women-led NGOs come in. Despite the vital role they play in advancing women's equality, IDAs only provide these groups with a small sum of money. Just US\$504 million (or 2.1% of US\$23,495 million) was contributed in favour of gender equality and women's empowerment in 2011. This is true even for donor countries that have historically funded women's organizations. The Netherlands, a major contributor to women's organizations, allocates just 10.5% of its budget to "gender equality and women's empowerment." (OECD, 2007). However, much of this aid is spent on low-budget, quickly-completed projects that do not allow for the development and consolidation of institutions, and this is especially true for countries in sub-Saharan Africa, which receives the lion's share of foreign aid (justly so since this is the region with the greatest need for help). Yet, the women's movement in the global South would not exist without assistance from elsewhere. When nations work together to address an issue, it can no longer be ignored or disregarded. An educator with years of experience in organising for change, Shor (1992) stresses the significance of civil rights movements in the struggle against oppression and for a more fair and democratic society.

Many campaigns have focused on education with explicit feminist aims. This article focuses on three of the most representative cases.

Efforts to Foster Empowerment in Women through Education

Several initiatives have been launched to improve the school environment and curriculum in the hopes of making female students feel more confident and comfortable. Women run and concentrate on education in 16 different African countries via the Forum for African Women Educationalists (Forum for African Women Educationalists, 2000), a regional African Organization. FAWE has long sponsored an after-school programme called Tuseme Clubs (Swahili for "Let's speak up"). Tuseme is an initiative that partners with schools to provide students with opportunities to develop their interpersonal and communicative abilities via activities like as seminars, festivals, dance, theatre, and the creation of a school newspaper. School-based action plans are developed in collaboration with programmed facilitators and teachers (FAWE, c. 2000). The "theatre for development" programme at FAWE is crucial because it gives students the opportunity to analyse community issues and then participate in a post-show debriefing in which the audience discusses the play's impact on them (Forum for African Women Educationalists, 2005) (p. 6). Tuseme clubs have been effective in educating young women about gender roles and protecting them from harmful cultural norms, but their expansion has been impeded by governments' unwillingness to support them.

There has been a rise in the number of successful non-formal education (NFE) programmes that aim to develop individual agency. An important intervention for empowering NFEs has been CARE's leadership model, which has been trialled in 28 countries since 2009. Individual agency (one's objectives, methods, abilities, attitudes, and achievements), institutional frameworks (rules and laws), and interpersonal interactions are the three pillars of this notion (power relations). The concept establishes a secure setting where girls may learn and practise leadership and decision-making abilities with the support of caring adults. Via after-school programmes and other community-based activities, CARE has tested its leadership approach in eight countries (Bangladesh, Egypt, Honduras, India, Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, and Yemen), reaching a total of 190,000 girls and 136,000 boys. Researchers in these eight countries compared the model to a control group and analysed self-reported data from girls after two years of project participation to determine the impact of the model on issues such as adolescent pregnancy and the prevalence of sexual abuse and rape among students and members of the local community. Women and men should have the same rights, and the proportion of girls who agree with this statement is far greater among those who took part. The girls' inclination for postponing marriage also changed (Mol, Kintz, & Janoch, forthcoming).

Another overview of empowerment programmes is provided by Warner et al. (2014), who conducted case studies of four major NFE projects in Egypt, Ethiopia, India, and Bangladesh. The programmes mostly focused on preventing young girls from getting married. These efforts took numerous forms, including programmes designed to improve girls' economic and sexual health, open up more channels of contact, and re-enroll them in school. In general, the workshops helped girls become more aware of the risks associated with early marriage and reduced

their likelihood of entering into such unions before the age of 18. The most promising tactics found in the studies were gaining knowledge, receiving instruction, and connecting with others (Stromquist, N. P. 1995, Stromquist, N. P. 2003).

The third NFE programme, the Tutorial Learning System (Sistema de Aprendizaje Tutorial, SAT) was pioneered in Colombia by the non-governmental organisation FUNDAEC. Some nations in Africa and South America have begun using the SAT. The SAT curriculum offers an alternative to the standard high school exit exam by placing a focus on critical thinking, class discussions, and debates, and addressing the issue of gender head-on (Murphy-Graham, 2012). Qualitative testing of ten women who had been attending SAT for at least three years found that they had become better at things like critical thinking and communicating with their partners. Women's independence was measured by factors such as when they started working or started their own businesses, or when they were able to successfully negotiate their marriages (Murphy-Graham, 2012).

The implementation of empowerment has clearly been one-sided, with a focus on the acquisition of emancipatory knowledge, often limited to influencing girls' choices and actions in opposition to child marriage. This teaching should not be minimised, but it is doubtful that the girls would be able to change the pattern once they become adults, get married, have children, etc. if they do not have access to the other components of empowerment.

CONCLUSION

This paper concluded that when compared to their male counterparts, female Chinese school leaders were more pessimistic about the progress towards gender parity in contemporary China. Despite this, many of our participants painted an optimistic picture of gender relations in Chinese schools, with many assuming they were working towards achieving gender parity for all of their pupils. Their expectations and perspectives run counter to much gloomier evidence, and they have helped us strengthen our theory that gender equality is conceptualised and modelled distinctively in China, such that it includes difference and division. Our male and female Chinese school leaders will hopefully continue to instil in the next generation of Chinese students a belief in and commitment to "gender equality with Chinese characteristics,"

A theory of social change predicated on the concept of empowerment may be used to work towards an emancipatory gender outcome. For this reason, social action necessitates taking into account four fundamental components of empowerment, dimensions which interact with one another and have synergistic outcomes. In this conception of social change known as emancipation, women play a pivotal role as protagonists. Cohesion among members of a group and the ability to take collective action are also crucial to achieving empowerment. Although recognising the importance of individual agency and group action, women's empowerment also pays attention to structural restrictions that operate as hurdles to the transformation of gender relations. Given the multifaceted nature of empowerment theory, governments and IDAs seldom promote cross-sectoral collaboration.

Education plays a crucial role in empowering women. Information that prepares women not just for the labour market but also for analysing and addressing their social surroundings is what women need, as has been argued elsewhere in this article. The revolutionary potential of formal education has not yet been fully used. Apart from the students' tender years, many constraints persist in redirecting education away from gender consciousness initiatives, particularly in the modern era, when academic success is narrowly linked to reading, mathematics, and science—and away from life skills, among which gender-sensitive learning and teaching. NFE has been shown to be more successful in training students to question and even subvert traditional gender norms. While NFE has the potential to greatly aid in the advancement of women's rights, it is currently underfunded. Knowledge is essential, but the economic, political, and psychological aspects of social life should not be ignored.

To boost women's emancipatory engagement, external aid is required. The efforts of women-led organizations at the grassroots, national, and transnational levels have greatly boosted people's individual and collective agency. These groups have paved the road for women to have access to education that gives them more agency and to collaborate in nontraditional settings beyond the home. Important non-governmental organizations should be led by women. Women's emancipation activity requires foreign assistance to take on meaningful and long-lasting gender action since national governments in undeveloped nations are reticent to offer support. Just by existing, global gender policies help raise consciousness about gender inequality and garner support from supporters willing to assist in funding its elimination.

From a feminist perspective, the value of knowledge lies in its ability to inspire people to take action. Gender-specific data and nurturing classrooms that encourage non-traditional gender roles are essential for making progress. Women's empowerment remains a promising theoretical premise that has not received concomitant

operationalization and support to reach its full range of possibilities, so there is a need to challenge its normative meaning and demand that it be taken seriously as a theory of change in gender relations.

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