

EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH DISTANCE LEARNING IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Development is a process of structural change in the economic, political, social and cultural domains. It starts with people as they are the primary and ultimate focus of all development. It empowers women through Distance Learning in India, historically explores the causes and reasons for long denial of formal education to women. In recent times, Distance Education has emerged as a boon to women of all ages to equip themselves intellectually through acquisition of knowledge, leading them to new radical methods of thinking, and alternative, lateral perspectives on existing information thus rendering them more autonomous and liberated.

It reviews aspects of Gender and distance learning, participatory trends of women in distance learning in India, barriers affecting womens advancement in academia, impact of distance learning on women learners, gender technology and distance learning, technologies for improving distance learning, limitations of distance education technologies, the Indian experience of distance learning. It also relates the success story of distance learning programmes for women run by the School of Distance Education of Mother Teresa Womens University Kodaikanal South India. It also outlines a few important issues for policy action to increase the participation of women in distance learning for their empowerment.

Development is a process of structural change in the economic, political, social and cultural domains. It starts with people, their education and their capabilities because people are the primary and ultimate focus of all development. The broader goal of development is to bring the entire population into the mainstream of the national development process, both as contributors and beneficiaries. Development is the development of an individual, each according to his or her potential and in this sense education is a crucial aspect of development. The concept of development and the role of educational systems (both formal and non-formal) are determined by the socio-political economic feature and cultural patterns of each nation.

'Education is no longer limited to either schooling, college, or the production of entrepreneurs, capable of increasing the gross national products, but rather aims at the development of human resources for a wide range of purposes' (Motilal Sharma).

Large increase in population coupled with a growing awareness of the benefits of education are leading governments to explore the possibility of using alternative means to provide education on a large scale, particularly as conventional educational methods are becoming increasingly expensive. One such alternative that countries in the region are considering is Distance Education.

Distance Education is a global and rapidly growing phenomenon which offers formal learning opportunities to people who would not otherwise have access to schooling or college education. Teachers and students are separated by physical distance and the

means by which they communicate range from basic print material and the use of postal services to highly sophisticated communication technologies.

The special characteristic of distance education is that it is endowed with high flexibility and can meet the demands of education for all and 'continuing education' which the conventional education system is unable to meet. Further, distance education takes education to places and people hitherto unreached, transcending social, economic and geographical equality and thereby opens a new vista in our striving towards breaking the barriers of 'opportunity and equity'. Through distance education it is easier to transport knowledge to people than transport people to the people of knowledge. Because of these special features of distance education, it benefits certain categories of people who for various reasons are unable to avail of the formal education system. These include persons without formal qualifications, persons belonging to different age groups, disadvantages groups, and employed persons. There are large percentages of women in all the above categories. Thus women as a category could really take advantage of the provision of distance education in a large measure. (Jaya Indiresan).