

Women Empowerment Process in South Korea and Sri Lanka

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### **Introduction**

The empowerment of women has become a significant part of discussion in the contemporary society. The process of empowering women aids in development of both the politics and the economy of a state. More specifically, women empowerment in social and political context points to methods concerning other trivialized genders. In other words, women empowerment refers to ensuring women's equal rights, making them confident enough so that they can claim their rights, and most importantly improving their legal, political, economic, and social strength of the women. A key way that empowers women economically is through land rights since it gives them the needed confidence to tackle gender inequalities. Most often, women are deprived off the opportunity to own a land by law merely on a gender purposes in the developing countries. Giving women an equal chance to purchase a piece of land gives them a bargaining power they sort of require so as to gain the capacities to state themselves in a number of aspects of their life. Those responsibilities that are often seen to be masculine or rather are in most cases allocated to men should also be given to men. Women need to be given an equal platform to compete favourably with their male counterparts. In actuality, women are more than capable to accomplish duties and responsibilities than are seen to belong to men. They can sometimes accomplish these activities way better than the men.

For states to build a stronger economy, achieve goals for sustainability and development that are agreed internationally, they need to empower women so that they can participate fully in economic building in all sectors. Also, empowering women not only improves their lives, but also those of their families, children, and the male. The private sector has been identified as one of the key areas that have put a lot of effort in empowering women and ensuring gender equality has been achieved. Current research demonstrates that

gender diversity improves performances in businesses. This further signals that common interest and self-interest can come together. Deliberate policies and intentional actions are required to ensure that the energies, talents, and skills of the women are incorporated into the supply chain management, factory floor, and the executive offices. With no doubt, it has been a burning issue internationally regarding ‘women equality with men’ and ‘women empowerment.’ The countries that have made major strides economically and democratically have consequently empowered women. This paper evaluates the women empowerment process between South Korea and Sri Lanka.

### **Literature Review**

There has been a growing trend in women empowerment in the political arena in the twenty first century. Traditionally, women have been underrepresented in the political arena since it has been a male-dominated field. This holds true for both Sri Lanka and South Korea as only a few women hold leadership positions in the political field. The case has been a little bit better in South Korea than in Sri Lanka. South Korea passed a constitution on 17<sup>th</sup> July, 1948 that upholds the rights of women and gives them an equal chance as their fellow men (Jones, 2016). In the South Korean National Assembly, the percentage of women representation in politics averaged 2.9 from 1948 to 2009 (Shin, 2015). This is in exemption of years 1973, 2000, and 2004 when the percentage of women in the National Assembly averaged 5 percent (Kim, 2015). There has been a noted increase in status and women empowerment in politics in South Korea. Women empowerment in the 16<sup>th</sup> National Assembly of 2000 stood at 5.9 percent while in the 17<sup>th</sup> National Assembly of 2004 stood at 13 percent (Shin, 2016; Kim 2015). This demonstrates a political willingness and a progressive women empowerment in South Korea. On the other hand, the gender ratio of Sri Lanka is favorably is over 51 percent (MacDonald, Wong & Sheldon, 2015). Similarly,

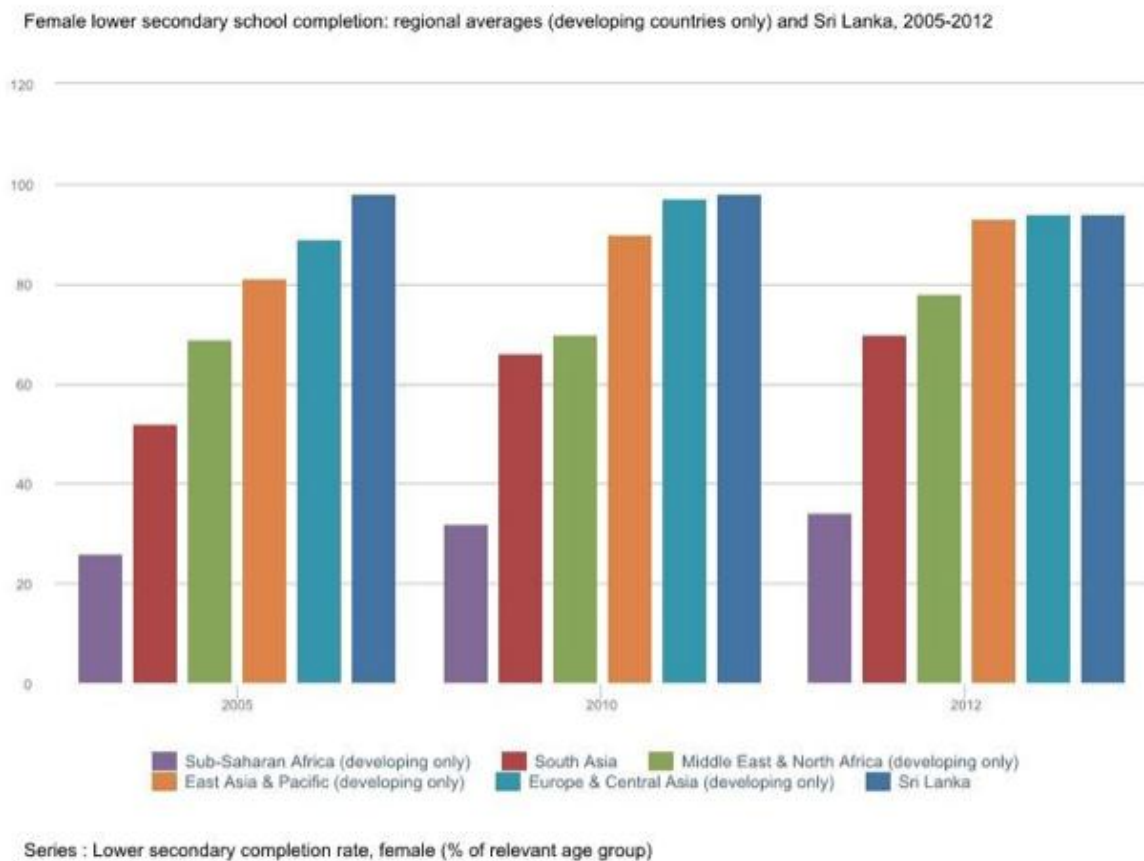
women are represented in all political positions in the country. Nevertheless, their presence remains below 5 percent in all sectors (Wickramasinghe, 2015). Violence and unfair practices in Sri Lanka has caused women and the marginalized groups in most parts of the country not to participate in the election process or are left out. Sri Lanka has the lowest percent in women representation in the whole of South Asian countries. Similarly, Sri Lanka's women representation is by way far much below the international average of 19.75 percent (Morley, & Crossouard, 2016). The country has measures in place to increase gender quotas in the legislature although the number of women representation still remains low.

Further, since South Korea's foundation in 1948, the country had not elected a woman president until in the year 2013 (Jones, 2016). In the course of South Korea history, the country had been greatly influenced by the Neo-Confucianism. The antique Confucianism gave men more respect than women. This made it difficult to thrive in politics. Confucianism points that being soft, chaste, obedient, non-intelligence, ignorance, and passiveness are all feminine virtues while men are dominant, intellectual, aggressive, active, and masculine. Over the past few decades, women have continued to take equally fight for political seats in South Korea. In 1993, three women were appointed as ministers while in 1993 two women made it to the cabinet minister portfolio (Paxton and Hughes, 2016). In addition, four women were appointed in the ministerial position. In 2013, South Korea elected the first female president, President Park Guen Hye (Ebrey, P. B., & Walthall, 2013; Shin, 2014). This demonstrates that the inauguration of the new constitution in South Korea acted as the turning point for the role of women in South Korea although it took a long time to implement. In Sri Lanka, the quota system has not been implemented effectively. The patriarchal system in Sri Lanka has made women become politically inactive. Over the past decades, women in Sri Lanka have held high political positions. Women were inspired by the United Nations International Women's Year in 1975 (Wickramasinghe, Maithree, and Chulani, 2014). This

led the country to having a woman Prime Minister, the first woman to hold the position in the world. Additionally, Sri Lanka has elected a female President, Chandrika Kumaranathunga. Although the country was under the leadership of women for over a decade, the quality of the women did not improve. According to Wickramasinghe, Maithree, and Chulani Kodikara. the percentage of elected women politicians in Sri Lanka is at 2 percent (2014). Additionally, the majority of the poorest population who are in the bottom strata of the society are the women. Women empowerment in South Korea has steadily grown than in Sri Lanka despite the fact that Sri Lanka has had more women in leadership than in South Korea.

Notably, the women labor workforce contributed significantly to the economic growth in South Korea. The increasing number of women professions in South Korea contributed greatly in the economic growth for the past three decades. The number of women contributing to the economic growth increased over time. In 1966, only 33 percent of girls among those who graduated in the elementary schools proceeded to the middle schools (Park, Behrman, & Choi, 2013). The comparable figures at the university were at 4 percent and 20 percent in high school during the same period. Conversely, comparable ratios reached at 99.5 percent for high school and 61.6 percent for the university (Park, Behrman, & Choi, 2013). Additionally, since the industrialization, economic participation of women in South Korea increased from 34.4 percent to 48.1 percent in 1965 and 1999 respectively (Park, Behrman, & Choi, 2013). In Sri Lanka, women contribute remarkably to her economy since a larger portion of women are involved in fields that contribute heavily to foreign exchange. Comparing Sri Lanka's female labor force with South Asian countries, the figures remain low in Sri Lanka than other the nations such as China and Bangladesh (Hancock, Georgiou, Carastathis, Adusei-Asante, & Bofo, 2016). Hancock et.al records that the rate of the female labor participation of women presently is at 35 percent while that of men is at 75 percent (2016). All girls are enrolled at the primary education level in Sri Lanka. Consequently, more

girls are enrolled in secondary schools than the boys while in the tertiary education, girls outnumber boys. Female literacy in Sri Lanka has been on the rise where in 1946 it stood at 42 percent in 2013 it was at 92 percent according to the Department of Census and Statistics (Gunawardena, 2016). The education of the female as a norm was attributed to the free education largely taught in vernacular. Despite excellent educational levels among women in Sri Lanka, they continue to face challenges in the workforce industry as women are not involved in decision-making and economic participation. Below is a chart indicating regional averages in female lower secondary school completion of Sri Lanka and other nations.



Source: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/education-plus-development/2015/09/29/whats-holding-sri-lankan-women-back-from-participating-in-the-labor-force/>

In 1975, the number of professional women in the managerial positions was at 2 percent in South Korea (Lee and Park, 2015). At the same time, 4 percent of the women

worked at the clerical positions. The numbers significantly increased to 12 percent of women employees working in the managerial positions and 16 percent worked as clerical officers in 1998 (Lee & Park, 2015). The number has progressively continued to increase with more women taking executive job positions in the workforce. This has been encouraged by the 1987 Equal Employment Act which protects female workers from discriminatory practices when it comes to promotion and/or hiring opportunities in the job market (Lee & Park, 2015). Through this, the Korean women are able to contribute significantly to the society in various fields such as the arts, education, law, medicine, and sports. The salary and employment benefits are similar with those of men with the same qualifications and at the same job position with women. On the other hand, women in Sri Lanka are involved in sectors such as the migrant, tea, and garments workers; critical sectors in the economy of the country. A third of the employed workforce in Sri Lanka is women. There have been indications that the number of women employment in Sri Lanka is changing. Gunawardena avers that the rate of female employment to that of men grew two times higher (2016). Comparing Sri Lanka and South Korea, there is a huge gap in women employment in the executive or the managerial positions. Most of the women in Sri Lanka have been employed in the informal sector. Therefore, there is a disparity between men's wages with those of women. The wages of women are nearly half of those of men. Looking at the country's wage bill, over 67 percent is paid out to the men. It is imperative that the state of Sri Lanka considers improving the rate of women employment in the executive positions as it demonstrates the equality between both genders: male and female. Also, the workforce gender gap remains high in Sri Lanka. Only 35 percent of the working population in Sri Lanka are women. More lucrative job positions in both public and private sector are dominated by men (Gunawardena, 2016).

### **Hypothesis**

The situation in South Korea in as far as women empowerment is better than in Sri Lanka. South Korea since 1948 has made major strides when it comes to the empowerment of women. Sri Lanka is slowly making steps in giving women positions both economically and politically. There are a number of ways in which Sri Lanka needs to do so as to improve women empowerment. First, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Community Based Organizations (CBOs) have been largely involved in empowering women. Democratic rights among women have been promoted by these organizations in the Southern Province of Sri Lanka in areas such as Hambantota, Galle, and Matara. One of the NGOs involved in women empowerment is the Saviya Development Group. Additionally, the media practitioners, private sectors, women self-help groups, and the Government functionaries promote democracy and women empowerment from the communities to the national level (Guneratne, Herath, & Sanderatne, 2015).

Secondly, women living in tea plantations are empowered economically by being taught entrepreneurial skills, financial literacy, and leadership (Gunatilaka, Wan, & Chatterjee, 2010). Street theatre is used to raise awareness and educate women so as to be economically stable. This addresses the social and cultural isolation for women living mostly in tea plantations. Women have no access to monthly budgeting, savings and long term planning which can help them achieve the financial goals of their families most importantly with the recent wage increases. Further, Sri Lanka has put in place policies to empower women and at the same time encourage gender equality. These policies include skills development, work-life balance, career advancement, and rewarding excellence. Reinforcing these links will help the country to eradicate poverty, grow their economy rapidly, and sustain their development (Oxaal, Z., & Baden, 2007; Duflo, 2012).

### **Research Design**



The preparation for conditions for gathering and exploration of data in a way that purposes to bring together significance to the research resolution with economy in technique is through statistical design. The research hypothesis is a predicative statement since it relates to a dependent variable that women empowerment in South Korea is better than in Sri Lanka. The information of the research for both countries was got from the scholarly and/or academic sources. In trying to reach the conclusion of the research on women empowerment that goes further than the immediate data, the unit of analysis to be used is inferential analysis (Creswell, 2013). Inferential analysis can be used in the simplest way possible when comparing the average performance of women empowerment in South Korea and Sri Lanka. The t-test for differences among binary groups was used to compare the average performance of South Korea and Sri Lanka on women empowerment using history analysis.

### **Empirical Results**

The empowerment of women in South Korea has greatly been influenced by the mechanisms of female education that enhance economic development and political involvement. The education system in Sri Lanka is also free hence women in the country have free access to education. Looking at the statistics, more girls acquire education in Sri Lanka than in the boys. The difference between South Korea and Sri Lanka in women leadership lies in the willingness to give women positions in politics and in the economy (Cho, McLean, Amornpipat, Chang, Hewapathirana, Horimoto & Hamzah, 2015). The democracy and plight of women in South Korea dates back in the last three decades. The country has made major strides in empowering women over these years. Also, the economic prosperity in South Korea is greatly attributed to women involvement. On the other hand, women in Sri Lanka are involved in economic sectors that are the back bone of the country's economy. The number of women employment is increasing in the country and the more

women are given an equal ground to compete with either politically or economically with their male colleagues, the more the country will make outstanding economic growth (Bartholomew, 2015).

Further, the research has proved that women are critical good governance, active civil society, and economic development for both the developing and developed countries. The most significant developmental force in the contemporary world is active participation of women in social, political, and economic sectors in the country (Athukorala, & Jayasuriya, 2013). Women have been identified as the active change agents in the community and the country. Therefore, countries should actively take part in protecting the voice of women politically, improve their education, and have more control over their resources.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, women empowerment process has for centuries been looked upon with contempt with a number of structures in the society looking down on women hence giving men an upper hand. Women can produce desirable results at the workplace and/or at the political arena if given equal chances with men. Similarly, women empowerment should be a collective agenda for everybody. In a case like Sri Lanka, the country had women who held high positions in politics and would have used their positions to empower women but did not. Women empowerment is, therefore, a collective responsibility and giving women an equal chance will help in thriving the economy of a country.

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