Tackling social and economic determinants of health through women’s empowerment: the SEWA case study

Abstract
The self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) has always placed emphasis on building a movement to improve and sustain the economic condition of women within the unorganized sector. SEWA recognizes the utility of the strength of collective action in individual and community development initiatives that ultimately improve health outcomes. As various strategies to improve the status of women in the unorganized sector showed limited success, it was realized in the early 1980s that structural changes in the distribution of wealth and power can provide women empowerment and the means to control their own lives. Empowerment of individuals also gives them the ability to influence those people and organizations that affect their lives and the lives of those they care about. The powerless gain power by coming together, and are thus collectively able to increase control over events that determine their lives. The SEWA case study on women's empowerment in matters related to social determinants of health clearly demonstrates that the marginalized are capable of tackling the recurring obstacles in their daily life. These determinants include, among others, financial resources, education, access to health services, housing and clean water. Addressing these social determinants of health provides an opportunity to examine the root causes of inequality and inequity among vulnerable groups such as women and children. Thus, empowerment of women leads to better health outcomes for families and entire communities.

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The concern about women’s economic and social empowerment has been a priority on the agenda of different countries. Moreover, promoting gender equality and empowering women. Women’s Role in Tackling Hunger. The Complexities of Work and Care in Korogocho slum, Nairobi, Kenya. Concern Worldwide Case Study October 2009. About image. Photo: Sarah Elliott/Concern Worldwide, 2009; Hellen Auko in a Nairobi slum. This case study illustrates how the changing roles of women – and notably their increased economic activity – impact decision making and food security at household level. You can buy that extra nutritious food for the child, e.g. fruit, which the husband never buys Informally employed mother, Korogocho. In addition to inadequate access to affordable foods, a poor health environment, and low coverage of health services, the survey showed poor childcare practices were an underlying cause of malnutrition in this area.