

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES FOR EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

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Abstract: In the process of poverty eradication and reducing gender discrimination, the governments have been implementing different schemes and programmes giving ways and means towards women development and empowerment. SHG movement, one among such programmes which has been proved fruitful in satisfying its goals. Then again, it is felt that the other schemes and programmes do have their conspicuous part in the process of women development and empowerment and which are being successfully implemented. In this regard the schemes and programmes intended for women development are briefed discusses in this paper.

INTRODUCTION

After attaining independence, the Government of India, initially decided to pave a path to bring about social change based on three key areas, viz., constitutional and legal reforms, planned development based on mixed economy and state support to social welfare activities. All these three policies are expected to build a democratic, just and wealthy society. All these three steps have their impact on the condition of women.

The constitution of India has given unique concentration to the needs of women to facilitate them to exercise their rights on equivalent footing with men and contribute in national development. It aims at making of an entirely innovative social order where, all citizens are given equivalent opportunities for growth and development and that no discrimination takes place on the basis of race, religion, caste, sex, etc.,

Planned development was considered to be the most resourceful way for solving the several problems of poverty which had caused various inequality and discriminations among huge numbers of people. The policy actions had serious ramifications for Indian women.

Framing of the five year plans was the first main step taken in the direction of welfare state: Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India and the pioneer of five year plans, stressed on welfare of women, children, scheduled cast and scheduled tribals in our nation.

NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE PLAN FOR WOMEN 1988 – 2000 A.D.

To improve up the programmes for women's development, a National

Perspective Plan for Women (1988–2000 A.D.) was carried out by the Department of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Human Resource Development.

THE NATIONAL POLICY FOR EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

The Government of India has affirmed 2001 as Women's Empowerment year. The national policy of empowerment of women has lay down certain clear-cut goals and objectives. The policy aims at up-liftmen, development and empowerment in socio-economic and politico-cultural characteristics, by creating in them awareness on various issues in relation of their empowerment.

The following are the specific objectives of National Policies particularly of rural areas on empowerment of women in India:

- Making an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to recognize their full potential
- The de-jure and de-facto enjoyments of all human rights and fundamental freedom by women on equal basis with men in all political, economic, social, science, cultural and civil areas
- Equal access to contribution and judgment making of women in social political and economic life of the country
- Equivalent access to women for health care, quality education at all levels, profession and vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security and public life etc.,
- Strengthening legal systems aimed at removal of all forms of discrimination against women
- Changing community attitudes and community practices by active participation and participation of both men and women
- Ministering a gender perception in the development process
- Elimination of discrimination and all varieties of violence against women and the girl child
- Building and increasing partnerships with civil society, particularly women's organizations

The National policy for empowerment of women envisaged introduction of a gender perspective in the budgeting process as an operational strategy. A few laws and legislations are enforced firmly for successful and proper implementation of this policy.

POLICY PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING:

It was merely in the Sixth Five Year Plan the development of women had been considered a separate matter. Until then they were provided welfare services all along with other weaker and handicapped sections. It was, for the first time that a chapter on women and development had been documented in the Sixth Plan. According to the document four strategies namely (1) Economic independence, (2) Educational advance, (3) Access to health care and family planning (4) Income supplementing of tribal women, were emphasized.

The Twelfth Five Year Plan strategy for women's development covers new thrust areas such as improving women's education, database, enumeration of women workers, and provision of supportive services, encouraging women's organizations and stepping up social security measures. The government has also initiated many

programmes for women. They are social welfare, nutrition service, supplement income generation, girls education, equal remuneration for equal work, hostels for working women and crèches for children, functional and legal literacy, family, promotion and strengthening of self-employment, review and streamlining laws concerning women etc.,

SCHEMES FOR WOMEN AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

The Ministry of women and child development, as the nodal agency for all matters relating to welfare, development and empowerment of women, has developed schemes and programmes for their advantage. These schemes are spread over a more extensive range, for example women's need for shelter, security, safety, legal aid, justice, information, maternal health, food, nutrition etc., as well as their requirement for economic sustenance through skill development, education and access to credit and marketing.

The schemes of the Ministry like Swashakti, Swayamsidha, STEP and Swawlamban enable economic empowerment. Working Women Hostels and Creches provide support services. Swadhar and Short Stay Homes give security and restoration to women in troublesome circumstances. The Ministry likewise bolsters autonomous bodies like National Commission, Central Social Welfare Board and Rashtriya Mahila Kosh which work for the welfare and development of women.

The following are the details pertaining to the above schemes intended for the development and empowerment of women.

SCHEMES FOR ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Swa-Shakti

The project jointly founded by IFAD, World Bank and the Government of India was dispatched in October, 1999 and reached a state of perfection on 30th June, 2005. The goal of the program was to bring out socio-economic development and empowerment of women through advancement of women SHGs, micro credit and income generating activities. The project was conceived as a Pilot Project implemented in 335 blocks of 57 districts in 9 states. The project established 17,647 SHGs covering about 2, 44,000 women. This was a Centrally Sponsored Project.

SWAYAMSIDDHA

This was an incorporated scheme for women empowerment through formation of Self Help Groups (SHGs) launched in February, 2001. The long haul goal of the programme was all encompassing empowerment of women through a supported procedure of mobilization and convergence of all the on going sectoral programmes by improving access of women to micro-credit, economic resources, etc. This is a centrally funded Scheme. The Scheme had been able to provide a forum for women empowerment, combined reflection and united action. The scheme was finished in March, 2007. The programme was executed in 650 blocks of the nation and 67971 women SHGs have been formed benefiting 9, 89,485 recipients. The scheme came to an end in March 2007.

It is proposed to take up Swayamsidha with a wider scope during the XI Plan and XII Plan. The schemes of Swayamsidha and Swashakti would be merged and implemented as Swayamsidha, Phase-II in the XI Plan. The next phase would be a country wide programme with larger coverage in States lagging behind on women

development indices. Convergence is the basic concept in Swayamsiddha. The lessons learnt in Swayamsiddha and Swa-Shakti would be incorporated in the universalized Swayamsiddha giving an integrated set of training inputs relating to social and economic empowerment, including skill development and training in traditional and non-traditional sectors.

SWAWLAMBAN PROGRAMME

Swawlamban Programme, beforehand known as NORAD/Women's Economic Programme, was launched in 1982-83 with support from the Norwegian Agency for Development Corporation (NORAD). NORAD support was profited till 1996 – 97 after which the programme is being run with Government of India funds. The objective of the programme is to give training and skills to women to facilitate them to gain employment or self employment on sustained basis. The target groups in the scheme are the poor and deprived women from weaker sections of the society such as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes etc. In order to guarantee more effective implementation and for better observing/assessment of the scheme, it has been transferred to the State governments from 1st April 2006 with the approval of Planning Commission.

SUPPORT TO TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMME (STEP)

This programme tries to give skills and new knowledge to poor and asset less women in the conventional sectors. Under this project, women recipients are organized into feasible and interconnected groups or cooperatives. A inclusive package of services such as health care, elementary education, crèche facility, market linkages, etc. are provided besides access to credit. Skill development is provided in ten conventional skills amongst women. This is a Central Scheme launched in 1987. The Ministry is at present getting the programme evaluated. Based on the results of the evaluation, the scheme is proposed to be revamped. Further, the possibilities of providing training and skills to women both in traditional and non-traditional sectors and integrating with Rashtriya Mahila Kosh for credit linkages are being considered.

SUPPORT SERVICES

Construction of Working Women Hostels

Under the scheme, budgetary support is given to NGOs, Co-operative Bodies and other agencies for construction/renting of building for Working Women Hostels with day care centre for children to give them protected and moderate settlement. This is a central scheme. The utilization of funds under the scheme has been unsatisfactory during the Tenth Plan period because NGOs are not capable to avail funds due to strict norms of funding and lack of suitable proposals from the organizations.

Creches

The Ministry runs a scheme of crèches that panders to the children of poor working women or ailing mothers. This gives an incredible help to women who are working as their children are being provided a safe environment when they are at work. The scheme is being covered in the Report of the Working Group on Child Development of this Ministry.

Relief, Protection and Rehabilitation to Women in Difficult Circumstances

SWADHAR

This scheme was launched in 2001-2002 for providing relief and rehabilitation to women in difficult circumstances. The main objectives of the scheme are as follows:

- To provide primary need of shelter, food, clothing and care to the marginalized women/girls living in difficult circumstances who are without any social and economic support
- To provide emotional support and counseling to women
- To rehabilitate destitute women socially and economically through education, awareness, skill up-gradation and personality development
- To arrange for specific clinical, legal and other support for women/girls in need of those interventions by linking and networking with other organizations in both Government and non-Government sectors on case to case basis
- To provide Help line or other facilities

Recipients secured under the scheme are widows deserted by their families, women detainees discharged from prison, women survivors of nature disaster, trafficked women, women victims of terrorist/extremist violence, mentally challenged and women with HIV/AIDS etc.

The root cause of most of problems being faced by women is lack of economic independence among women. Providing training and skills in various vocations to women living in shelter homes will facilitate them to obtain employment on sustained basis. Though the scheme in the current form provides for vocational training, no separate funds are being provided for the purpose. Organisations are expected to seek convergence of the benefits of schemes like STEP, Swawlamban etc. In the Plan, it is proposed to allocate funds for vocational training to the women as a part of the scheme. It is also proposed to revise the norms for food, medical expenses, clothing, rent etc. under the scheme.

Compensation to Rape Victims

The Hon'ble Supreme Court in Delhi Domestic Working Women's Forum Vs. Union of India and others writ petition (CRL) No. 362/93 had guided the National Commission for Women to develop a 'scheme so as to wipe out the tears of unfortunate victims of rape'.

IMPLEMENTATION OF PROTECTION FROM DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ACT AND OTHER ACTS OF THE MINISTRY

The protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act came into force on 26th October 2006:

- Set up the required infrastructure and requirements to make the Act effective
- Provide training, sensitization and capacity building of Protection Officers, Service Providers, members of the judiciary, police, medical professionals, counsellors, lawyers etc on the issue of domestic violence and the use of law to redress the same
- Monitoring the appointment of Protection Officers by regular feedback from the various states

- Setup an effective MIS to monitor its implementation
- The corporate sector will be encouraged to take up projects that provide assistance and support services to women in situations of domestic violence and for rehabilitation of victims of trafficking
- Give wide publicity to the Act

BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

The barriers to women's empowerment are manifested in various ways. Deep-rooted ideologies of gender bias and discrimination like the confinement of women to the private domestic realm, restrictions on their mobility, poor access to health services, nutrition, education and employment, and exclusion from the public and political sphere continue to daunt women across the country. Other parameters that reflect the status and position of women in society are work participation rates, sex ratio in the age group of 0–6 years and gender based violence which remain heavily skewed against women. New challenges such as increased intra-country migration, changing labour markets that require new skill sets and rapidly changing technologies have also emerged.

The access of women to key social services such as health and education is a critical determinant of the status of women and their ability to participate in making society a better place. Details of access in each dimension are discussed in the relevant chapters (see especially Chapters on Health and Education). While the overall picture is one of progress in many dimensions, large gaps still remain. India's Gender Inequality Index value of 0.617 in 2011 placing the country at 129 among 149 countries globally is reflective of the high gender inequality that is prevalent. The lower attainments of women in key human development indicators are indicative of the sharp disparities in opportunities available to women and men. An exceptionally worrying factor is the deteriorating child sex ratio. 23.12. Hence, the key elements for Gender Equity to be addressed in the Twelfth Plan can be clubbed under the following:

- ❖ Economic Empowerment
- ❖ Social and Physical Infrastructure
- ❖ Enabling Legislations
- ❖ Women's Participation in Governance
- ❖ Inclusiveness of all categories of vulnerable women
- ❖ Engendering National Policies/Programmes
- ❖ Mainstreaming gender through Gender Budgeting

CONCLUSION

The Government seeks to make the fulfillment of women's rights an inalienable condition to achievement of rapid and sustainable economic growth. According the highest priority to ending gender based inequities, discrimination and violence faced by girls and women is the prerequisite to the objective. Linking with the approach to Universal Health Care, converging the health, child care and education systems, ensuring a continuum of care and development, the Twelfth Plan strategy for inclusive development is unique. The Government reiterates that Nutrition is crucial for the fulfillment of human rights—especially those of the most vulnerable children, girls and women, locked in an inter-generational cycle of multiple deprivations.

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