



The Process of Empowering Women of India

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Abstract

This paper captures the process of empowering women in India, it explores the programs for women and tracks the empowerment process in India since the birth of the nation, and the SDGs targets the government seeks to address through the programs. The paper has in detailed discuss the evolution of the empowerment process under the five-year plans, the paradigm shift from subject of welfare to partners in development.

Keywords

Empowerment, development plans and women, National Mission for Empowerment of Women, Mahila Shakti Kendras.

Background

Indian women unlike in the Western world did not have to fight for legal and social rights, it was granted and guaranteed by the provisions of various articles under the constitution of India, at the time of birth of India as a nation. The constitution of India has ensured women's rights and privileges. Several provisions of the constitution, importantly, Article 14, 15, 15(3), 16, 39, 42 and 51 (A) (e) made sure to cover all the aspects of a woman's life. They received consideration in all the development plans and are central to India's growth story. Despite the guarantee of equality by the supreme law of the land, i.e. the constitution of India; women in India traditionally have not been accorded equal status to men.

With the evolution of India as a nation and economy, the status of women underwent change, from a subject for "Welfare Programs" to "Partners in Development". The paradigm shift is the result of global factors. India was affected by the world wide women's movement that culminated into the year 1975, being declared International Year of Women by the United Nations. As a signatory, to UN's International Year for Women, in 1975 Government of India recommitted itself with renewed energy for the development of women. The approach to women's development in India was through the development plans. The mapping of the development plans and policies and programs reveals the ever-evolving efforts at women's development and empowerment and is akin to Fred Riggs model of development administration theory. In the context of Indian women development and attempt to empowerment happened simultaneously.

Development Plans and Women

Development of women received attention of the Government right from the very First Plan (1951-56). However, women were treated as a subject of 'welfare' and clubbed together with the welfare of the disadvantaged groups like destitute, disabled, aged, etc. Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) identified



the problem of absence of any governmental machinery at most levels for welfare related activities and undertook to promote a number of welfare measures one of the measures was promotion of Mahila Mandals. Mahila Mandals were promoted as delivery mechanisms for essential services of education, health especially maternal and child health etc.both by the CSWB and the Community Development Program through the first and the second Five Year Plans.

The Second to Fifth Plans (1956-79) continued to reflect the very same welfare approach, besides giving priority to women's education, by formulating Report of the National Committee on Women's Education (1958-59). However, the planners, failed to address the major problems of poverty, illiteracy, non-enrollment, and drop out etc., and thus women continued to languish at the bottom of the family and society pyramid and stayed away from the mainstream. The government, took measures to improve women's health through schemes such as Maternal and child health program. This umbrella program envisioned to check the maternal mortality rates, infant mortality rates, malnourishment and morbidity.

Around the same time the second wave of feminism also challenged the women's development theory; and India was not untouched by the global winds of changes. These approaches were attacked for criticism in the report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (1974-75). The Committee pointed out that plans for development of agriculture, industry, fishery, livestock and other major sectors of the Indian economy contained no acknowledgement of the millions of women involved in these sectors for their livelihood.

The increasing investment on education, health and the opening of opportunities for public employment had benefited a small minority, widening the gap between this minority and the majority of women. Even amongst the privileged minority, the promise of gender equality was threatened by escalation of social practices like dowry, continued inequality in personal laws (including Hindu Law which had been 'reformed' after independence) non-enforcement of existing laws, which sought to offer some protection to women (e.g. labour laws, criminal law), and the 'invisibility' of women's needs, concerns and perspectives in the planning. On the other hand, the growing emphasis on population control, highlighted women's reproductive, rather than their productive roles, influencing 'populationist' approach to women's development needs.

It was only between 1977 and 1980 that some serious exercises in policy review were taken up. The most significant exercises were the Report of the Working Group on Employment of Women, 1977-78; Report of the Working Group on Development of Village Level Organizations of Rural Women, 1977-78, Report of the Working Group on Adult Education Programs for Women, 1977-78 and Report of the National Committee on the Role and Participation of Women in Agriculture and Rural Development, 1979-80. These exercises undeniably marked a watershed in conceptualizing basic problems and strategies for women's development in India.

In fact, the Indian agenda even got incorporated into the United Nations and mid-Decade Program of Action-through the immediacy of the Non-aligned Movement at the special Conference on Women and Development (Baghdad, 1979) and India's Membership of the Commission on the Status of Women (1978-80) as well as the Preparatory Committee for the Mid-Decade, Copenhagen Conference (1980) and Program of Action. The policy makers wholeheartedly recognized the need for greater participation of women in all the spheres of her public and personal life.



The government of India was put under pressure by national and international forums to act. The various policy review committees especially, the National Committee on the status of women in India, (GOI 1974), and the Blue Print of Action Points and the National Plan of Action for women (1976), forced the government to recognize women as “active participants in development”. The UN declaration of the period 1974-84 as the International decade of women, made the clamoring at home for women to be active participants, made the situation even better, acted a major influencer. The Non- Aligned Movement (NAM) conference on Women and Development in its report, titled "*Women Resources and Power*" contained many of the lessons of possible generation of employment, reduction of poverty, education, improvement of productivity and women's empowerment through the strategy of increased investment in collective organizations of poor rural women, building on their existing expertise and skills at the initial stage.

The Sixth Plan (1980-85) saw a shift from welfare to development. The developmental programs were directed to raising the economic and social status of women, including targeted schemes. Accordingly, the Sixth Plan adopted a multi-disciplinary approach with a special thrust on the three core sectors of health, education and employment. As a result, the chapter on women and development in the Sixth Plan resulted in the introduction of schemes specifically oriented to their needs and the incorporation of special components in various others. The government had also converted the Division for Women's Welfare and Development, till then a part of the Ministry of Social Welfare; into a full Department of Women and Child Development and transferred it to the Ministry of Human Resource Development in 1985.

The sixth plan, was a watershed plan for women farmers' as well. It rectified; the error made in the land reforms earlier. The hitherto reforms, did not consider the noteworthy role of women as farmers and did not give them joint ownership over distributed land. However, the sixth plan markedly first expressed the government's commitment to giving joint titles (*pattas*) to spouses in program involving the distribution of land.

The Seventh five-year plan further reiterated and stepped up efforts to meet women's needs in the areas of education, health, employment, industry, science and technology and welfare.

The National Education Policy 1986 marked occasion for gender advocacy. The continued efforts of women's organizations and women's studies groups and internal struggle within government – resulted in the incorporation of two paragraphs on Education for Women's Equality within the National Policy on Education. For the first time it carried the message that along with expanding women's access to all kinds of education, the system, with all its institutions, had to shoulder a major responsibility for genuine empowerment of women, by changing the social construction of gender. The reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions, marked another breakthrough in the history of women development and empowerment in India.

In the year 1988, the government launched two programs one Mahila Samkhya, in pursuance of the goals of the new Education Policy (1986) and the Programs of Action as a concrete program for the education and empowerment of women in rural areas, particularly of women from socially and economically marginalized groups. Second, the National Perspective Plan (NPP) for Women, the NPP wanted increase in women's participation and presence at decision-making levels – in local self-government bodies, state assemblies and Parliament; suggesting a 30 percent reservation at all these levels.



The Eighth plan (1992-1997) with human development as its major focus played a very important role in the development of women. It promised to ensure that benefits of development from different sectors do not by-pass women, implement special programs to complement the general development programs and to monitor the flow of benefits to women from other development sectors and enable women to function as equal partners and participants in the development process.

The Ninth Plan (1997-2002) declared the **Empowerment of Women** as one of the nine primary objectives of the plan and the transfer of control of social infrastructure in the public sphere to women's groups as a strategy of the Plan. The plan envisaged that every effort will be made to create an enabling environment where women can freely exercise their rights both within and outside home, as equal partners along with the man.

Organizing women into Self Help Groups marks the beginning of a major process of empowering women, the institutions thus developed, it was foreseen would provide a permanent forum for articulating their needs and contributing their perspectives to development.

The Tenth Plan (2002-2007), through a series of measures for women farmers ensured household food security and women's empowerment. The Eleventh Plan with objective of inclusive growth strategy for the first time in the history of Indian planning attempted to move beyond empowerment and recognize women as agents of sustained socio-economic growth and change. The Plan acknowledged women's agencies and tried to ensure that their needs, rights and contribution are reflected in every section of the plan document.

The vision of the Twelfth Plan is faster, sustainable and more inclusive growth. Inclusive growth is viewed as a growth process which is seen to be 'fair' by different socio-economic groups that constitute our society. It intensively worked towards ending of gender-based inequities, discrimination and all forms of violence against girls and women. This is fundamental to enabling women participate fully in the development process, and in fulfilling their social, economic, civil and political rights. This is to take us closer to SDGs, if not completely achieve them.

National Institute for Transforming India (NITI) replacing the Planning Commission, India has moved away from the planned economy. The vision document for 2017-22 titled 'Strategy for New India @75', is an outcome of 2018 economic survey. Under the strategy, "gender" are listed objectives, for women's development and, include i) To create an enabling environment, sans institutional and structural barriers; and ii) To enhance the female labour force participation rate to at least 30 per cent by 2022-23.

The Ministry of Women and Child Development, also implements a few innovative schemes besides formulating policies and programs; enacts/amends legislations affecting women and co-ordinates the efforts of both governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to raise the overall status of women on par with that of men.

The means to empower the women, under the various schemes of the Ministry has been primarily through Self-Help Groups (SHGs). The SHGs be it Indira Mahila Yojna launched in 1995 or its recast Syamsidha (2001) or the redesigned avatar of National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW) into Mahila Shakti Kendra, are pivotal to empowering strategies. The huge numbers of SHGs in India



are indicative of the prominence the collective is accorded in the government's scheme of empowerment, especially the economic empowerment of women in India.

Women's Empowerment Programs in India

A. Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA)

The inadequacies of the IRDP, especially delay in reaching or not reaching of assistance to women soon came to fore. The government was steadfast on its commitment of women empowerment and development. It initiated the “**Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas**” (DWCRA) scheme in 1982. The scheme received support from the central and state governments and the UNICEF.

The program started with an objective to raise income level of the rural women of poor households so as to enable their organized participation in social development towards economic self-reliance to improve women's access to basic services of Health, Education, Sanitation, Child care and Nutrition etc., through group formation. The DWCRA, a pilot project is considered to be one of the most successful programs aimed at women's economic empowerment by governments in several Indian States. Although the DWCRA scheme was not entirely successful, it helped in the initiation of several other programs through village level women's groups (Ramaswamy, 1996).

More importantly, the DWCRA Program was aimed at poor women in rural areas accessing credit facilities from institutions like banks through bank linkages facilitated by government functionaries along with access and information about other development programs. DWCRA was merged with SGSY.

B. Women Development Program (WDP)

In 1984, the government of Rajasthan initiated a unique program “**Women Development Program**” (WDP). The program, a consortium of the government, voluntary groups and research institutions aimed at strengthening women's organizations and their involvement in development processes at the grass roots.

The WDP, set up by the government of Rajasthan is a response to non-deliverance of hitherto development programs and the attempts to channel resources to women, to change their status for better. *“It also took note of the fact that men had been entrusted with the responsibility for women's development in the family, government and society far too long”* (Dighe and Jain, 1989). Women empowerment ‘or’ development was defined as bringing about a change in women's self – image through a collective process at the grass roots level; as providing them a space of their own and greater control over the conditions that determine their life.

The WDP was based on the premise that if women's empowerment had to be achieved speedily and on a large scale, State patronage and legitimacy were needed (Bhaiya et al, 1994). The evaluation of the program, brought to the fore the need for organizational strategies to empower women based on an understanding of the *“Specific Social Context in which women find themselves”*. *“If it were not for their specific efforts, the riddle of resources never reaching needy women would not have been resolved at all”* (Jain et al, 1986).



C. The MahilaSamakhyaProgram(MS)

The outcome of the WDP encouraged, the Government of India's MoHRD's department of education to roll out another innovative program, "MahilaSamakhya". The program initiated in 1989, had a defined plan i.e. "Empowerment of Women", although inspired by WDP, this program was different from it in both content and structure.

The MS program initially rolled out in 10 districts of the three states namely Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka and Gujarat and later scaled to 126districtsin seven states namely, Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Chattisgarh, Jharkhand, Kerala and Uttarakhand. The MS program was designed to be a decentralized experiment, and body that would evolve as it grows, in that terms MS program was unstructured and open, without any targets or time frames.

The MS program was envisaged would create demand through various Information, Education and Communication (IEC) activities and thus put pressure on the supply side i.e. the service provider be it education, health, gender specific programs. The MS program was implemented in a campaign mode to have a wider reach and impact. The program campaign was led by numerous women's groups with differentideological leanings around issues that affect their lives. The wide range of issues included a) equal employment opportunities; b) equal wages for same and equal work; c) right to resources; d)prevention against and right to raise voice against domestic violence; e) Women's right to reproductive choices; f) right to safe environment; and g) rights to participate in decision making and role in electoral politics.The campaigns led by several autonomous women's groups and aspart of larger mass-based movements challenged the inadequacy and injustice ofdevelopment processes for not addressing women's realities and needs while alsochallenging the development paradigm of the State.

D.The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA)

The acronym SEWA literally means Service. The group since its formation in 1972, is serving women as an organization and as a movement. SEWA emerged in response tothe expressed needs of women workers in the unorganized sector who had largely been uncouncted, undercounted and hidden or invisible by male dominated trade union movements. SEWA adopted the term" Self-Employed Workers" tocounter the labels of 'unorganized' 'informal' 'unprotected' or 'marginal' that wereapplied to a large section of the workforce, constituted by women.Over the years, SEWA the organization has become a movement. A movement synonymous with the empowerment of women, a movement enhanced by its being a sangam or confluence of three movements: the labor movement, the cooperative movement and the women's movement. But it is also a movement of self-employed workers: their own, home-grown movement with women as the leaders¹.

Through their own movement women become strong and visible. Their tremendous economic and social contributions are recognized with globalization, liberalization and other economic changes.

¹ <http://www.sewa.org> accessed on April 25,2020



E. The other empowerment programs and other ministries' program to empower women

Training of Rural Youth for Self-Employment (TRYSEM)

A centrally sponsored scheme Training of Rural Youth for Self-Employment' - (TRYSEM) was launched by the Government of India by the Department of Rural Development on 15th August 1979, to provide training facilities and create self-employment among rural unemployed youths. It was a component of IRDP. It was later merged under umbrella scheme SGSY.

Supply of Improved Tools for Rural Artisans (SITRA)

Started in July 1992, the scheme was introduced to modernize and improve the efficiency and productivity of the poor rural artisans. Under the scheme, 40 percent of the beneficiaries were women.

F. Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY)

The *Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana* (SGSY) of the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD), was started with effect from 1st April, 1999. The scheme considered a holistic one covered all the aspects of self-employment such as organization of the poor into Self Help Groups, training, credit, technology, infrastructure and marketing. SGSY replaced IRDP, TRYSEM, DWCRS, SITRA, Ganga Kalyan Yojana and Million Wells Scheme etc.

The objective of SGSY was to provide sustainable income to the poorest of the poor people living in the rural areas of the country and bring assisted families above the poverty line within three years by providing them income generating assets through a mix of bank credit and Government subsidy.

The "Swarozgaris" as the beneficiaries were addressed under the scheme, had to be from the identified vulnerable section i.e. SC/ST 50 percent, Women 40 percent and the disabled 3 percent of those assisted.²

SGSY implementation 1999 to 2009 brought to focus shortcomings like uneven mobilization of rural poor and formation of SHGs across the States, insufficient capacity building of beneficiaries, low credit mobilization and lack of professionals to implement the program. On the other hand, the experience amply validated the need for the poor to be organized into SHGs and SHG federations as a pre-requisite for poverty reduction and the social and economic empowerment of rural poor. Accordingly, SGSY was restructured, based largely on the recommendations of the Radhakrishna Committee (IRMA, 2017).

G. National Rural Livelihood Mission

The GoI accepted the recommendation of the Radhakrishna Committee and restructured the SGSY into National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) in FY 2010–2011 to provide a sharper and greater focus as well as momentum for poverty elimination. The years 2011–2012 and 2012–2013 were the transition years as both SGSY and NRLM were implemented; complete transition of SGSY to NRLM took place with effect from 1st April, 2013. The SGSY also aimed to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) by 2015. The framework for implementation for DAY-NRLM was approved by the Ministry on 9th December, 2010. The Mission was formally launched on 3rd June, 2011. In November 2015, the program was renamed *Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihoods Mission* (DAY-NRLM).

² SGSY Guidelines



NRLM implementation is in a Mission Mode. This enables (a) shift from the present allocation based strategy to a **demand driven strategy** enabling the states to formulate their own livelihoods-based poverty reduction action plans, (b) focus on targets, outcomes and time bound delivery, (c) continuous capacity building, imparting requisite skills and creating linkages with livelihoods opportunities for the poor, including those emerging in the organized sector, and (d) monitoring against targets of poverty outcomes. As NRLM follows a demand driven strategy, the States have the **flexibility to develop their livelihoods-based perspective plans and annual action plans for poverty reduction.**

The Ministry of Women and Child Development

The broad mandate of the Ministry of Women and Child Development is to have a holistic development of women and children. The ministry's mission is twofold³ 1. to promote safety, social and economic empowerment women through cross-cutting policies and programs, mainstreaming gender concerns, creating awareness about their rights and facilitating institutional and legislative support for enabling them realize their human rights and develop to their full potential; 2 Ensuring development, care and protection of children through cross-cutting policies and programs, spreading awareness about their rights and facilitating access to learning, nutrition, institutional and legislative support for enabling them to grow and develop to their full potential.

The ministry envisions empowered woman living with dignity and contributing as equal partners in development in an environment free from violence and discrimination. And, wellnurtured children with full opportunities for growth and development in a safe and protective environment.

The ministry acting as a nodal ministry, promotes inter-ministerial and inter- sectoral convergence to create gender equitable and child centered legislation, policies and programs. All these programs play a supplementary and complementary role to the other general developmental programs in the sectors of health, education, rural development etc. All these efforts are directed to ensure that a woman is empowered (legal, political, economic and social) and thus become equal partners in national development along with men.

The working group on women's agency and empowerment⁴ advocated a shift from mere 'income' poverty of women to the adoption of a 'multi-dimensional' approach to poverty and wellbeing. The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) complements the income poverty measures by reflecting all the other deprivations with respect to education, health and living standard that a poor person simultaneously faces. It assesses poverty at the individual level, with poor persons being those who face multiple deprivations, and the extent of their poverty being measured by the range of their deprivations.

The Twelfth Plan worked towards making a transition from viewing women as 'victims' of poverty to empowering them to change the contexts in which they live. And redefined poverty as not only lack of material resources but also lack of power and choice. This shift in definition of poverty and empowerment contrasts the hither to narrow view which identified development with growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), rise in personal incomes, industrialization and technological advancement.

The last of the five years plans, the 12th Plan (2012-2017) emphasized on the need for national programsto move beyond addressing income poverty and include an expanded response so that the income generated

³ <https://wcd.nic.in/about-us/about-ministry> Website accessed on December 15, 2019.

⁴ XII five-year plan Report of the working group on Women's Agency and Empowerment, MWCD, Govt. of India.



is used to create capacities that enhance freedoms and choices the thrust areas under the plan, that include i) Economic Empowerment; ii) Social Empowerment; iii) Gender Based Violence; iv) Women in Governance; v) Focus on vulnerable women; vi) Gender Response Budgeting; and lastly vii) institutional arrangements.

Economic Empowerment: The working group acknowledged economic independence as the vital feature to improve women's position within the family and society, it consequently laid emphasis on increasing women's access to and control over resources. It includes increasing their work force participation but more importantly, improving the quality of women's work and ensuring their upward mobility on the economic ladder.

Social Empowerment: The group looked at social empowerment from holistic angle and encompassed all the factors important for the wellbeing of women that impact their lives i.e. health, education, housing, drinking water, sanitation and energy.

Gender Based Violence: To arrest gender-based violence and discrimination against women, the working group highlighted the women's right to dignity, equality, freedom and bodily integrity. The five-year period starting 2012-2017 worked to provide a safe and protective environment to women both in the public and private arena.

Women in Governance: The group agreed the need to go beyond affirmative action in terms of reservation for ensuring women's political representation for promoting women's leadership and their participation in governance.

Focus on Vulnerable Women: The diversity of women's situations and the deep-rooted socio-cultural norms and practices make certain categories of women particularly vulnerable to discrimination and violence. The working group acknowledged the needs of specially disadvantaged groups such as Dalit, Tribal, and Women Living with HIV and AIDS and migrant women, therefore, the stress on the measures and programs to address the issues faced by them.

Gender Response Budgeting: Gender Responsive Budgeting or Gender Budgeting as it is more commonly known, is a means of ensuring that public resources are allocated in an equitable way so that the most pressing needs of specific gender groups are satisfied. The group agrees, unless an affirmative action is taken, the unequal economic and social status of women may be perpetuated.

Institutional Arrangements: Stressed on the need to strengthen the National Women's Machinery for achieving women's empowerment. This includes the MoWCD as the nodal Ministry and its attached and autonomous organizations, National Commission for Women (NCW), Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK) and operationalizing the National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW). Working group envisaged a larger role for the NMEW, to provide a strong impetus for reform by catalyzing the existing system, ensuring better coordination and convergence of all development programs impacting women in close collaboration with grassroot structures and enabling participatory approaches and processes.

The National Mission for Empowerment of Women

The National Missions for Empowerment of Women or Poorna Shakti Kendras (PSK) was operationalized in 2011-12 for holistic empowerment of women. The NMEW focused on convergence of the efforts through inter-sectoral coordination amongst different ministries and programs, with the Ministry of



Women and Child Development (MWCD) acting as the nodal agency. Under the 12th plan period it functioned as sub scheme of the umbrella Scheme for Protection and Development of Women.

It is envisioned NMEW will achieve gender equality, and gender justice and holistic development of women through inter-sectoral convergence of programs relating to women, forging synergy between various stakeholders and creating an enabling environment conducive to social change. The all-inclusivemodel developed for empowerment of women covered all the facets namely legal, political, economic and social and within these facets all the programs for gender by various ministries were brought together. The National Mission for Empowerment of Women Scheme, has been brought under the Mahila Shakti Kendra since 2017-18.

Programs for Empowerment: The Ministry of Women and Child Development

The Ministry of Women and Child Development has several programs for women's empowerment. Women's safety and security remains central to the empowerment and all other schemes revolving around it. These programs and schemes cross cut and empower women on primarily three fronts namely safety/ gender justice, social and economic empowerment. There are several schemes for safety, and which cross cut both social and economic empowerment, with stand-alone social and economic empowerment programs⁵

Gender Justice Programs⁶

BetiBachoBetiPadaho: The program was launched in 2015 to arrest the trend of decline of Child Sex Ratio (CSR) and uplift women by ensuring protection and survival of girl child at birth. This program cuts across gender justice and social empowerment. This scheme focuses on celebrating the birth of a girl child and being proud of them just as we are about our boys. This social campaign creates awareness and encouragement in 100 identified districts with alarmingly low sex ratio.

One Stop Centre: In 2013-2014, the Ministry of Finance set up 'Nirbhaya Fund' the scheme One Stop Centre (OSC). The scheme was started in 2015 as per retired Justice Usha Mehra Commission's recommendation. The one stop centre support women affected by violence,⁷ in private and public spaces, within the family, community and at the workplace. Women facing physical, sexual, emotional,

⁵ As listed on the MWCD website <https://wcd.nic.in/schemes-listing/2405> accessed on December 15, 2019.

⁶ Over two decades ago India had ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), thereby committing to incorporate the principle of equality of men and women within its legal system, abolish all discriminatory laws and adopt those laws which prohibit discrimination against women. Since then, changes have been made in the law to prevent violence and create a system which rehabilitates women affected by violence and ensures their access to a violence free life. The Article 1 of UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence 1993 provides a definition of gender-based abuse, calling it "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life"



psychological and economic abuse, irrespective of age, class, caste, education status, marital status, race and culture will be facilitated with support and redressal.

Women Help Line: The scheme unveiled in 2016 is integrated with OSCs. The aim is to provide integrated support and assistance to women affected by violence, both in private and public spaces under one roof. Women affected by violence and in need of redressal services will be referred to OSC through WHL. Under the scheme a woman in distress can seek for help by dialing 181, the 24 by 7 toll free number from her post/pre-paid mobile or landline services through any public or private network i.e. GSM, CDMA, 3G, and 4G etc.

SwadharGerh: The scheme caters to primary needs of women in difficult circumstances. This scheme is an extension of Short Stay home Scheme (1969) for women and girls introduced as a social defense mechanism for destitute women left homeless due to family discord, crime, violence, mental stress, social ostracism or are being forced into prostitution and are in moral danger. A new scheme “**SWADHAR**” with similar objective was launched in 2001 by the Department of Women and Child Development. The success of SWADHAR propelled the Government to launch a new scheme called “**SWADHAR GREH**” in 2015.

Ujjawala: The scheme in effect from start of the financial year in 2016 visualizes a holistic system for Prevention of Trafficking and Rescue, Rehabilitation and Re-Integration of Victims of Trafficking for Commercial Sexual Exploitation. The objectives of the scheme include; i) to prevent trafficking of women and children for commercial sexual exploitation through social mobilization and involvement of local communities, awareness generation programs, generate public discourse through workshops/seminars and such events and any other innovative activity; ii) to facilitate rescue of victims from the place of their exploitation and place them in safe custody; iii) to provide rehabilitation services both immediate and long-term to the victims by providing basic amenities/needs such as shelter, food, clothing, medical treatment including counselling, legal aid and guidance and vocational training; iv) to facilitate reintegration of the victims into the family and society at large; and v) to facilitate repatriation of cross-border victims to their country of origin.

Working Women Hostel : The Government of India being concerned about the difficulties faced by such working women, introduced a scheme in 1972-73 of grant-in-aid for construction of new/ expansion of existing buildings for providing hostel facilities to working women in cities, smaller towns and also in rural areas where employment opportunities for women exist..

Social Empowerment Programs

Nari Shakti Puraskar: To commemorate and acknowledge the achievement of Women, the MoWCD since 2015, has institutionalized “**Nari Shakti Puraskar**”. The awards or the puraskars are given to eminent women and institutions in recognition of their service towards the cause of women empowerment. On International Women's Day i.e. March 8th, the ministry gives away 20 awards. The awards are given in two categories i) Institutional; and ii) Individual.

Economic Empowerment Programs

Support for Training and Employment Program (STEP): The STEP program was started in 1986-87. Under the scheme poor and marginalized women are provided training in traditional trades in the informal sectors. The program strives to build upon the traditional knowledge of women and convert it into sustainable livelihood capacitation.



Mahila E- Haat: The Ministry of Women & Child Development launched “Mahila E-Haat” a bilingual portal in March, 2016. This is a unique direct online marketing platform leveraging technology for supporting women entrepreneurs/SHGs/ NGOs for showcasing the products / services which are made/manufactured/ undertaken by them. It is an initiative for meeting aspirations and needs of women.

Mahila Shakti Kendras : The Holistic Empowerment Program

Mahila Shakti Kendras rolled out in 2017, post declaration by the then finance minister in his budget speech in Parliament. Therein the finance minister said “*Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas* begins with girl child and women. Mahila Shakti Kendra (MSK) will be set up at village level with an allocation of 500 crores in 14 lakhs ICDS Anaganwadi Centres.” Outlining the aim of the MSK, minister further said, “This will provide one stop convergent support services for empowering rural women with opportunities for skill development, employment, digital literacy, health and nutrition”⁸.

This is a sub- scheme under the umbrella scheme Pradhan Mantri Mahila Shashaktikaran Yojana (PMMSY). The hitherto national mission for empowerment of women is effectively merged with Mahila Shakti Kendra scheme to create an environment in which women realize their full potential, convergent support is proposed for equal access to health care, quality and digital library at Gram Panchayats level. The scheme aims to strengthen the conceptual and programmatic women centric schemes/ programs implemented by MoWCD and other ministries.

Appreciating that women empowerment is multi-dimensional, the MSK scheme therefore seeks to provide the services that will build upon by leveraging available resources of variety of schemes/programs of the government at the District/block level. The primary function of the scheme is to create awareness or demand generation for the various women centric programs under the various ministries, it is based on the belief, and demand generation would lead to seeking of services through appropriate training and capacity building.

The districts cover under MSK program are the aspirational districts as identified by NITI Aayog with most backward blocks in the country. In all by the financial year 2019-2020 115 districts and 920 blocks of the country would have been implemented MSK.

Conclusion

The empowerment programs for women in India has evolved over the years and during the course it has learnt and imbibed from various events within the country and globally. As enshrined in the constitution, the national government sets the agenda, and states take it up from their and adapt it to suit their respective socio-cultural and economic milieu. As of now the empowerment program of the GoI are aligned to the SDGs and the gender component under the following SDGs, i.e. SDG -5 (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls) and the nine targets; SDG -2 (Zero hunger) target 2 and 3; SDG-3 (Good Health and Wellbeing) target 1-4, 7 and 8; SDG-4 (Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all) target 1,2 and 3; SDG-8 (Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work

⁸ Excerpts from Mr. Arun Jaitley, Finance Minister Budget speech in Parliament, 2017.



for all) target 5,7 and 8; and SDG 10 (Reduce inequality within and among countries) target 1,2 3 and 4. The programs it is envisaged would take India closer to SDGs, if not completely achieve them.

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