

Measures taken by the government for gender equality

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Abstract

Social inequalities between men and women exist in all known societies. However nature and extent of these inequalities are not uniform. They differ from one society to another, generally these inequalities are more pervasive in patriarchal than matriarchal societies. Superior-inferior or higher-lower social status of men and women does not merely prevail in fact but also exist in design. Women are believed to be unintelligent and weak who are always dependent upon men for protection and guidance. Inequalities are most obvious in: health and education, economic development, violence against women, participation in public life and policymaking and social attitudes and gender stereotyping. Health discrimination against women in India starts early and is evident in the skewed sex ratio of 933 women to 1,000 men (world average: 990:1,000). Maternal mortality in India is the second highest in the world and close to 125,000 women die due to pregnancy and pregnancy-related illnesses every year. In rural areas, 60% of girls are married before the age of 18, and 60% of married girls bear children before they are 19. Almost one-third of babies are born with low birth weight because of poverty, early marriage, malnutrition and lack of healthcare during pregnancy. In the education sector, the inequalities observed are: Around 245 million Indian women cannot read or write and they form the world's largest number of unlettered women. Female literacy is 54.16, and there are wide disparities within states. Enrolment and retention of girls in education is poor and the average years of schooling for girls is only 1.2 years as against 3.5 years for boys. A look at the economic development sector indicates that, official data does not reflect the amount of work that women actually do to enable their families to survive, collecting fuel, fodder or water, keeping poultry, working as unpaid labour on family farms.

Keywords: gender equality, health and education, economic development, violence against women, participation in public life

Introduction

To raise the status of women and for the welfare of women numerous schemes, policies and programmes are implemented by the Government of India. After attaining independence, the Government of India, initially decided to pave a path to bring about social change based on three major 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 create a democratic, just and prosperous society. All these three steps have their impact on the status of women. The constitution of India has given special attention to the needs of women to enable them to exercise their rights on equal footing with men and participate in national development. It aims at creation of an entirely new social order where, all citizens are given equal 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 efficient way for solving the numerous problems of gender equality. The Ministry of Women and Child Development is administering following schemes for gender equality:

National Policy for Empowerment of Women

- In 2001, it was formulated as the blueprint for the future, with the express goal of bringing about the advancement, development and empowerment of women.
- It laid down detailed prescriptions to address discrimination against women, strengthen legal systems, provide better health care access, equal opportunities for women's participation in decision making and mainstreaming gender concerns in development process etc.

Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojna (IGMSY)

- A conditional maternity benefit scheme.
- Cash incentive up from 4K to 6K to pregnant and lactating mothers aiming partly compensate them for wage-loss during childbirth and childcare and also provide conditions for ensuring safe delivery and promote good nutrition and feeding practices for infants and young children.
- Centrally sponsored scheme under which financial assistance is provided as grant-in-aid to the state Government.
- Introduced in 2010 under the Ministry of women and child development.
- All pregnant women of 19 years of age and above are eligible for the benefits under the scheme for the first two live births. However, women who are entitled to pay maternity leave are not eligible for the benefits under this scheme.
- The anganwadi workers play a vital role in identifying the beneficiaries to receive incentives under the scheme.

Dhanalakshmi Scheme

- A scheme for conditional cash transfer for the girl child.
- The scheme provides for cash transfer to the family of a girl child on fulfilling certain conditionality relating to registration of birth, immunization, enrolment and retention in school till class VIII.
- An insurance coverage if the girl remains unmarried till the age of 18.

Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girl (RGSEAG)

- Scheme envisages health and Nutrition Support. Besides

imparting health and nutrition support its imparting life and vocational skills and counseling to out of school girls (11-18years)

- Introduced in 2010.
- Special focus is on more than 25,000 girl children in the tribal areas who are living in sub-human conditions.
- Services are being provided under the scheme:
 - a) Nutrition provision (600 calories, 18-20 grams of protein and micro-nutrients for 300 days)
 - b) Health check-up and referral services.
 - c) Education in nutrition and health.
 - d) Counseling and guidance on family welfare, adolescent reproductive and sexual health, childcare practices and home management.
 - e) Education in life-skills and on accessing public services.
 - f) Vocational training for girls aged 16 and above under National Skill Development Programme.

National Mission for Empowerment for Women (NMEW)

- Launched on International women's day in 2010 for holistic empowerment of women through inter sector convergence of programmes, state resource center for women set up in 29 states and UTs.
- It has a mandate to achieve inter-sectorial convergence of all pro-women/women centric programmes across Ministries.
- It is an attempt by the Government to put women's concerns at the very heart of public policy and governance.
- The Mission does not involve direct delivery of benefits to individual beneficiaries.

The Mission will focus on

1. Economic empowerment of women.
2. Progressive elimination of violence against women.
3. Social empowerment of women with particular emphasis on health and education.
4. Gender mainstreaming of programmes, policies, institutions and organization.
5. Awareness generation as well as advocacy activities to fuels the demand for benefits under various schemes and programmes at the grassroots level.

Poorna Shakti Kendra (PSK)

- Under NMEW as one stop service centre to women at district and gram panchayat level.
- A model intervention project under NMEW established in villages, for offering services to women at the grassroots,
- Working with the motto, HUM SUNENGE NARI KI BAAT (we will listen to women's voices)
- Two women coordinators or gram samanvayaks in each Kendra.
- One of the important elements of the project is to stress on processes instrumental in bringing about women's empowerment through convergence strategies on the ground.

Functions of PSK

- To reach out the information to women about all the government programs/schemes/services and helping them to utilize those benefits providing by the Government. Further, to facilitate to avail those benefits especially related to health, education and livelihoods.

- To conduct capacity building training programs to women on various issues like leadership qualities, crisis management, stress management life skills development, legal rights & entitlements etc, in order to create awareness and enhancing their knowledge & skills.
- To maintain a database of target population (women) on various issues related to women.
- To coordinate with the outreach services of various departments.
- To organize women into clusters to access various services and to strengthen SHGs.

Ahimsa Messenger

- For generating awareness about basic legal right, procedures and provisions by involving men and women to address and eliminate all forms of violence against women both inside and outside home.
- Launched in August 2013
- Dimension to be covered:
 - a) A series of awareness building programmes across the nation on gender issues.
 - b) A series of training and sensitization programmes for grass root level functionaries across the nation.
 - c) Developing and introducing a gender sensitive module/curriculum which is now being introduced in various training institutes across states.
 - d) Implemented through all Anganwadi Centers, all Panchyati Raj Institutions, Sabla Girls (in the age group of 16-18 years) and Poorna Shakti Kendras (PSK) coordinators under the National Mission for Empowerment of women (NMEW) will be training as Ashimsa Messengers.

Support to Training & Employment Programme (STEP)

- Central Sector Scheme launched in 1986-87.
- Enabling women to take up employment cum income generation programmes. Financial assistance also given.
- Seeks to upgrade skill of poor and asset less women and provide employment on sustainable basis by mobilizing them in viable cooperative groups, strengthening marketing linkages, support services and access to credit.
- The scheme also provides for enabling support services in the form of health checkups, legal and health literacy, elementary education, gender sensitization and mobile crèches.
- The ultimate endeavour of each project is to develop the group to thrive on a self-sustaining basis in the market place with minimal government support and intervention even after the project period is over.

Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK)

- Set up in 1993.
- The RMK is now being restructured as a NBFC.
- Provides micro finance to poor and asset less women in informal sector.

Working Women Hostel (WWH)

- Aims at providing safe shelter for single, windowed, divorced, separated, married but whose husband or immediate family does not reside in same area and for those who are under training for job.

Rajiv Gandhi National Creche Scheme for the Children of Working Mothers (RGNC)

- Introduced in 2006.
- With a view to encourage women to join/ continue with gainful employment.
- It seeks to provide day care facilities to children in the age group 0-6 years from families with a monthly income of less than Rs. 12,000.
- In addition to being a safe space for the children, the crèche provide services like supplementary nutrition, preschool education, emergency health care etc.
- It is a Central Sector scheme being implemented through Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) and two national level mother NGOs i.e. Indian Council for Child Welfare (ICCW) and Bharatiya Adimjati Sevak Singh (BAJSS).

Ujjwala

- The Ministry of women and Child Development launched a comprehensive scheme called Ujjwala in 2007.
- Conceived primarily for the purpose of preventing trafficking on the onehand and rescue and rehabilitation of victims on the other.
- The scheme has five specific components Prevention, Rescue, Rehabilitation, Reintegration and Repatriation of victims of trafficking.
- The scheme is mainly implemented through NGOs.
- The scheme also facilitates rescue of victims from the place of their exploitation and place them in safe custody in order to provide rehabilitation services, both immediate and long-term.
- It also facilitates reintegration of the victims into the family and society at large.

Swadhar

- Provides shelter for women in difficult circumstances, widows, destitute and deserted women.
- Administered by women and child development ministry since 2001.
- Another scheme with similar objectives/target groups namely Short Stay Home was being implemented by Central Social Welfare Board. Being similar in objectives and target groups, both the schemes have been merged to SwadharGreh scheme.

Women's Empowerment and Livelihood Programme in MID Gangetic Plain (WELP) also called Pryadarshini

- Being implemented with the assistance of International Fund for Agricultural Development in 13 Block spread over 5 Districts in Uttar Pradesh and 2 Districts in Bihar.
- It aims at holistic empowerment of vulnerable groups of women and adolescent girls in the project area through formation of women's Self Help Group (SHGs) and promotion of improved livelihood opportunities.

Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Bill

- Seeks to provide a safe and secure working environment to all women. It covers all work places whether organized or unorganized including domestic workers.
- The definition of aggrieved women who will get protection under the act is extremely wide to cover all women, irrespective of her age or employment status.
- It defines sexual harassment at the work place and creates

a mechanism for redressal of complaints.

- It also provides safeguards against false or malicious charges.
- Definition of employee covers regular/temporary/ ad hoc/daily wage employees, whether for remuneration or not and can also include volunteers. The definition of employer includes the head of the Government department/organization/institution/office/branch/unit, the person responsible for management/supervisions/control of the workplace, the person discharging contractual obligations with respect to his/her employees and in relation to a domestic worker the person who benefits from that employment.
- The redressal mechanism provided in the Act is in the form of Internal Complaints Committee (ICC) and local Complaints Committee (LCC). All workplaces employing 10 or more than 10 workers are mandate under the act to constitute on ICC. The ICC will be a 4 member committee under the Chairpersonship of a senior woman employee and will include 2 members from amongst the employees preferably committed to the cause of women or has experience in social work/legal knowledge and includes a third party member (NGO etc.) as well.
- LCC will be a five member committee comprising of a chairperson to be a nominated from amongst eminent women in the field of social work or committed to cause of women, one member from amongst women working in block/taluka/tehsil/municipality in the district, two members whom at least one shall be a woman to be nominated from NGOs committees to the cause of women or a person familiar with the issues related to sexual harassment provided that at least one of the nominees should preferably have a background in law or legal knowledge. The concerned officer dealing with the social welfare or women and child development shall be an ex officio member.
- A complaints of sexual harassment can be filled within a time limit of 3 months. This may be extended to another 3 months if the woman can prove that grave circumstances prevented her from doing the same.
- The complaints committees are required to provide for conciliation before initiating an inquiry, if requested by the complainant.
- Penalties have been prescribed for employers. Non-compliance with the provisions of the Act shall be punishable with a fine of upto 50,000. Repeated violations may lead to higher penalties and cancellation of license or registration to conduct business.
- The complaints Committees have the powers of civil courts for gathering evidence.

Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA) 2005

- The Act seeks to cover those women who are or have been in a relationship with the abuser where both parties have lived together in a shared household and are related by consanguinity, marriage or a relationship in the nature of marriage, or adoption, in addition, relationship with family members living together as a joint family are also included. Even those women who are sisters, widows, mothers, single women, or living with the abuser are entitled to get legal protection under the proposed Act.

- Domestic violence, includes actual abuse or the threat of abuse that is physical sexual, verbal, emotional and economic. Harassment by way of unlawful dowry demands to the women or her relatives would also be covered under this definition.
- One of the most important features of the Act is the women's right to secure housing. The Act provides for the women's right to reside in the matrimonial or shared household, whether or not she has any title or rights in the household. This right is secured by a residence order, which is passed by a court. These residence order cannot be passed against anyone who is a woman.
- The other relief envisaged under the Act is that of the power of the court to pass protection orders that prevent the abuser from aiding or committing an act of domestic violence or any other specified act, entering a workplace or any other place frequented by the abused, attempting to communicate with the abused, isolating any assets used by both the parties and causing violence to the abused, her relatives and others who provide her assistance from the domestic violence.
- The draft Act provides for appointment of protection officers and NGOs to provide assistance to the woman w.r.t. medical examination, legal aid safe shelter, etc.
- The Act provides for breach of protection order or interim protection order by the respondent as a cognizable and non-bailable offence punishable with imprisonment for a term which may extend to one year or with fine which may extend to twenty thousand rupees or with both. Similarly, non-compliance or discharge of duties by the protection officer is also sought to be made an offence under the Act with similar punishment.

Criminal Law (Amendment) ACT 2013

- The bill brought out after the Delhi gang rape of the Para-medical student on 16th December 2012.
- Bill provides for amendment of Indian Penal Code, Indian Evidence act, and code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 on laws related to sexual offences.
- Act has expressly recognized certain acts as offences which were dealt under related laws. These new offences like, acid attack, sexual harassment, voyeurism, stalking have been incorporated into the Indian Penal Code.
- Fixed the age of consensual sex to 18 years.
- Provides stringent punishment for sexual offences against women.
- The bill states that offender could be given an imprisonment of not less than 20 years, extendable up to life term.
- The bill also includes provisions for death sentence for offenders who are convicted earlier for such crimes.

Other Legislations

- The commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987
- The Indecent Representation of women (Prohibition) Act, 1986
- The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 (Amended in 1986)
- The immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956.

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