

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH CENTRAL AND STATE SPONSORED PROGRAMMES: A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

In the recent years, empowerment of women has been recognized as a central issue in determining the status of women. Empowerment covers many aspects such as women's control over material and intellectual resources. Empowerment is a process but not an event which challenges traditional power equations and relations. Abolition of gender based discrimination in all institutions and structures of the society and the participation of women in policy and decision-making process in domestic and public levels are few dimensions of women empowerment. The issues taken up by the Human Report, 2003, is of immense significance, which speaks of Millennium Development Goals (MDG) that prominently includes empowerment of women. In India, the principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Constitution, in the preamble, fundamental rights and the directive principles of state policy. The Constitution of India not only grants equality to women but also empowers the state to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. Government of India in collaboration with State Governments has been implementing several programmes which support women to take up new ventures and start self-employment activities, which have been categorized under four heads. Our vision is to eradicate rural poverty and secure better quality of life to the poor. The challenges lie in harnessing the innate potential within the poor and enabling them to manage the natural resources for sustainable development. Enhancement of skills of the poor, access to credit, technology and market has proved to be critical to economic empowerment of the poor. In this connection, let us briefly discuss some of the major schemes, sponsored by the Government of Andhra Pradesh. Hence, the present study is Women Empowerment through Central and State Sponsored Programmes.

Key Words: *Women Empowerment, Gender, Poverty Eradication, challenges, Equality, policies, planning, Community, Society.*

INTRODUCTION

“The Gender inequality which remains pervasive international tends to lower the productivity of labour and the efficiency of labour allocation in households and in economy, intensifying the unequal distribution of resources. It also contributes to the non-monetary aspects of poverty-lack of security, opportunity and empowerment-that lower the quality of life for both men and women. While women and girls bear the largest and most direct costs of these inequality, the costs cut broadly across society, ultimately hindering development and poverty reduction”. Concepts like ‘Bharat Nirman’, ‘Shining India’, and ‘Socio-Economic Development’ cannot be translated into reality without the participation and empowerment of rural downtrodden women. UNDP report indicates that while 67 per cent of the world’s work is done by women, only 10 per cent of global income is earned by women and a mere one per cent of global property is owned by them. Thus, comments prof. Amartyasen, “women are less likely to secure favourable outcome for themselves in household decision-making process. They feel that their long term security lies in subordinating their well being to that of male authority”.

PRIORITY FOR EMPOWERMENT

Gender equality is one of the eight Millennium Development Goals to which world leaders agreed at the Millennium Summit held in New York in the year 2000. The strength of the nation lies in the strength of the people, especially the women folk. If we want to change, the social face of India, the socio-economic situation of women must change. Economic growth is not end in itself. It blooms with the happiness of the dejected, depressed, disadvantages, deprived sections of the society. In India women, particularly in rural India, belong to this underdeveloped and underprivileged category. regardless of many proclamations and declarations and time-bound goals women in the contemporary world are still lagging behind development; gender inequality in all fields still persists. India has signed the U.N. convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. Efforts are being made by the Union as well as State Governments in India as part of public policy to improve the socio-economic conditions of women in general and rural women in particular.

MEANING AND SIGNIFICANCE OF EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment is a multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives, communities and in their society, by acting on issues that they define as important. Empowerment occurs within sociological, psychological and economic spheres and at various levels, such as individual, group and community. Empowerment challenges our assumption about the status irregular power relationships and social dynamics. Empowerment should enable the individual or a group of individuals to have greater ability to plan their lives, to

have greater control over the circumstances that influence their lives and free them from the shackles imposed on them by customs beliefs and practices. Empowerment of women may also mean equal status, opportunity and freedom to develop them. Empowering women socially and economically through augmented awareness of their rights and duties as well as access to resources is a decisive step towards superior security for them.

GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

The goal of this Policy is to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women. The Policy will be widely disseminated so as to encourage active participation of all stakeholders for achieving its goals. Specifically, the objectives of this Policy include

- Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full budding.
 - The de-jure and de-facto enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedom by women on equal basis with men in all spheres – political, economic, social, cultural and civil.
 - Equal access to contribution and decision making of women in social, political and economic life of the nation.
 - Equal access to women to health care, quality education at all levels, career and vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security and public office etc.
 - Strengthening legal systems aimed at removal of all forms of discrimination against women
 - Changing societal attitudes and community practices by active contribution and participation of both men and women.
 - Mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process.
 - Elimination of inequity and all forms of aggression against women and the girl child; and
 - Building and strengthening partnerships with civil society, predominantly women's organizations.
- Policy Prescriptions

JUDICIAL LEGAL SYSTEMS

- Legal-judicial system will be made more responsive and gender sensitive to women's needs, especially in cases of domestic violence and personal assault. New laws will be enacted and existing laws reviewed to ensure that justice is quick and the penalty meted out to the culprits is commensurate with the severity of the offence.

- At the initiative of and with the full participation of all stakeholders including community and religious leaders, the Policy would aim to encourage changes in personal laws such as those related to marriage, divorce, maintenance and guardianship so as to eliminate discrimination against women.
- The evolution of belongings rights in a patriarchal system has contribute to the subordinate status of women. The Policy would aim to encourage changes in laws relating to ownership of property and bequest by evolving agreement in order to make them gender just.

DECISION MAKING

Women's equality in power sharing and active participation in decision making, including decision making in political process at all levels will be ensured for the achievement of the goals of empowerment. All measures will be taken to guarantee women equal access to and full participation in decision making bodies at every level, including the legislative, executive, judicial, corporate, statutory bodies, as also the advisory Commissions, Committees, Boards and Trusts etc. Affirmative action such as reservations/quotas, including in higher legislative bodies, will be considered whenever necessary on a time bound basis. Women-friendly personnel policies will also be drawn up to encourage women to participate effectively in the developmental process.

MAINSTREAMING A GENDER PERSPECTIVE IN THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Policies, programmes and systems will be established to ensure mainstreaming of women's perspectives in all developmental processes, as catalysts, participants and recipients. Wherever there are gaps in policies and programmes, women specific interventions would be undertaken to bridge these. Coordinating and monitoring mechanisms will also be devised to assess from time to time the progress of such mainstreaming mechanisms. Women's issues and concerns as a result will specially be addressed and reflected in all concerned laws, sectoral policies, plans and programmes of action.

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

POVERTY ERADICATION

Since women comprise the majority of the population below the poverty line and are very often in situations of extreme poverty, given the harsh realities of intra-household and social discrimination, macro-economic policies and poverty eradication programmes will specifically address the needs and problems of such women. There will be improved implementation of programmes which are already women oriented with special

targets for women. Steps will be taken for mobilization of poor women and convergence of services, by offering them a range of economic and social options, along with necessary support measures to enhance their capabilities

MICRO CREDIT

In order to enhance women's access to credit for consumption and production, the establishment of new and strengthening of existing micro-credit mechanisms and micro-finance institution will be undertaken so that the outreach of credit is enhanced. Other supportive measures would be taken to ensure adequate flow of credit through extant financial institutions and banks, so that all women below poverty line have easy access to credit.

WOMEN AND ECONOMY

Women's perspectives will be included in designing and implementing macro-economic and social policies by institutionalizing their participation in such processes. Their contribution to socio-economic development as producers and workers will be recognized in the formal and informal sectors (including home based workers) and appropriate policies relating to employment and to her working conditions will be drawn up. Such measures could include: Reinterpretation and redefinition of conventional concepts of work wherever necessary e.g. in the Census records, to reflect women's contribution as producers and workers. Preparation of satellite and national accounts. Development of appropriate methodologies for undertaking (i) and (ii) above.

GLOBALIZATION

Globalization has presented new challenges for the realization of the goal of women's equality, the gender impact of which has not been systematically evaluated fully. However, from the micro-level studies that were commissioned by the Department of Women & Child Development, it is evident that there is a need for re-framing policies for access to employment and quality of employment. Benefits of the growing global economy have been unevenly distributed leading to wider economic disparities, the feminization of poverty, increased gender inequality through often deteriorating working conditions and unsafe working environment especially in the informal economy and rural areas. Strategies will be designed to enhance the capacity of women and empower them to meet the negative social and economic impacts, which may flow from the globalization process.

WOMEN AND AGRICULTURE

In view of the critical role of women in the agriculture and allied sectors, as producers, concentrated efforts will be made to ensure that benefits of training, extension and various programmes will reach them in

proportion to their numbers. The programmes for training women in soil conservation, social forestry, dairy development and other occupations allied to agriculture like horticulture, livestock including small animal husbandry, poultry, fisheries etc. will be expanded to benefit women workers in the agriculture sector.

WOMEN AND INDUSTRY

The important role played by women in electronics, information technology and food processing and agro industry and textiles has been crucial to the development of these sectors. They would be given comprehensive support in terms of labour legislation, social security and other support services to participate in various industrial sectors. Women at present cannot work in night shift in factories even if they wish to. Suitable measures will be taken to enable women to work on the night shift in factories. This will be accompanied with support services for security, transportation etc.

SUPPORT SERVICES

The provision of support services for women, like child care facilities, including crèches at work places and educational institutions, homes for the aged and the disabled will be expanded and improved to create an enabling environment and to ensure their full cooperation in social, political and economic life. Women-friendly personnel policies will also be drawn up to encourage women to participate effectively in the developmental process.

SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

EDUCATION

Equal access to education for women and girls will be ensured. Special measures will be taken to eliminate discrimination, universalize education, eradicate illiteracy, create a gender-sensitive educational system, increase enrolment and retention rates of girls and improve the quality of education to facilitate life-long learning as well as development of occupation/vocation/technical skills by women. Reducing the gender gap in secondary and higher education would be a focus area. Sectoral time targets in existing policies will be achieved, with a special focus on girls and women, particularly those belonging to weaker sections including the Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes/Other Backward Classes/Minorities. Gender sensitive curricula would be developed at all levels of educational system in order to address sex stereotyping as one of the causes of gender discrimination.

HEALTH

A holistic approach to women's health which includes both nutrition and health services will be adopted and special attention will be given to the needs of women and the girl at all stages of the life cycle. The reduction of infant mortality and maternal mortality, which are sensitive indicators of human development, is a priority concern. This policy reiterates the national demographic goals for Infant Mortality Rate (IMR), Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) set out in the National Population Policy 2000. Women should have access to comprehensive, affordable and quality health care. Measures will be adopted that take into account the reproductive rights of women to enable them to exercise informed choices, their vulnerability to sexual and health problems together with endemic, infectious and communicable diseases such as malaria, TB, and water borne diseases as well as hypertension and cardio-pulmonary diseases. The social, developmental and health consequences of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases will be tackled from a gender perspective. To effectively meet problems of infant and maternal mortality, and early marriage the availability of good and accurate data at micro level on deaths, birth and marriages is required. Strict implementation of registration of births and deaths would be ensured and registration of marriages would be made compulsory. In accordance with the commitment of the National Population Policy (2000) to population stabilization, this Policy recognizes the critical need of men and women to have access to safe, effective and affordable methods of family planning of their choice and the need to suitably address the issues of early marriages and spacing of children. Interventions such as spread of education, compulsory registration of marriage and special programmes like BSY should impact on delaying the age of marriage so that by 2010 child marriages are eliminated. Women's traditional knowledge about health care and nutrition will be recognized through proper documentation and its use will be encouraged. The use of Indian and alternative systems of medicine will be enhanced within the framework of overall health infrastructure available for women.

NUTRITION

In view of the high risk of malnutrition and disease that women face at all the three critical stages viz., infancy and childhood, adolescent and reproductive phase, focussed attention would be paid to meeting the nutritional needs of women at all stages of the life cycle. This is also important in view of the critical link between the health of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women with the health of infant and young children. Special efforts will be made to tackle the problem of macro and micro nutrient deficiencies especially amongst pregnant and lactating women as it leads to various diseases and disabilities. Intra-household discrimination in nutritional matters vis-à-vis girls and women will be sought to be ended through appropriate strategies.

Widespread use of nutrition education would be made to address the issues of intra-household imbalances in nutrition and the special needs of pregnant and lactating women. Women's participation will also be ensured in the planning, superintendence and delivery of the system.

DRINKING WATER AND SANITATION

Special attention will be given to the needs of women in the provision of safe drinking water, sewage disposal, toilet facilities and sanitation within accessible reach of households, especially in rural areas and urban slums. Women's participation will be ensured in the planning, delivery and maintenance of such services.

HOUSING AND SHELTER

Women's perspectives will be included in housing policies, planning of housing colonies and provision of shelter both in rural and urban areas. Special attention will be given for providing adequate and safe housing and accommodation for women including single women, heads of households, working women, students, apprentices and trainees.

ENVIRONMENT

Women will be involved and their perspectives reflected in the policies and programmes for environment, conservation and restoration. Considering the impact of environmental factors on their livelihoods, women's participation will be ensured in the conservation of the environment and control of environmental degradation. The vast majority of rural women still depend on the locally available non-commercial sources of energy such as animal dung, crop waste and fuel wood. In order to ensure the efficient use of these energy resources in an environmental friendly manner, the Policy will aim at promoting the programmes of non-conventional energy resources. Women will be involved in spreading the use of solar energy, biogas, smokeless chulahs and other rural application so as to have a visible impact of these measures in influencing eco system and in changing the life styles of rural women.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Programmes will be strengthened to bring about a greater involvement of women in science and technology. These will include measures to motivate girls to take up science and technology for higher education and also ensure that development projects with scientific and technical inputs involve women fully. Efforts to develop a scientific temper and awareness will also be stepped up. Special measures would be taken for their

training in areas where they have special skills like communication and information technology. Efforts to develop appropriate technologies suited to women's needs as well as to reduce their drudgery will be given a special focus too.

WOMEN IN DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES

In recognition of the diversity of women's situations and in acknowledgement of the needs of specially disadvantaged groups, measures and programmes will be undertaken to provide them with special assistance. These groups include women in extreme poverty, destitute women, women in conflict situations, women affected by natural calamities, women in less developed regions, the disabled widows, elderly women, single women in difficult circumstances, women heading households, those displaced from employment, migrants, women who are victims of marital violence, deserted women and prostitutes etc.

OBJECTIVES OF EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment of women is aimed at striving towards acquisition of the following:

1. Higher literacy level and education.
2. Better health care for her and her children.
3. Equal ownership of productive resources.
4. Increased participation in economic and commercial sectors.
5. Awareness of their rights.
6. Improved standard of living, and
7. Achieve self-reliance, self-confidence and self-respect amongst women.

NATIONAL POLICY FOR EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

Realizing the need to improve the status of women, a national policy for empowerment of women was adopted by the Union Government in 2001 with the ultimate objective of ensuring women their rightful place in the society. The policy recognized the need to empowering them as agents of socio-economic change and development. The national policy identifies the causes of gender inequality, which are related to the social and economic structure.

RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Since a majority of women who are below the poverty line, live in villages, there is a close linkage between rural development and empowerment of women. The question that needs to be answered is that in a country where men control the destiny of women how is it possible to empower women? It is realized that mobilizing women to take up entrepreneurial and cottage industry activities can ensure economic changes. Through entrepreneurship a women can, not only generate income for herself but also provide employment to other women in the locality. Self-Help Groups and cottage industries, small scale industries play a vital role in providing the rural women gainful employment. Though farm work is a major activity for rural women they remain invisible in statistics. They remain unreached and unattended in planned development. They have no access or control over physical resources.

NATIONAL SCHEMES FOR THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

Government of India in collaboration with State Governments has been implementing several programmes which support women to take up new ventures and start self-employment activities, which have been categorized under four heads.

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT THROUGH SELF-HELP GROUPS

Under the trickledown theory in the planning process, it was expected that women will equally benefit along with men. This has been believed by actual developments. The Ninth Plan document opined that “in spite of development measures and the constitutional/legal guarantees women have lagged behind in almost all sectors”. In the past decades, there have been various forces and pressures which are more dominant than those which have tried to push women towards growth and development. However, planners and policy makers have been eagerly searching for certain alternatives. Ultimately they settled for the participatory approach to women’s economic empowerment.

Self-Help Groups (SHGs) are considered as one of the most significant tools to adopt participatory approach for the economic empowerment of women. It is an important institution for improving the life of women on various social components. The basic objective of an SHG is that it acts as the forum for members to provide space and support to each other. SHGs comprise very poor people who do not have access to formal financial institutions. It enables its members to learn to cooperate and work in a group environment. SHG is considered as an important institution for improving the life of women in various economic and social

components such as health, education, human rights, water and sanitation, etc. However, in reality it does not happen without any specific inputs or direction.

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT SCHEMES LAUNCHED BY GOVERNMENT OF ANDHRA PRADESH

Our vision is to eradicate rural poverty and secure better quality of life to the poor. The challenges lie in harnessing the innate potential within the poor and enabling them to manage the natural resources for sustainable development. Enhancement of skills of the poor, access to credit, technology and market has proved to be critical to economic empowerment of the poor. In this connection, let us briefly discuss some of the major schemes, sponsored by the Government of Andhra Pradesh.

INDIRA KRANTHI PATHAM (IKP)

World Bank assisted Andhra Pradesh District Poverty Initiatives Project and Andhra Pradesh Rural Poverty Reduction Project, together called Indira KranthiPatham, is one of the biggest community driven reduction programmes in the country. The programme is focusing on the formation, development and strengthening of the organization of the poor, expansion of asset base and skill base of the poor, particularly the poorest by providing community Investment Fund CBOs. Indira KranthiPatham demonstrated sustainable approaches to poverty reduction.

Indira KranthiPatham (IKP) is a state-wide poverty reduction project to enable the rural poor to improve livelihood and quality of life through their own organizations. It aims to cover all the rural poor households in the state with a special focus on 30 lakh poorest of the poor households, it is implemented by the Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty (SERP), Department of Rural Development, and Government of Andhra Pradesh. IKP builds in more than a decade long state-wide rural women's self-help movement. The focus is on deepening the process, providing an institutional structure and developing a framework for sustaining it for comprehensive poverty eradication. It is the single largest poverty reduction project in South Asia. IKP works with 4,76,930 Self-Help Groups federated into 28,080 village organizations (VOs). The project mandate is to build strong institutions of the poor and enhance their livelihood opportunities so that the vulnerabilities of the poor are reduced.

Objectives

The main objective of IKP is to enable the rural poor in the State, particularly the poorest of the poor to improve their quality of life.

To achieve this, the project would:

- 1) Help to create self-managed grassroots level institutions of the poor, namely women thrift and credit SHGs, the federations-village organisations and Mandal Samakhyas.
- 2) Support investments in sub-projects proposed by SHGs, VOs and MSs.
- 3) Improve access to education for girls to reduce the incidence of child labour among the poor.
- 4) Support to disabled persons through social mobilization and access to livelihood opportunities.
- 5) Achieve convergence of all anti-poverty programmes, policies, projects and initiation at state, district, mandal and village levels.

IKP is to cover entire State of Andhra Pradesh – villages and rural households, estimated at 90 lakhs out of 1,420 lakh rural households. It lays special emphasis on the poorest of the poor and the most vulnerable households (26 lakhs). IKP is a women-centered development programme. The core belief is that the poor can come out of poverty only through building their own institutions. Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty (SERP) has been setup by the State Government of Andhra Pradesh as a sensitive support structure to facilitate social mobilization of rural poor women. This organization is responsible for conceptualization, implementation and monitoring of Indira KranthiPatham. SERP does this in close collaboration, partnership and continuous consultation with the women self-help group and their Samakhyas, who are the key stakeholders.

WOMEN SELF-HELP GROUPS (SHGS)

Self-Help movements through savings have been taken up by about 5.79 lakh women SHGs in Andhra Pradesh covering nearly 74.58 lakh rural poor women. The SHGs are not only resorting to thrift but are also taking small loans out of the corpus available with the group. An amount of Rs.2,385.98 crore is mobilized as corpus amount among the groups. The State Government has taken several initiatives to extend financial support to these groups which are mentioned hereunder.

CONCLUSION

The empowerment of women was adopted by the Union Government in 2001 with the ultimate objective of ensuring women their rightful place in the society. Their policies recognized the need to empowering them as agents of socio-economic change and development. The national policy identifies the causes of gender inequality, which are related to the social and economic structure. The challenges stretch out in harnessing the innate potential within the poor and enabling them to manage the ordinary resources for sustainable development.

Enhancement of skills of the poor, access to credit, technology and market has proved to be critical to economic empowerment of the poor. The Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty (SERP), Department of Rural Development, and Government of Andhra Pradesh. IKP builds in more than a decade long state-wide rural women's self-help movement. The focus is on deepening the process, providing an institutional structure and developing a framework for sustaining it for comprehensive poverty eradication. It is the single largest poverty reduction project in South Asia. IKP works with 4, 76,930 Self-Help Groups federated into 28,080 village organizations (VOs). The project mandate is to build strong institutions of the poor and enhance their livelihood opportunities so that the vulnerabilities of the poor are reduced.

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