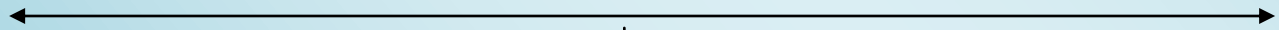


North Asian International Research Journal Consortium

*North Asian International Research Journal of
Social Science & Humanities*

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NAIRJC JOURNAL PUBLICATION

North Asian
International
Research Journal Consortium



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ISSN NO: 2454 - 9827

North Asian International Research Journal Social Science and Humanities is a research journal, published monthly in English, Hindi, Urdu all research papers submitted to the journal will be double-blind peer reviewed referred by members of the editorial board. Readers will include investigator in Universities, Research Institutes Government and Industry with research interest in the general subjects

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WOMEN EMPOWERMENT PRESENT STATUS AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

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ABSTRACT

Women, the reservoir of productive human resource, constitute almost half of the country's total production. In India, women are the central figure of family life. Women have strong potential role in many aspects of economic development, in relation to their family responsibilities as well as their agricultural production activities. They are instrumental in shaping the society and play a major role in raising the economic resources for the family, though their contribution is always underemphasized. The government has framed legislation and special schemes which empower the women with the aim of giving them a better position. Despite efforts to raise the social status of women for more than a century, India still ranks very low among the 177 nations on gender equity according to the Human Development Index. Empowering women is the surest means of strengthening democracy and improving the lives of the rural people. Against this background, a modest attempt in this paper has been made to cover present status and future outlook of women empowerment in Indian context.

Keywords: *Gender Gap, The National Mission for Empowerment of Women 2010, The National Policy for Empowerment of Women 2001, Women Development Corporation, Women Empowerment.*

INTRODUCTION

Women are central to the development of rural areas and to national economies. They make up 43 per cent of the agricultural work force worldwide and as much as 70 per cent in some countries. Often working longer hours than men, rural women are also the caregivers who look after children, the elderly, and the sick. In addition, many rural women are small business entrepreneurs and investors who dedicate most of their earnings to the well-being of their families and societies. But despite some progress, most rural women and girls are still struggling. They typically face more obstacles than men in gaining access to public services, social protection, decent employment opportunities, and markets and other institutions. However, if women had the same access to

resources as men, they could increase farm yields. When women are empowered – economically and socially – they become leaders and agents of change for economic growth, social progress and sustainable development.

India is a predominantly patriarchal society, which goes to add to the already existing unfavourable stereotypes established for women in our country. One wonders if the anatomy of women is the main reason behind the gender discrimination she faces in her day to day life. Lack of literacy and economic resources for women living in rural areas adds to the burden faced by them. They also lack representation and involvement in decision making which leads to their on-going marginalized status. The key issues related to their daily lives go unnoticed. One is not surprised to find a woman still observing *pardah* in the 21st century, due to the overpowering nature of traditional norms and conservative frame of mind, especially in villages. Another reason behind their disparity is the declining female ratio.

Women empowerment is an essential element in national development. Since women constitute half of the population there can be no development unless the needs and interests of women are fully taken into account. In fact, empowered women are a nation's strength. Since development means improvement in the living conditions of the society, as a whole, it is logical to expect that this also mean improved status for women. The effective management and development of women's resources, their capabilities, interests, skills and potentialities are of paramount importance for the mobilization of human resources. In the Indian social, cultural and economic context, no one can achieve the whole purpose of women's empowerment and emancipation within a short span of time. However, the women have utilized the chances given to them and made considerable progress. As formal agency, the government of India made efforts to improve the living conditions of women at different times.

CONCEPT OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment is a process aimed at changing the nature and direction of systematic forces, which marginalise women and other disadvantaged sections in a given context. Empowerment is also visualized as an enabling process. It implies fundamental redistribution of power within and between families/societies and an externally induced process or mechanism of change towards women's equality and development. Here, power is used not as domination, but the right to choose and the ability to influence social and political process.

Empowerment is a process and is not, therefore, something that can be given to people. The process of empowerment is both individual self-assertion to collective resistance, protest and mobilisation that challenge basic power relations. For individuals and groups where class, caste, ethnicity and gender determine their access

to resources and power, their empowerment begins when they not only recognize the systematic forces that oppress them, but act to change existing power relationships. Women's empowerment can be viewed as a continuum of several interrelated and mutually reinforcing components:

- having control or gaining further control,
- having a say and being listened to,
- being able to define and create from women's perspective,
- being able to influence social choice and decisions affecting the whole society,
- being recognized and respected as an equal citizen and human being with a contribution to make,
- Capacity building and skill development, especially the ability to plan, make decisions, organise and carry pit activities.

In short, empowerment is a process of awareness and capacity building leading to greater participation, greater decision making power and control, and to transformative action.

Human development encompasses elements that contribute critical issues of gender and development. The dignity and culture of a society can be detected from the status of women in that society. Empowerment has become the key solution to many social problems. Empowerment of women is empowerment of family/household and in turn development of a nation/of a country. Empowerment of women leads to benefit not only to the individual woman and to women groups, but also to the families and community as a whole through collective action for development (**Pandya, 2008**).

In fact an empowered woman is a nation's strength. The United Nation's Organization had declared the year 1975 as women's year and the decade 1975-1985 as women's decade on an international level. Various studies were conducted and made a consensus that so long as women remain depressed and exploited, no nation can enjoy freedom and justice. It is found that when half of the population is denied the opportunities for utilizing their full potential, the economic parameter like growth, development and welfare remain undefined. So, various steps were taken to define the concept of women empowerment and to find out ways through which women can be empowered.

Women empowerment is a global issue and discussion on women political right are at the fore front of many formal and informal campaigns worldwide. The concept of women empowerment was introduced at the International Women Conference at Nairobi in 1985. Education is milestone of women empowerment because it

enables them to respond to the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their life. So we can't neglect the importance of education in reference to women empowerment as India is poised to become superpower, a developed country by 2020. The year 2020 is fast approaching. This can become reality only when the women of this nation became empowered (**Prasad and Gautam, 2015**).

Kabeer (1999) shows that the probable indicators for empowerment of women are: family structure, marital advantage, financial autonomy, freedom of movement and lifetime experience of employment participation in the modern sector. The study by **Malhotra et. al. (2002)** identifies various indicators for measuring empowerment of women are; domestic decision-making; finance and resource allocation; social and domestic matters; child related issues; access to or control over resources; freedom of movement; and so on.

STATUS OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: INDIAN CONTEXT

In the last five decades, the concept of women empowerment has undergone a major change from welfare oriented approach to equity approach. Empowerment as powerfully articulated goal of development interventions has become significant in recent years. While the status of women has advanced in some important aspects in the past decades, progress had been uneven and still inequalities between men and women have persisted (**Ganguli, 2015**).

The idea of Women Empowerment came forward when the Third International Women's Conference at Nairobi in 1985 introduced and defined it as a re-distribution of social power and control of resources in favour of Women. The Government of India declared 2001, the year of Women's Empowerment and the National Policy for the Empowerment and the National Policy for the Empowerment of women came into force the same year. **Sen and Batliwala (2000)** opine that empowerment leads to a growing inherent capability, greater self-confidence, and an inner transformation of one's consciousness that enables one to overcome external barrier. This view mainly emphasizes on two important aspects.

Firstly, it is a power to achieve desired goals. Secondly, idea of empowerment is more applicable to those who are powerless-whether they are male or female, or group of individuals, class or caste. Women empowerment is also defined as a change in the context of a women's life, which enables her increased capacity for leading a satisfying human life. It gets reflected both in external qualities (viz. health, mobility, education and awareness, status in the family, participation in decision making and also at the level of material security) and internal qualities (viz. self-awareness and self-confidence).

Behaviour and talent are two of the core drivers of sustainable, long-term economic growth. If half of these talents are underdeveloped or underutilized, the economy will never grow as it could. Multiple studies have shown that healthy and educated women are more likely to have healthier and more educated children creating a positive, virtuous cycle for the broader population. Research also shows the benefits of gender equality in politics: when women are more involved in decision-making, they make different decisions – not necessarily better or worse – but decisions that reflect the needs of more members of society. Table 1 clearly portrays the low level of attainment of women in the diverse fields of achievement. Keeping aside the Political Empowerment, in other three indices, India's rank is far below. Out of 142 countries, India's rank is 114, which is a good indicator of its position in global scenario. The Political Empowerment ranks quite high may be due to the 73rd and 74th Indian Constitutional Amendments providing greater opportunity to women to take active part in politics. But overall, the situation needs improvement.

Table 1: Global Gender Gap Rankings (India)

Gender Gap Sub-Indices	2014		2012	
	Rank	Score	Rank	Score
Economic Participation and Opportunity	134	0.4096	123	0.4588
Educational Attainment	126	0.8503	121	0.8525
Health and Survival	141	0.9366	134	0.9612
Political Empowerment	15	0.3855	17	0.3343
Overall Index	114	0.6455	105	0.6442

Source: World Economic Forum, 2014

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. The Constitution not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. Within the framework of a democratic polity, our laws, development policies, plans and programmes have aimed at women's advancement in different spheres. From the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-78) onwards, there has been a marked shift in the approach to women's issues from welfare to development. In recent years, the empowerment of women has been recognized as the central issue in determining the status of women. The National Commission for Women was set up by an Act of Parliament in 1990 to safeguard the rights and legal entitlements of women.

The 73rd and 74th Amendments (1993) to the Constitution of India have provided for reservation of seats in the local bodies of Panchayats and Municipalities for women, laying a strong foundation for their participation in decision making at the local levels (Sharma, 2015).

Analysis and comparison of Census 2001 and 2011 depict a disturbing picture as far as Child Sex Ratio (CSR) is concerned. According to Census 2001, out of 29 states and sex UTs, 20 states and four UTs had CSR above national average [927] whereas as per census 2011, 18 states and three UTs recorded CSR above national average [919]. Out of 24 states and UTs that had CSR above national average in 2001 two states [J&K and MP] and Lakshadweep showed lower CSR in 2011. The CSR is more skewed in the land-rich and affluent states of Punjab, Haryana, Gujarat and Delhi. The 2011 Census data showed that the CSR in Punjab, Haryana, Gujarat and Delhi was as low as 846, 890 and 871 female for 1000 males respectively. In this context, effective implementation of the recently launched Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao programme has the potential to not only arrest the declining CSR but significantly improving it (Patel, 2016).

The National Policy for Empowerment of Women, 2001 in India had the goal to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women. The Policy is widely disseminated in order to encourage active participation of all stakeholders for achieving its goals. Specifically, the objectives of the National Policy for Empowerment of Women include:

- (i) Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential
- (ii) 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
- (iii) Equal access to participation and decision making of women in social, political and economic life of the nation
- (iv) 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.
- (v) Strengthening legal systems aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women
- (vi) Changing societal attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women.
- (vii) Mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process.
- (viii) Elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and the girl child; and

- (ix) Building and strengthening partnerships with civil society, particularly women's organizations.

Similarly, The National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW) was launched by the Government of India on International Women's Day in 2010 with the aim to strengthen overall processes that promote all-round Development of women. The mission had the mandate to strengthen the inter-sector convergence; facilitate the process of coordinating all the women's welfare and socio-economic development programmes across ministries and departments. In light with its mandate, the mission has been named Mission Purna Shakti, implying a vision for holistic empowerment of Women. As expressed in the statement of the mission which is "To strengthen the processes which promote holistic development and empowerment of women, gender equality and gender justice through inter-sectoral convergence of programmes that impact women, forge synergy among various stakeholders and create an enabling environment conducive to social change", the mission aims to provide a single window service for all programmes run by the Government for Women under aegis of various Central Ministries.

The key strategies adopted by the National Mission for Empowerment of Women, 2010 are:

- Inter-sectoral convergence of schemes for women; monitoring and review of progress
- Strengthening institutional framework for greater efficiency in support to women
- Focused research, review of schemes, programmes and legislations, and gender audits for evidence based policy making
- Investment in skill and entrepreneurship development, micro-credit, vocational training and SHG development for economic empowerment of women
- Support to Panchayati Raj institutions; women's movements and community representatives for strengthening of local bodies 360 degree approach on media and communication for behaviour change and social mobilization for gender equality

Following are the major domain areas of the National Mission for Empowerment of Women:

- Poverty Alleviation and Economic Empowerment of Women
- Social Empowerment And Education
- Health & Nutrition
- Gender Rights, Gender Based Violence and Law Enforcement
- Gender Budgeting, Gender Mainstreaming & Gender Audit

- Empowerment of Vulnerable and Marginalized Groups and Women in Difficult Circumstances

The focus areas of the mission are:

- Violence Against Women
- Declining Child Sex Ratio
- Prevention of Child Marriage
- Trafficking
- Health & Sanitation
- Drinking Water
- Gender Budgeting
- Right to Education
- Elected Women Representatives
- I.E.C Activities
- Drudgery Reduction
- Innovative Financial Inclusion
- Engendering Livelihood Programmes/Training Programmes

Apart from these there are a large number of important schemes run by Government of India that have impacted lives of women and have contributed to their empowerment. Some of these schemes are:

- Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS)
- Public Distribution System for Food (PDS)
- Integrated Child Development Services Scheme (ICDSS)
- National Rural Health Mission (NRHM)
- National rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM)
- Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan (SSA)
- National Literacy Mission (NLM)
- Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (SABLA)
- Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY)
- The Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojna
- Total Sanitation Campaign
- Indira Gandhi National Widow Pension Scheme
- Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme
- Support for training and Empowerment Programme for Women (STEP)

- SWADHAR
- Janani Suraksha Yojana
- Panchayat Mahila Evam Yuva Shakti Abhiyan
- Schemes for Leadership Development for Minority Women
- Science and Technology for Women Adivasi Mahila Sashaktikaran Yojana of NSTFDC

These initiatives have resulted in recognizing and reinforcing the significance of issue of gender equality and empowerment of women for sustainable development in social and economic spheres. But, still there exists a wide gap between the goals enunciated in the Constitution, legislation, policies, plans, programmes, and related mechanisms and the reality of the status of women in India.

JOURNEY SO FAR IN BIHAR

The direct interventions by the state government to address gender disparity can be clubbed under two main heads: child protection (Kanya Suraksha Yojana to stop female foeticide) and social and economic security (Lakshmibai Social Security Pension Scheme, Kanya Vivah Yojana and Nari Shakti Yojana) (Table 2). With an objective to check the foeticide of a girl child to improve sex ratio and encourage birth registration, Mukhyamantri Kanya Suraksha Yojana, was launched in 2007. Under this scheme, the state government contributes ₹ 2,000 for every girl child belonging to the BPL category and born on the after November 22, 2007. The benefit of the scheme is limited to two girls per family. In 2013-14, up-to September 2013, 14.8 lakh beneficiaries availed this facility.

Table 2: Flagship Schemes to Address Gender Disparity

Scheme	2009-10 Actual	2010-11 Actual	2011-12 Actual	2012-13 RE	2013-14 BE
Lakshmibai Social Security Pension Scheme (2007)	6176.26	8592.01	10643.20	16800.00	14462.61
Nari Shakti Yojana	1000.00	1000.00	3000.00	3000.00	1020.00
Mukhyamantri Kanya Vivah Yojana	7753.22	7000.00	8848.53	8600.00	8520.00
Mukhyamantri Kanya Suraksha Yojana	6700.00	10541.10	10000.00	7200.00	6000.00

Source: Gender Budget, Department of Finance, Government of Bihar

Till the end of 2011-12, the Mukhyamantri Nari Shakti Yojana (MNSY) covered 6324 villages from 1561 panchayats in 165 Blocks of 27 districts, reaching out to 5,16,587 households. Out of these, 1649 villages of 272 panchayats have been saturated and target households have been brought under the SHG fold. The programme envisages holistic empowerment of women in economic, social and cultural spheres. Their work is focused on understanding rural poverty, analysing situation of SHGs, village and social mobilization of women, understanding the livelihood and micro financing, social and institutional support, make provisions for women victims of violence etc. Table 3 shows that, up-to 2012-13, the total expenditure of MNSY was 69.5 per cent of the funds received. Out of the three heads i.e. economic, social and cultural, the utilisation of expenditure is the highest on economic empowerment (84.78 per cent) and the lowest on cultural empowerment (46.73 per cent).

Table 3: Mukhyamantri Nari Shakti Yojana

(₹ In Lakh)

Particulars	Total Fund Received up-to 2012-13	Total Expenses up-to 2012-13	
		Amount	Per cent Share of the Total Fund received
Economic empowerment	4812.95	4080.62	84.78
SHG formation, nurturing & Capacity building	2273.78	2449.54	107.73
Initial capitalization for development	1201	1039.43	86.55
Community assets for development	701.22	318.52	45.42
Training & action research in service sector	249.00	174.81	70.20
Study & reasherc	130.00	10.19	7.84
Monitoring & Evaluation	257.95	88.13	34.17
Social empowerment	2645.50	1309.93	49.52
Helpline	680.68	456.62	67.08
Short Stay Home	744.32	558.88	75.09
Protection Home	63.99	1.11	1.73
Working Women Hostel	378.43	0.87	0.23
Creche	100.50	0.53	0.53
Social awareness	677.58	291.92	43.08
Social rehabilitation fund	200.00	100.10	50.05
Cultural empowerment	385.32	180.05	46.73
Women Resource Centre	266.23	158.61	59.58
Innovative Scheme	300.00	151.48	50.49
Total	8610.00	5980.79	69.46

Source: Bihar State Women Development Corporation, Government of Bihar

Economic Empowerment

- Between 2007-08 and September 2013, there were 4740 villages from 910 panchayats in 69 blocks of 19 districts which were covered under SHG programme. Over the same period, the Women Development Corporation has constituted 54,793 SHGs. Initial capitalisation fund is an important component under MNSY. By means of this, SHGs can borrow money from banks and, till 2013-14, an amount of ₹5,237.94 lakh have been disbursed to 13,925 SHGs as loan amount.
- Women Development Corporation is concurrently running various programmes for training and capacity building of young girls and women, belonging to the poor community. Under this scheme, the selected candidates are provided training free of cost on housekeeping as a beautician, computer operation and sales management by reputed training institutes.
- Lac cultivation is encouraged among women to make them self-employed and, till now, 12 female farmers have already started cultivating lac.
- Under vocational training, 50 poor urban females have been trained to take up nursing as livelihood, and 37 other females have also been trained for preparing artificial jewellery, out of which 11 have become master trainers.

Social Empowerment

- At present, women helplines are functional in 34 districts in which a total of 5621 cases were registered in 2012-13 and 2783 in 2013-14. Out of those registered cases, 4162 cases in 2012-13 and 2108 cases in 2013-14 have been disposed of. Short-stay homes are operating in 21 districts of Bihar.
- Under MNSY, Women Development Corporation has planned to establish 50 bed working women hostels in district headquarters at Patna, Gaya, Muzaffarpur, Darbhanga and Bhagalpur to provide safe and suitable accommodation for working women. The state government has selected 5 NGOs to carry out this project.
- Under Creche Scheme, 11 NGOs have been selected and financed to run 26 units of crèche in 11 districts of the state which are helping 260 beneficiaries.
- The Social Awareness Programmes of Women Development Corporation is aimed at dealing with social evils like dowry system, child marriage, witch craft, sexual harassment at work place etc. Folk Media, documentary films, posters and banners are used as medium of campaign. As an innovative scheme, a cultural group of beggars was formed in 2011-12 to campaign against various social evils.

- Table 4 shows that there has been increase in the number of cases registered and disposed of relating to offences against women. Out of all the cases, the registration of cases is the highest for domestic violence. In 2012-13, it is interesting to note that more than 70 per cent of cases were disposed of under all the heads.

Table 4: Number of Cases Registered and Disposed Under Social Empowerment

Types of Cases	2011-12		2012-13		2013-14, up to Sept. 2013	
	Registered	Disposed	Registered	Disposed	Registered	Disposed
Domestic Violence	2843	2043(71.9)	3062	2192(71.8)	1443	1112(74.7)
Dowry Abused	650	426(65.5)	623	452(72.6)	313	198(63.9)
Dowry Death	22	16(72.7)	14	14(100.0)	9	8(88.9)
Second Marriage	163	116(71.2)	172	121(70.3)	68	46(80.8)
Assets Related	276	222(80.4)	260	206(79.2)	103	82(62.3)
Rape & Trafficking cases	116	68(58.6)	85	85(100.0)	61	48(64.4)
Sexual abuse at office and other places	78	68(87.2)	44	39(88.6)	16	15(93.8)
Others	1120	792(70.7)	1371	1049(76.5)	770	599(77.3)
Total Cases	5268	3751(71.2)	5621	4162(74.0)	2783	2108(73.8)

Note: Figures in parentheses denote the percentage of cases disposed

Source: Bihar State Women Development Corporation, Government of Bihar

Cultural Empowerment

Along with economic and social empowerment, cultural empowerment is also an essential part of personality development. Therefore, Women Development Corporation is playing an active role in cultural empowerment of women of the state.

- To strengthen the artistic and craft-based skills through training, enterprise, marketing etc. it is proposed that the cultural events be organized primarily in all 9 Divisional headquarters by the panel of selected agencies. A detailed plan of action regarding logistics, participation events, convergence strategy would be worked out in a phased manner.

- The Women Development Corporation has stated a campaign 'Hamari Munia' under which awareness is created among women and adolescent girls on issues related to health and hygiene for girls and discrimination against girl child.
- The exposure of cultural values and tradition is very important for development of gender friendly environment and confidence level of adolescent girls. It is proposed to organise motivational events, primarily in all women's colleges and Kasturba Gandhi Schools of Bihar to make girls more culturally empowered.
- Bihar has a rich tradition of diverse folk forms, deeply embedded in life of rural people. Unfortunately, with rapid spread of urbanization and change in life style, these folk art forms are in a state of extinction. Many of the artist families are in a state of abject poverty, with their traditional livelihood being at stake. The art forms are also losing relevance. As part of a unique initiative to empower women of these families, one or two folk art forms of Bihar may be revived and revitalized, so that they become sustainable livelihoods for the relevant artists.
- In 15 women's colleges in 5 districts (Nalanda, Nawada, Samastipur, Begusarai and East Champaran), exhibition-cum-gender fairs under 'Sapno Ko Chali Chhoone' programme have been organized. The organisers have selected 30 'Champions of Change' from these colleges who would carry the baton of cultural change further.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

The government has framed legislation and special schemes which empower the women with the aim of giving them a better position. The impact of reserving one third of seats for women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) has been fruitful, and has empowered women both politically and socially. Despite efforts to raise the social status of women for more than a century, India still ranks very low among the 177 nations on gender equity according to the Human Development Index. Empowering women is the surest means of strengthening democracy and improving the lives of the rural people. Woman need to be empowered in order to become strong and ready to take up new challenges for the building up of the family, society and the nation. In fact women empowerment is human empowerment itself. So, we should march forward with considering the following points:

- ✓ The formation of Self-Help-Groups as a basis for the social and economic empowerment of deprived and disadvantaged women has been found to be successful mechanism for the organization, mobilization and self-development of women. There is need to replicate this mode throughout the country.
- ✓ Transforming the prevailing social discrimination against women must become the top priority, and must happen concurrently with increased direct action to rapidly improve the social and economic status of women. In this way, a synergy of progress can be achieved. As women receive greater education and training, they will earn more money.
- ✓ Given the diversity of the agro-ecological system and the resulting wide varieties of farming systems, it is important that state level efforts in gender planning are supported by gender/sex segregated data pertinent to local situation.
- ✓ The current efforts on creating agricultural data and gender information in farming systems across the country should be co-ordinated and the available information should be fed into the planning process.
- ✓ Planning at the local Panchayat level should be gender-sensitive and should have gender/sex-segregated information to support local development efforts.
- ✓ Agricultural education institutions and training centres should develop regular curricula to integrate a gender approach in all technical areas of agricultural sector.
- ✓ Existing policies related to target women and gender-equity should be widely communicated to all involved development work including women clientele.
- ✓ Review of the land right policies and implementation of land distribution for gender equity and women's land rights should be made earliest.
- ✓ Farmer's right initiatives should explicitly address concerns of women farmers.
- ✓ A sustained campaign through the print, electronic and folk media is necessary on various issues related to empowerment of women, health and nutrition, laws, value of the girl child, violence against women etc.
- ✓ Further, in order to empower women any type of crime against women is to be rooted out, be it domestic violence, dowry death, rape or other forms of cruelty. So, true empowerment means not only education and economic empowerment but also the fact that women are able to move in the world fearlessly. Further, unless women are a part of the decision-making process and are able to stand up to men in every walk of life, a country cannot be said to be fully developed and women cannot be fully empowered.

CONCLUSION

Indisputably, India is committed to the cause of empowerment of women. However, the journey towards progress is long and arduous. India has witnessed great change in the last two decades. Age old prejudices and gender based biases are giving way to gender equality and harmonious development. Policies to raise women's age at marriage, enhance their education and open greater employment opportunities will also help to empower them, at least in some respects. Our goal is to cause policy, institutional and individual change that will improve the lives of women and girls everywhere.

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