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## UNIT 2 POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA

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- 2.3 Constitutional Safeguards and Legislation for Women
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### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

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The aim of this Unit is to discuss the major policies and programmes for the empowerment of women in India. Women who constitute 48 percent of India's population, according to the 2001 Census, remain unequal to men in our society. This contradicts the principle of gender equality enshrined in the Indian Constitution and calls for reflection and action. In response, various policies and programmes are made to empower women.

After studying this Unit, you should be able to:

- discuss the meaning of women's empowerment including social, economic and political dimensions;
- analyze the status of women vis-à-vis the indicators of women's empowerment;
- describe the Constitutional safeguards and legislation for women;
- analyze the plans and policies introduced for women in India; and
- evaluate the programmes for women in India implemented to fulfill policy commitments.

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### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

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In this Unit, we are going to deliberate on the policies and programmes introduced for empowering women. The transition to the concept of 'empowerment' from the idea of 'welfare' and then to 'development' explains that women's diverse roles are being recognized. To go back to history, it is interesting to note that in pre-independent India, though provisions related to health and education were demanded from the State yet, these social welfare programmes were the concern of voluntary agencies. There was hardly any nation-wide programme to provide such welfare services. After Independence, the State realized its role in strengthening welfare services provided by voluntary agencies. This led to the formulation of Central

Social Welfare Board in 1953 which was to provide welfare services to women, children and other deprived sections of society. This Board sought to improve welfare programmes, introduce them in remote areas and assist the voluntary agencies (CSWI 1974). We have moved far ahead from those times when the programmes emphasized acquisition of knowledge and skills to become better mothers and housewives to the present times when the focus is on making women conscious of their own rights.

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## **2.2 MEANING OF ‘EMPOWERMENT’**

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Power is ‘the ability to control people or things-right or authority of a person or group to do something’, according to the Oxford Dictionary (2000), and empowerment is ‘to give somebody the power or authority to do something; to authorize; to give somebody more control over their own life or the situation they are in’. It gives a sense of control to women over their own lives whereby they are able to weigh choices, make decisions and act accordingly. However, distinctions of caste/ class/ ethnicity constrain them from getting access to resources. Panda (2007) states that empowerment as a term is being used since the 17th century and it is now being treated as an enabling factor unlike earlier when it meant ‘to invest with power and authority’. In the year 1611, women got the right to vote in the American State of Massachusetts. Another significant event was on March 8, 1857 women workers of garments and tailoring factories of America went on strike demanding fixed hours and equal remuneration. This struggle continued until their voices were heard. That is why we celebrate March 8 as International Women’s Day every year. In the 1970s the concept of empowerment grew out of the relationship between feminism and popular education in Latin America. The United Nations declared the year 1975 as the International Women’s Year and decade 1975-1985 as Women’s Decade (Naqvi 2008: 27). Later, empowerment got linked with Paulo Freire’s idea of conscientization and Gramsci’s conception of democratic and participatory institutions. In India, in the 1980s empowerment began to be used for women’s development and for analysis of women’s subjugation in society. Thus, empowerment emphasizes the need to be conscious of one’s position in society and to change it by fighting for one’s rights. As Albert Camus said “Don’t walk behind me, I may not lead. Don’t walk in front of me, I may not follow. Just walk beside me and be a friend”.

In the Programme of Action 1992, women’s empowerment is considered primary for social change. Giving importance to ‘collective reflection’ and ‘decision-making’, it enlists parameters of empowerment, which are as follows-building a positive self-image and self-confidence; developing ability to think critically; building up group cohesion and fostering decision-making and action; ensuring equal participation in the process of bringing about social change; encouraging group action in order to bring about change in the society; providing the wherewithal for economic independence.

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## **2.3 CONSTITUTIONAL SAFEGUARDS AND LEGISLATION FOR WOMEN**

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The Constitution upholding the principles of equality, justice, liberty and social justice for the citizens of India is the basis of formulation for laws. Box 2.1 below shows the fundamental rights, which if violated, a citizen can move to the High court or the Supreme Court. The directive principles though not justifiable are to be kept in view by the State while formulating policies and programmes. Both safeguard Indian women and empower them to play their roles effectively in society, polity and economy.

Box 2.1 highlights important legislation enacted to empower women. The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005 was notified on the 26th of October 2006. This law, for the first time, recognizes a woman's right to a violence-free home. In doing so, this law provides a comprehensive definition of domestic violence, recognizes a woman's right to reside in the shared household, provides for reliefs that she is entitled to in cases of violation and lays down a mechanism to facilitate her access to justice and other support services. This law is a first step towards bringing women's human rights into the home (Lawyer's Collective, Women's Rights Initiative 2007).

The Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005 came into force from 9th September, 2005. This Act removes gender discriminatory provisions in the Hindu Succession Act, 1956 to give equal rights to daughters as provided to sons in ancestral property. The property here includes agricultural land also (Joshi 2008: 8). The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005 came into force on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2006 in 200 districts and is due to be extended to the whole of rural India within five years. The objective of the act is to enhance livelihood security in rural areas by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. It is an important initiative for sustainable development of an agricultural economy. Through the process of providing employment on works that address causes of chronic poverty such as drought, deforestation and soil erosion, the Act seeks to strengthen the natural resource base of rural livelihood and create durable assets in rural areas. The salient feature of the Act is that at least one-third beneficiaries shall be women who have registered and requested work under the scheme. Work site facilities such as crèches, drinking water, shade have to be provided (NREGA 2008). The Immoral Traffic Prevention Act is being amended to make the law enforcement machinery strict in punishing the traffickers and save girls likely to be forced into prostitution.

#### Box 2.1: Legislation for Women

**Equal Remuneration Act of 1976** provides for equal pay to men and women for equal work.

**Hindu Marriage Act of 1955** amended in 1976 provides the right for girls to repudiate a child marriage before attaining maturity whether the marriage has been consummated or not.

**The Marriage (Amendment) Act, 2001** amended the Hindu Marriage Act, Special Marriage Act, Parsi Marriage and Divorce Act, the Code of Criminal Procedure providing for speedy disposal of applications for maintenance; the ceiling limit for claiming maintenance has been deleted and a wide discretion has been given to the Magistrate to award appropriate maintenance.

**The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act of 1956** as amended and renamed in 1986 makes the sexual exploitation of male or female, a cognizable offence. It is being amended to decriminalize the prostitutes and make the laws more stringent against traffickers.

An amendment brought in 1984 to the **Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961** made women's subjection to cruelty a cognizable offence. The second amendment brought in 1986 makes the husband or in-laws punishable, if a woman commits suicide within 7 years of her marriage and it has been proved that she has been subjected to cruelty. Also a new criminal offence of 'Dowry Death' has been incorporated in the Indian Penal Code.

**Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1976** raises the age for marriage of a girl to 18 years from 15 years and that of a boy to 21 years and makes offences under this Act cognizable.

**Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act of 1971** legalizes abortion by qualified professionals on humanitarian or medical grounds. The maximum punishment for unauthorized abortion may go upto life imprisonment. The Act has further been amended

specifying the place and persons authorized to perform abortion and provide for penal actions against the unauthorized persons performing abortions.

**Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act of 1986** and the Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987 have been enacted to protect the dignity of women and prevent violence against them as well as their exploitation.

**The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005** provides for more effective protection of the rights of women guaranteed under the Constitution who are victims of violence of any kind occurring within the family and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto. It provides for immediate and emergent relief to women in situations of violence of any kind in the home.

Source: Ministry of Women and Child Development 2006

### Check Your Progress I

**Note:** Use the space provided for your answer

- 1) Discuss in brief the constitutional safeguards and the legislative measures for women's development..

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## 2.4 WOMEN AND PLANS

India was one of the first countries to highlight women's issues in development planning, according to Devaki Jain (2007). She states that women's development received attention from the 1960s onwards, especially in the 1970s, after the first UN International Women's Year 1975 and a UN World Conference on Women in Mexico in 1975. Since then continuous forward movement has led to the inclusion of women in whatever measure it exists today. The history of growth of India's political economy and women's role in the development process are special. Political economy is preferable to development because "development happens through political negotiations, political restructuring and politically guided institutions, then only economics can grow with justice" (2007: 73).

The emergence of Gandhi in the freedom struggle added an interesting dimension to the history of India's political economy. His ideas for revival of India like non-violence and his own simple living caught the attention of women in large numbers. The notable faces like Dr. Sarojini Naidu, Kamala Devi and the ones not so visible like Chameli Devi along with many other women actively participated in the freedom struggle. Even before this, women of the reformist families had begun to question and challenge the prevailing customs that subordinated women in society. Swarnakumari Devi started the Sakhi Samaj in Bengal in 1882, Pandita Ramabai the Arya Samaj in 1882 and Bharat Sri Mahamandal 1910, Sarla Devi Chaudharani began the first all India women's organization. Such women initiated the process of women's development much before international organizations began. The social reform movements that began to challenge the divisions in society on the basis of caste, class and religion also had women's participation. This was due to the efforts of reformers like Periyar, E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker, Jyotibai Phule, Babasaheb Ambedkar, Narayan Guru among others. Women questioned the spaces created and dominated by men.

Later on, after independence in 1939 a sub-committee on women called Women's Role in Planned Economy (WRPE) was established as part of the body called the National Planning Committee to decide the future course of planning in India. The sub-committee dealt with issues like the position of women in the planned economy constituting the family, employment, education also analyzing the social customs that inhibit women from contributing to the economy. Rani Lakshmbai Rajwade, the chairperson of the committee and other famous women of that time included civil rights, economic rights, property rights, education, marriage and also other concerns such as widowhood, prostitution etc. In spite of that, the first five year plan (1951-55) did not include most of these concerns. It did set up the Central Social Welfare Board in 1953 spearheaded by Dura Bai Deshmukh to encourage welfare work through voluntary organizations, charitable trusts etc. The Second Plan promoted the mahila mandals or women's clubs to begin work at the grassroots level. The focus was on intensive agricultural development. It felt the need to organize women as workers and realized the need to counter the social prejudices they face. This plan stated that women should be protected from hazardous work, be given maternity benefits and crèche facilities for children (National Population Policy 1988). The Third, Fourth and Interim Plans (1961-1974) promoted women's education, pre-natal and child health care services, supplementary feeding for children, nursing and expectant mothers (Jain 2007). The Third plan specifically highlighted female education as a welfare strategy which continued in the Fourth Plan (1969-74). The Report of the National Committee on Women's Education (1959) had a strong effect on the Third Plan. Rural welfare services, condensed courses of education for adult women, Bal Sevika training and child care programmes received foremost attention. Along with these measures, subsequent plans continued incentives like free textbooks and scholarships for girls. In the Fourth plan, the expenditure on family planning was increased to reduce birth rate through mass education (NPP 1988).

During the period 1951 to 1975 women remained invisible both as citizens and as leaders since the welfarist strategy towards women continued. With International Women's Year and UN Decade for Women, women in India gained focus. Two important documents were written at this time-'Towards Equality: Report of the Committee on Status of women In India' and a volume on 'Indian Women' which was discussed at the UN World Conference in Mexico. A bureau was started to deal with women's issues and now it is referred to as Ministry of Women and Development. The Fifth Plan (1974-78) adopted a development-centred approach rather than a welfarist one for women thus bringing a significant change. This was an outcome of the 'Committee on Status of Women Report 1974' which highlighted the unfavourable impact of the development process on women (Das and Mishra 2006: 25). This plan wanted to achieve equality of educational opportunity to fulfill the aim of social justice and to enhance the quality of education. It encouraged enrolment and retention in schools in backward regions and amongst the deprived sections of community. It also realized that low enrolment of girls was the result of lack of women teachers among other reasons. Therefore, scholarships were given to girls to finish their education and become teachers (NPP 1988). The Integrated Child Development Services Scheme was started at an all India level in 1977. It looked after health and nutrition of pregnant mothers and nursing mothers belonging to socio-economically vulnerable groups, though it was meant for children (NPP 1988:102). Soon, the National Plan of Action (1976) was drawn which identified areas of education, health, employment, nutrition, legislation, social welfare and family planning to conduct action programmes for women and through this intervention to improve their status (NPP 1988).

The next two decades 1981-2001 and four plans saw gender issues being highlighted in the form of a chapter. The Sixth Plan (1980-85) acknowledged women's development as a distinct economic issue. With regard to health care for women,

both sixth and seventh plans focused on expanding physical infrastructure, increasing trained health workforce, strengthening control over communicable and other diseases and focusing on maternal and child health care (NPP 1988). Through a multi-disciplinary approach, the sixth plan emphasized health, education and employment for women. Until the sixth five year plan, women's role was understood to be a social and welfare issue. The Seventh Plan (1985-90) tried to get women into the centre of national development. It showed concern for equity and empowerment of women. The emphasis was on 'inculcating confidence among women, generating awareness about their rights and privileges and training them for economic activity and employment' (NPP 1988). The Women's Component Plan was outlined this time by designing a system to recognize and monitor schemes that benefitted women directly (Das and Mishra 2006: 25). The Eighth Plan (1992-97) witnessed a shift from development to empowerment. In the sectors of education, health and employment there was a focus on women. The outlay for women arose from Rs. 4 crore in the first plan to Rs 2,000 crore in this plan. The Ninth Plan (1997-2002) focused on attaining empowerment of women. It also brought convergence of the ongoing services in both women-specific and women-related sectors. The Centre and the States followed the approach of Women's Component Plan (WCP) to ensure that at least 30 percent of funds/benefits from all development sectors reach women (Chattopadhyay 2006: 30; Jain 2007). The Tenth Plan (2002-2007) consists of definite strategies, policies and programmes for empowering women as agents of social change. The National Policy on Empowerment of Women 2001 shaped the Tenth Plan. This plan has a sector-related three-fold strategy- social empowerment, economic empowerment and gender justice (Chattopadhyay 2006: 30; Jain 2007: 75). Incorporating gender conscious planning, this plan envisioned "immediate tying up these two effective concepts of WCP and Gender Budgeting to play a complementary role to each other, and thus ensure both preventive and post facto action in enabling women to receive their rightful share from all women-related general development sectors" (Das and Mishra 2006: 26). Along with the Women's Component Plan, Gender Budgeting which is a much broader approach of making gender responsive budgets and public policies was adopted. Gender budgeting is not about a separate budget for women, but a process whereby budget-related allocations, policies and their implementation are analyzed using a gender lens (Das and Mishra 2006). It was introduced by Finance Ministry in the Union Budget 2005 to ensure equitable allocation of resources (Yojana 2007: 28)

Jain argues that mere inclusion of a chapter on 'Women and Development' enlisting goals to be achieved by various departments and ministries is an inadequate way of including women. She says that

*Women's Gyana*, their knowing and the body of knowledge they have released, which challenges most facts, most classificatory systems, including the measuring of the GNP, and the dichotomies of home and work place etc have to be forged into alternative development theories, underpinnings of planning development, designing the political economy rather than knit the gender thread into an already designed fabric (Jain 2007: 76).

Jain (2007) states that the planning process should recognize the presence of women in all ways-be it in the logic behind plan goals; women's status in agriculture and tiny sectors; address basic needs of water, health, food and also the effect of privatization policy etc. Basically, to put together women's experiences of development in the chapters discussing various sectors like defense, science and technology and so on. This kind of linking up between women and development will shift the women out of the basket of women's chapter changing the policy to a large extent giving voices to many women. In order to realize this in the Eleventh Plan (2007-2012), the government constituted a committee of feminist economists to ascertain gender-sensitive allocation of public resources to achieve the goals of

gender equality and inclusive growth. The committee suggested how schemes across sectors need to weave gender into the planning process (GOI 2007).

### Check Your Progress II

**Note:** Use the space provided for your answer

- 1) Examine the approach followed by the Five-Year Plans for women's development.

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## 2.5 POLICIES FOR DEVELOPMENT AND EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

In this section, we will discuss the policies made for development and empowerment of women in India. Policy directions emerge from the Committee on the Status of Women in India 1974, National Policy on Education 1986, National Perspective Plan 1988-2000, Shramshakti Report 1988 and National Policy on Empowerment of Women 2001.

**The Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India 1974** is a radical document considering the times in which it was formulated. The Committee made various recommendations with regard to the socio-cultural aspects. It suggested changes to be brought about in social attitudes and institutions through a planned process and concerted effort. There was a need to mobilize public opinion and create awareness on issues like dowry, polygamy, conspicuous expenditure on weddings, child marriages, and lead a campaign on legal rights of women. For this the Government would need to collaborate with the voluntary organizations working on women's issues.

On Women and Law, the committee recommended such marriage laws that provide equal footing to women. This was to be done by eradicating polygamy in Muslim Law, enforcing provision against bigamy under Hindu Marriage Act, restraint of child marriage which is still prevalent in rural areas and to provide the right to repudiate marriage on attaining majority to be made available to minor girls from all communities whether marriage was consummated or not. It states the importance of registering marriages, establishment of family courts to resolve matrimonial matters in a conciliatory manner, adopting a Uniform Civil Code (Article 44) valuing secularism, science and modernization since the continuity of personal laws causes inequality between women and men, among others.

In the economic sphere The Committee said that women are to be involved in national development. This requires extension of Maternity Benefits Act 1961 to other arenas of the economy, provision of crèches for working women, equalization of wages and its incorporation in the Minimum Wages Act, training programmes for women in industries to avoid their retrenchment, part-time employment for them, national employment service to assist women by providing them requisite information, provision of special leave without pay up to five years to enable women to take care of the family, setting up of women's wings in trade unions to highlight women's problems.

The Committee emphasized equality of educational opportunities. It recommended that co-education should be followed; common curricula should be followed for both girls and boys. It recommended three years of pre-school education for all children through balwadis in rural areas and urban slums; universalization of elementary education for children in the age-group of six to fourteen years; introduction of sex education middle school onwards; free secondary education for girls; gender equality to be woven in the curriculum, along with others. The gender gap in literacy can be reduced by involving the community in creating awareness among women.

In order to ensure women's participation in the political system of the country, the Committee suggests reservation of seats in municipalities for women as an interim measure, political parties to adopt a definite policy with regard to the percentage of women they would sponsor for elections to Parliament and state assemblies and inclusion of women in all important commissions formed to discuss socio-economic issues. The committee recommends a separate budget for maternity and child health care services, campaigns for family planning to also bring about a change in notions on fertility where women are blamed for the sex of the child, changes in the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act providing women control over their lives, along with other provisions. It suggests that in place of focusing on curative services, preventive and promotive health care should receive attention (NPP 1988).

**The National Policy on Education 1986** emphasizes on the need to equalize educational opportunities by removing disparities that exist in society. Under the section 'Education for Women's Equality' the policy observes that "education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of woman...The National Education system will play a positive, interventionist role in the empowerment of women" (1986: 6). This will be done through curricula, teacher training and active participation of the educational institutions. It also promotes women's studies and also encourages educational institutions to initiate programmes for women's development. Women's literacy will be encouraged and any hurdles in obstructing their access and retention in elementary education will be identified and tackled. Moreover, gender stereotyping in vocational and professional courses will be eliminated giving way to woman's participation in modern occupations.

**The National Perspective Plan for Women 1988-2000** perceives women in a holistic manner and assesses the effect of development plans and programmes on women. It aims at economic development and integration of women into the mainstream economy and equity and social justice for all women. The plan suggests measures to be adopted in the fields of agriculture, employment and training, supportive services (fuel, fodder, water, crèche, and housing), education, health and family welfare so that women could reach a level comparable to men by 2000. In agriculture and allied services, women-related development dimensions need to be discussed and women should be provided productive resources. The plan states that new avenues of employment have to be made available for women, improving their present working environment, employment and productivity potential, enabling them to become an 'articulate and conscious workforce', thus assuming the status and recognition of a worker. The supportive services provided to women would help them focus on work, at the same time reducing the daily drudgery they have to undergo. Issues of fuel, fodder and water are directly of concern to women so they should be included in the programmes designed on these aspects. The Plan envisages involving community members in girls' education and making them realize its importance for strengthening women's role in society and for socio-economic development of the nation. The National Literacy Mission should also involve women's organizations. Health is an important indicator of well-being for women's development. The Plan recommended that the amniocentesis tests be banned. There is a need to encourage parents to have female children. Health services should cater to women's health problems.

The Plan recognizes that the women's movement has struggled to get equal legislation. In spite of the constitution and various laws, equality has not been extended to women in society. Still, there is a greater incidence of violence against women in various forms. Thus, a multi-pronged group is required that monitors drafting of legislation, judicial decisions and such matters at Centre and State level. It is important to generate legal literacy among women so that they are able to exercise their political rights. Media and Communication play an important role in changing attitudes towards women and their support has to be sought in this regard. Voluntary action can also improve the status of women, particularly in rural areas. It can enable women to become self-reliant and act as a catalyst in organizing them for collective action. Such agencies can be involved in the Government-run employment and support services for women.

**Shramshakti: Report of the National Commission on Self-Employed Women and Women in the Informal Sector 1988** was set up to study in a comprehensive manner the working and living state of poor women. It includes unprotected labour, those who are self-employed, engaged in wage labour, paid or unpaid, and contract labour. Though women contribute to family and national economy, their work gets no recognition. Thus, "women worker" should be defined in a broad manner to include work, whether paid or unpaid, which she does within the household or outside as a worker or on her own account. It suggests that a multi-pronged approach that is flexible, integrated and area-specific should be adopted by planners. The ongoing exploitation and uneven control of resources cause women to survive in extreme poverty and destitution. Lack of knowledge, skills and resources makes them feel powerless. The existing development schemes do not overtly discriminate against women. Yet at the same time they do not also empower them. This feeling of powerlessness is the outcome of the subordinate status accorded to women in implementation of the policies which then makes men chief beneficiaries in any development project. Moreover, certain vested interests keep women subordinated to get cheap and docile labour. In such a situation, the commission recommends introduction of new packages and programmes that assist the poor and vulnerable women. The areas of employment need to be enlarged for women. Working conditions have to be improved, drudgery could be reduced and they be provided with social security. The Commission advocates adoption of a holistic and integrated approach.

**The National Policy for Empowerment of Women 2001** states that the judicial legal system will be sensitized towards women's needs. Old laws will be changed and new ones be made stringent to ensure punishment to offenders in accordance with the offence. Personal laws related to marriage, divorce, maintenance and guardianship will be changed to ensure equality for women. Alongside at the political level, women will be made partners in the decision-making and power-sharing process.

This policy realizes the need to mainstream gender perspectives in the development process. Women can act as catalysts, participants and recipients. For this, women's issues and concerns need emphasis in all plans, policies, laws and programmes of action. The strengthening of women's role in social, economic spheres and through institutional mechanisms would lead to empowerment. Box 2.2 discusses some of the salient features of this policy.

**Box 2.2: NPEW 2001: Salient Features**

- 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

## Women and Development Initiatives

- 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.

Source: NPEW 2001, p.7

According to the Policy, **economic empowerment** of women is essential for any change in their status. Since women form a major segment of those below the poverty line, hold low intra-household position and face ongoing inequity, policies and poverty-eradication programmes should cater to their needs. Such measures would help them build requisite capacities. In order to assist them in starting new enterprises, micro-credit would be made available to them from finance institutions. Women's viewpoint has to be included in the macro-economic policies. Their contribution to the formal and informal sector has to be acknowledged and the concept of work in the census records has to be revisited. Studies show that advantages of globalization have been unevenly distributed leading to economic inequalities, feminization of poverty and growing gender inequality. To address this, policy recommends strategies to be designed to empower women. The policy also recognizes the role of women in agriculture, information technology, electronics, food processing, agro-industry and textiles. It recommends provision of crèches at workplaces and educational institutions to enable women to participate fully in the social spheres. It suggests women-favourable personnel policies.

**Social Empowerment** can be ensured by focusing on education, health, nutrition, housing and shelter, environment, science and technology, combating violence and harnessing and regulating the mass media. In the arena of education, the policy assures equal access to girls/women by removal of discrimination, universalization of elementary education, increase in enrolment and retention of girls, improvement in quality of education, gender-sensitive curriculum and education system, also reduction in gender gap in secondary and higher education and to achieve sectoral time targets for vulnerable women belonging to SC/ST/OBC and minorities. The Policy envisions a holistic health perspective for women with focus on nutrition. It aims to achieve the national demographic goals for infant and maternal mortality rates, mentioned in the National Population Policy 2000. Women will also be enabled to exercise their reproductive rights. Registration of births, death and marriages will be made compulsory to strategize and deal with the problems that women face. Moreover, women face malnutrition in infancy/ childhood, adolescence, and reproductive stages and also face intra-household discrimination. Toilet facilities and safe drinking water has to be made available in urban slums and rural areas.

The policy aims to involve women's perspective in designing policies and programmes for conservation and restoration of the environment. Women will also be motivated to take up science and technology in higher education. The policy

recognizes the need to pay attention to the women in critical circumstances such as those in destitution, conflict situations, affected by natural calamities, widows, elderly women etc. Moreover, women facing continuous violence, both physical and mental, at home or in society will be able to approach institutions thus created to eliminate such acts. Mass media will be regulated to depict images that portray women in diverse roles and do not hurt their dignity. The Policy realizes the significance of gender budgeting to make the planning process gender conscious. It discusses the Women's Component Plan and assigns the Department of Women and Child Development, being the "nodal ministry", to monitor and review the progress of the implementation of the Component Plan from time to time, in terms of both quality and quantity in collaboration with the Planning Commission".

**Political Empowerment** of women is essential to enable them to play an effective role in the political system. Universal Adult Suffrage (Article 326) ensures that all the citizens of India 18 years and above have the right to vote irrespective of caste, class and gender. The 73rd and 74th Constitution Amendment Acts 1993 are inserted in Parts IX and IX-A of the Constitution. Part IX relates to Panchayats containing Articles 243 to 243-O and Part IX-A relates to Municipalities containing Articles 243P to 243 ZG. Article 243 D states that not less than one-third of the total number of seats to be filled by direct elections in every Panchayat shall be reserved for women. Of the total seats reserved for the scheduled caste/ scheduled tribe in proportion to their population, one-third are to be reserved for SC/ST women (Basu 2004:275).

### Check Your Progress III

**Note:** Use the space provided for your answer

- 1) Discuss the main policies for women's development.

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## 2.6 PROGRAMMES FOR WOMEN

The Ministry of Women and Child Development has launched many programmes for women in the field of education, health, employment so as to enable them to become self-reliant. Some of the major programmes are discussed in this sector.

### Mahila Samakhya

Mahila Samakhya has taken the shape of women's movement changing the lives of women in 14000 villages in 60 districts of nine states namely Karnataka, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Bihar, Assam, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh and Uttaranchal says K.K. Khullar (2007). It started in response to the National Policy on Education 1986 and its Programme of Action in 1992. Now, along with women's non-formal education it centres on health issues, human rights and governance where its objective is to create a gender-just society by empowering women. This scheme has also encourages women in other states to struggle for issues close to their lives e.g. in Haryana women protested alcoholism, in Himachal Pradesh they stood against polygamy and in Tamil Nadu they resisted the practice of devdasis. Dowry, violence against women, infanticide, foetus death, child labour are issues of ongoing struggle. Didi Banks (Sister's Banks), Kishori Sanghas, Jago Behan (Arise, Sister)

are auxiliaries of the Mahila Samakhya programme. This programme has empowered women through education enabling them to assert their rights, becoming visible in family and community and also demanding accountability from the government bodies. Based on Gandhian philosophy, it believes in principles of volunteerism, community participation, decentralization and mass mobilization.

The nodal units of Mahila Samakhya are the Mahila Sanghas which run schools, dispensaries, markets, banks and also participate in Panchayati Raj Institutions. HERS, Sakhis or Sahyoginis work as catalysts facilitating formation and functioning of the Sanghas. They usually work in around ten villages to organize women. The Nari Adalats, started by Gujarat initially have been adopted by all the Mahila Samakhya States to organize collective action against violence. These are also spaces available for discussion to women. Kishori Sanghas engage adolescent girls and create awareness on health issues and natural resources. These Sanghas train girls to play active roles in communities. In Bihar and Jharkhand, the graduates of Mahila Shikshan Kendras mobilize the community to get children back to school, especially girls. They act as role models, also ensuring universalization of elementary education for girls.

### **Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP)**

This Programme was launched in 1987 to provide updated skills and new knowledge to poor and asset-less women in the traditional sectors such as agriculture, animal husbandry, dairying, fisheries, handlooms, handicrafts, khadi and village industries, sericulture, social forestry and wasteland development for enhancing their productivity and income generation. This would enhance and broaden their employment opportunities, including self-employment and development of entrepreneurial skills. A comprehensive package of services, such as health care, elementary education, crèche facilities, market linkages etc. are provided besides access to credit.

During the Ninth Plan period, about 255635 women beneficiaries were covered under 66 projects implemented in the States of Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Kerala, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Manipur, Nagaland, Orissa, Tamil Nadu, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh, Uttaranchal and West Bengal. The Tenth Plan period has provided training to 215651 women beneficiaries under the scheme.

### **Hostels for Working Women**

The scheme of assistance for construction or expansion of hostel buildings for working women with day care centres for children is in implementation since 1972-73. Under this scheme, financial assistance is provided to non-governmental organizations, cooperative bodies and other agencies engaged in the field of women's social welfare, women's education, etc., for construction of buildings for Working Women's Hostels. It envisages provision of safe and affordable hostel accommodation to working women (single working women, women working at places away from their home-towns, widows, divorcees, separated women etc.) and women being trained for employment and girl students. Trainees are permitted to stay for a period of one year and girl students for a period of five years, but with the conditions that first preference would be given to working women. It is also stipulated in the scheme that the category of women who are being trained for employment and girl students should not exceed 30% of the capacity of the hostel.

Till now (upto 2007) only 876 hostels have been sanctioned throughout the country. Since the demand for Working Women Hostels is on the increase due to increasing number of women in employment, a Committee was set up to revamp the scheme so as to make it more viable.

### **Swadhar: A Scheme for Women in Difficult Circumstances**

This scheme was launched by the Ministry during the year 2001-2002 for the benefit of women in difficult circumstances with the following objectives: to provide primary need of shelter, food, clothing and care to the marginalized women/girls living in difficult circumstances; to provide emotional support and counselling to such women; to rehabilitate them socially and economically through education, awareness, skill up-gradation and personality development through behavioural training etc; to arrange for specific clinical, legal and other support for women/girls in need of those interventions by linking and networking with other organizations in both Government and Non-Government Sectors on case-to-case basis; to provide help-line or other facilities to such women in distress; and to provide such other services as will be required for support and rehabilitation of such women in distress. The target group comprises of widows deserted by their families, women prisoners released from jail and without family support, women survivors of natural disasters, trafficked women/ girls rescued, women victims of terrorist/ extremist violence, mentally challenged women, women with HIV/AIDS and similarly placed women in difficult circumstances. The implementing agencies are the Social Welfare/Women and Child Welfare Department of State Governments, Women's Development Corporation, Urban Local Bodies and reputed Public/Private Trusts or Voluntary Organizations. In 2008, a total of 208 Swadhar Shelter Homes and 210 Women Helplines are functional across the country.

### **Prevention of Trafficking of Women and Children for Commercial Sexual Exploitation**

Trafficking in human beings is an organized crime violating all basic human rights. India has emerged as a source, transit and destination country. It is estimated that there are three million sex workers in India, of which 40 percent constitute children, as young as 10 years old. Most often these victims are trafficked through means like duping, luring, fake marriages, abducting, kidnapping and manipulating social and economic vulnerabilities and sold to brothels where they are continuously subjected to abuse, violence and exploitation by perpetrators of the crime.

The main legislation "Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956" lays down provisions for providing stringent punishment to the perpetrators of such crime. In addition, the Indian Penal Code also provides provisions for crimes related to trafficking. India is also signatory to various International and regional Conventions such as UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (with its protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons especially women and children), SAARC Convention on Preventing and Combating Trafficking of Women and Children in Prostitution, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and Convention on the Rights of the Child.

### **Scheme for Relief and Rehabilitation of Victims of Rape**

The Scheme for Relief and Rehabilitation of Victims of Rape, 2005 provides for constitution of Criminal Injuries Relief and Rehabilitation Board at each and every district to award compensation to rape victims; and District Monitoring Committees to provide shelter, protection, legal and medical aid and other rehabilitative measures for the victims. The Scheme has been included in the Report of the Working Group on Empowerment of Women for the Eleventh Plan. An amount of Rs.1 crore in the year 2007-08 has been allocated for the new scheme.

### **Swawlamban**

Swawlamban scheme, previously known as NORAD (Norwegian Agency for International Development) / Women's Economic Programme, was started in 1982-83 with the objective of providing training and skills to the poor and needy women and women from weaker sections of the society such as Scheduled Castes and

Scheduled Tribes, etc. to facilitate them in obtaining employment or self-employment on a sustained basis. There are 36 traditional and non-traditional trades for which assistance is provided under the scheme. The State Women's Development Corporations (WDCs) are the nodal agencies for implementation of the scheme mostly through voluntary organizations in the States.

### **Reproductive and Child Health Programme (RCH)**

Promotion of maternal and child health has been one of the most important objectives of the Family Welfare Programme in India. The current Reproductive and Child Health Programme (RCH) was launched in October 1997. The RCH Programme incorporates the components covered under the Child Survival and Safe Motherhood Programme and includes an additional component relating to reproductive tract infection and sexually transmitted infections. In order to improve maternal health at the community level a cadre of community level skilled birth attendants who will attend to the pregnant women in the community is being considered. The need for bringing down maternal mortality rate significantly and improving maternal health in general has been strongly stressed in the National Population Policy 2000. This policy recommends a holistic strategy for bringing about total inter-sectoral coordination at the grass root level and involving the NGOs, Civil Society, Panchayati Raj Institutions and women's groups in bringing down Maternal Mortality Ratio and Infant Mortality Rate.

#### **Check Your Progress IV**

**Note:** Use the space provided for your answer

- 1) Discuss the programmes for women's development.

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## **2.7 LET US SUM UP**

In this Unit, we have discussed various policies and programmes that aim to empower women. There are various constitutional safeguards and legislations that guarantee women's equal status. Policies like CSWI, National Policy on Education, National Perspective Plan for Women, Shramshakti Report, and National Policy on Empowerment of Women recognize women's contribution to society and suggest ways to empower them. They consider women as participants in the development process and not mere beneficiaries of welfare programmes. In the light of these policies, various programmes were started. These empowered women in developing their potential to lead a dignified life.

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