A Study on Welfare Measures for Women’s Empowerment in India

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Abstract

Women’s are like Backbone of every human beings life. So it is inevitable for the government and the society to protect, safeguard the rights of women. It is also a prime responsibility of the government to enhance the quality standards of women’s life, and for the upgrading the existing standards of the existing society as well as improving the national economy. Women’s are the foundation and pillars of this world. Women’s empowerment is also contributes more towards the societal development, creation of economic environment. Hence it is too important to analyze, understand the various aspects of Women’s empowerment process. There are several challenges that are now connected with the issues of women’s rights in India. A few of important challenges are discussed in this article. That is the reason behind this present article and made an attempt and tried to provide possible details to the readers to know the basic facts related to Women’s empowerment in India.

Key Words: Empowerment, Women’s Empowerment, Women Development, Empowering Women, Eradication of Poverty, Violence against Women, Economic Reforms, Gender Development Indices.

Introduction

The Government of India have launched a number of initiatives to increase investment in agriculture and rural development, in education and health care, in urban renewal and poverty removal, in rural infrastructure and in generation of rural employment especially for women entrepreneurs. Surely these initiatives will bear good results and it will certainly make the growth process more inclusive. There was a regional disparity among the states. The 9 per cent growth rate is an average of over 10 per cent in some parts of India and under 3 per cent in others. Large continental economies are bound to have inter-regional disparities. However, we cannot afford to allow this gap between our developed and backward regions persist. This is where the role of State Governments comes into focus.

Therefore, while there is still an unfinished agenda of economic reforms so the real action will have to be taken at the State level. The successful implementation of our social and human development initiatives requires greater Public-Private Partnership. This is yet another important initiative of our nation. We have to ensure productivity of resource utilization we should deeply concern about the efficiency in utilization of public funds, especially in infrastructure development, education and health care. We should look forward to combine our concern for equitable outcomes with our concern for efficient utilization of outlays. Hence under this topic I would like to analyze the facts about economic reforms and women empowerment, what are the steps already taken to empower the women, what are the steps to be taken and plans to be implemented to empower the women? What are all the opportunities available for women empowerment? Why it is needed at the present scenario. The following statement clearly expresses the meaning of women’s empowerment.

What is Women Empowerment?

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has defined empowerment as the process "of giving people the power, capacities, capabilities and access needed to change their own lives, improve their own communities and influence their own destinies." It is a process which enables a person to understand the workings of power so that they can deal with questions of existing power and exercise control over the sources of power.

Women’s empowerment is not a Northern concept. Women all over the world, including countries in the South, have been challenging and changing gender inequalities since the beginnings of
history. These struggles have also been supported by many men who have been outraged at injustices against women and the consequences for society. It would be yet another instance of imperialism to say all these women and men did not have minds of their own.

The word empowerment, although it gained widespread usage in the context of the US Civil Rights and Women's Movements is an extension of earlier concepts of equality, justice and freedom which were expressed in many anti-imperialist and political struggles. These are also enshrined in international agreements and also bring about the principles of many religious traditions, including Islam.

**Objectives of the Present Study**

- To insist for today’s necessity for women empowerment in India
- To identify, analyze the steps already been taken and aids available for women empowerment in India.
- To suggest the steps to be taken for women’s empowerment

**Methodology**

The data required for this study collected only from secondary sources. The time spent to collect the required data related to welfare schemes related to women empowerment is four months from Jan 2014 to April 2014. In addition to strengthen the theoretical background of the study, the required data also collected from the books, articles, magazines, journals and etc.

**Limitations of the Study**

- The study reviews India’s developmental strategies including recent economic reforms and its impact on women empowerment.
- Discussing about economic performance and its outlooks.
- It also reviews women empowerment from our independence.

Due to financial and time constraints its content is made out of secondary data only.

**Need for Empowering Women**

Women always and almost blended with all kinds of responsibility to meet the basic requirements of the family. The Universal Statistical report says that the majority of the world's poor community and two thirds of the world's illiterate population are female. Out of the millions of school aged children are not able to get school education. Especially the girl children. In addition to it, now the AIDS is becoming a woman's disease. In the present days the millions of people eat two or three times a day, but on a contrary the percentage of women eat only once. Many women refuse themselves even that one time meal to ensure that their children are fed. These women are already suffering the effects of even more severe undernourishment, which inexorably their children's fate as well.

The present study concentrates on what are all the remedy available for women empowerment, when they are going to be empowered, when they will get all kinds of social benefits out of the remedial measures taken by the Indian government and governmental welfare measure related policies. The current also study firmly believes that empowering women will be the key aspect to achieve the end of poverty and lack of earning capacity of the Indian women. The study focusing and aims to extend the moral support to empower the women and built their inherent capacity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poverty Headcount Ratio (2016)</th>
<th>World Bank</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Live less than $1.25 a day</td>
<td>96.9% (1,179 million)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live less than $2 a day</td>
<td>93.7% (1,148 million)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live less than $2.5 a day</td>
<td>81.1% (992 million)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live less than $4 a day</td>
<td>68.7% (841 million)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live less than $6 a day</td>
<td>32.7% (400 million)</td>
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Poverty is considered the greatest threat to peace in the world, and eradication of poverty should be a national goal as important as the eradication of illiteracy. Here the following table shows the poverty head count ratio for the readers reference and understanding. The majorities of the women populations are falls below the
poverty line. Therefore there is a need for having poverty eradication programs specifically address the needs and problems of such women. The steps will be taken for poor women and junction of required aided services, by offering them a range of economic and social options, along with necessary support measures to enhance their capabilities.

**Women’s Education**

Equal access to education for women and girls should be ensured. Special measures will be taken to remove unfairness, universalize education, wipe out illiteracy, create a gender-sensitive educational system, increase enrolment and retention rates of girls and improve the quality of education to facilitate long learning and development of occupation, technical skills by women. Reducing the gender gap in secondary and higher education should be a focus area. Sectoral time targets in existing policies should be achieved, with a special focus on girls and women, specifically those who belongs to poor and weaker sections of the society including the SC/ST/OBC categories as well as Minority groups.

**Evolution of Women Empowerment**

From the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-78) onwards has been a marked change in the approach to women’s issues from welfare to development. Now, women empowerment has been acknowledged 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. On the other hand, the 73rd and 74th Amendments (1993) to the Constitution of India have provided for seat reservation in the local bodies of Panchayats and Municipalities for women, laying a strong foundation for their participation in decision making at the local levels. India has also approved various international meetings and human rights instruments committing to secure equal rights of women.

The Mexico Plan of Action (1975), the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies (1985), the Beijing Declaration as well as the Platform for Action (1995) and the Outcome Document adopted by the UNGA Session on Gender Equality and Development & Peace for the 21st century, titled "Further actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action" have been completely approved by India for appropriate follow up. The Policy also takes note of the commitments of the Ninth Five Year Plan and the other Sectoral Policies relating to empowerment of Women.

The women’s movement and a wide-spread network of non-Government Organizations which have strong grass-roots presence and deep insight into women’s concerns have contributed in inspiring initiatives for the empowerment of women. Accordingly, the access of women particularly those belonging to weaker sections including Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes/ Other backward Classes and minorities, majority of whom are in the rural areas and in the informal, unorganized sector – to education, health and productive resources, among others, is inadequate. Therefore, they remain largely marginalized, poor and socially excluded.

**Policy Related Objectives towards Women’s Empowerment**

The objective of the Women Empowerment Policy includes the following aspects:

- Creating an environment through positive economic policies for the development of women to enable them to realize their full potential
- 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.
- 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 participation and decision making of women in social, political and economic life of the nation
- Strengthening legal systems aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women
- Changing societal attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women.
- Mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process.
- Elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and the girl child; and
- Building and strengthening partnerships with civil society, particularly women’s organizations.

Rights of Girl Child

All forms of prejudice against the girl child and violation of her rights shall be eliminated by undertaking strong measures both preventive and corrective within and outside the family. These would relate specifically to strict enforcement of laws against prenatal sex selection and the practices of female feticide, female infanticide, child marriage, child abuse and child prostitution etc. Removal of prejudice in the treatment of the girl child within the family and outside and projection of a positive image of the girl child will be actively fostered. There will be special emphasis on the needs of the girl child and set aside of substantial investments in the areas relating to food and nutrition, health and education, and in vocational education. In implementing programmes for eliminating child labour, there will be a special focus on girl children.

Achieving Health related Targets

Special attention should be given to the needs of women and the girl at all stages of their life cycle. The reduction of infant mortality and maternal death, which are sensitive indicators of human development, is a priority concern. This policy recap the national demographic goals for Infant Mortality Rate, Maternal death Rate set out in the National Population Policy. Women should have access to comprehensive, affordable and quality health care. To effectively meet problems of child and motherly death, 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 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.

Crimes Rate against Women

The crimes against women fly directly against women empowerment in India. A report on the crimes against women by the National Crime Records Bureau comes up with some alarming statistics:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year wise Statistical Report towards Crime Rate against women from 2006 to 2012</th>
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<tr>
<td>S.No</td>
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### Recent Trends and Measures Taken by the Government towards Women’s Empowerment

- Recently our democratic and development policies, our laws, Plans and procedures have aimed at women’s advancement in different aspects. From the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-78) onwards, there has been a shift in the approach to women’s issues from welfare to development.
- In recent years the empowerment of women has been recognized as an important 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 powers of women.
- 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.
- The national policy for women, 2001 is a step in building up a strong women’s movement. The goal of this policy is to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women.
- 9th Five Year Plan is committed to women’s empowerment. The principle of gender equity is focused in the Indian Constitution Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. The Constitution grants not only equality to women, but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favor of women.

### Availability of Assistance Schemes for Women Empowerment in India

#### (A). PRIME MINISTER’S ROZGAR YOJANA (PMRY)

- The Government of India is implementing a subsidy-linked self-employment scheme for providing employment to educated unemployed in the rural and urban areas in the age group of 18 to 35 years.
- There is no separate target for women but preference is to be given to women beneficiaries and other weaker sections.
- It is observed that about 80,000 women borrowers have been sanctioned loans by banks to avail of self-employment during the last three years under the scheme.
- The minimum educational qualification fixed is to pass Std. VIII.
The beneficiary is required to bring in 5 per cent as margin money and Government provides subsidy of 15 per cent of the project cost. The ceiling on subsidy is Rs. 7,500/- in States/Union Territories other than North Eastern Region where the ceiling is up to Rs. 15,000/-.  

(B). SWARNA JAYANTI GRAM SWAROZGAR YOJANA (SJGSY)

The main objective of this scheme is to bring every family above the poverty line in three years by providing them income generating assets through a mix of bank credit and government subsidy. The monthly income from activity to be undertaken should not be less than Rs. 2,000/- net of repayment to the bank at least in the third year.

It covers all aspects of self-employment such as organization of poor into Self Help Groups, training, credit technology, infrastructure and marketing. The scheme will be funded on 75:25 basis by Centre and States and will be implemented through panchayat.

(C). SWARNA JAYANTHI SHAHARI ROZGAR YOJANA (SJSRY)

It is in practice in all urban and semi-urban towns of India. The scheme has two sub-schemes where bank credit is involved, namely Urban Self Employment Program, Development of Women and Children in Urban Areas (DWCUA). Women are to be assisted to the extent of not less than 30 per cent. It is funded on a 75:25 basis between Centre and State.

(D). SELF HELP GROUPS (SHGs)

This is a cost-effective mechanism for providing financial services to the unreached and underserved poor women. Self Help Groups are small economically homogeneous and affinity groups of rural poor voluntarily coming together to save small amounts regularly, to mutually agree to contribute to a common fund, to have collective decision-making and to provide collateral free loans with terms decided by the group at market driven rates.

(E). SUPPORT FOR SETTING UP OF WOMEN DEVELOPMENT CELLS (SSWDC)

Under this scheme, assistance in the form of grants is being extended to meet 50 per cent of the pay and allowances forming part of the salary of key personnel (lady officer) to be appointed in such cells by the Regional Rural Banks and Cooperative Banks, subject to a maximum of Rs. 75,000/- per cell per annum. So far 91 such cells have been set up in 15 States.

(F). SWAYAMSIDHA PROGRAMME

The Ministry is also implementing the Swayamsidha Programme. This Programme is an integrated scheme for the empowerment of women with a cost of Rs. 116.30 Crores. Central part to this programme will be the establishment of women’s self-help groups which empowers women to have increased access to all kinds of resources that they are denied, in addition to increasing their awareness and skills. Thorough this programme 9,30,000 women’s have benefited with the setting up of 53,000 self-help groups, 26,500 village societies and 650 block societies.

(G). National Commission for Women

The National Commission for Women is a Department within the Ministry of Women and Child Development. It was set up exclusively to help women by reviewing Legal and Constitutional safeguards for women, recommending remedial legislative measures, by facilitating quick redressal of grievances and by advising the Government of India on all policy matters affecting women.

FINDINGS

- It is found that the Government of India taking lot of initiatives to strengthening of institutions for protecting women's rights and Values.
- It is observed that currently there is a need for allocation of funds for providing adequate education and training for women and girls to ensure women empowerment.
- It is also found that there is a need for creation of special funds for science and IT education for women’s development.
- It is also found that the requirement of special measures needed for determining equal educational opportunities for women, ensuring equal participation of women in administration.
- It is also observed that the introduction of legislative and administrative reforms needed for women’s equal access to economic resources including the right to own land and other assets, to credit, to natural resources and to appropriate technology.
Certain measures adopted for the past years to modify the social and cultural behavioral patterns of men and women.

SUGGESTIONS

- It is suggested to achieve the measurable goals to enhance the lifestyle of the women in India
- Identification and commitment of resources should be identified to ensure the development of women in India.
- Action plans should be implemented to achieve the women empowerment related targets
- Structures and mechanisms to ensure efficient monitoring, review and gender impact assessment of action points and policies.
- In order to have better planning and programmed formulation and adequate allocation of resources, Gender Development Indices (GDI) should be developed by networking with specialized agencies.

CONCLUSION

Based on the above detailed discussions, the researcher concluded that there should be a strong and concrete structure of implementation needed to upgrade the standards and qualities of Women’s empowerment. In India, the government taking many promotional and welfare measures to protect and safeguard the rights of women’s rights but due to population size, not able to identify and to reach the welfare measures to the village level, unable to implement effective supervision, the government not able to achieve their predetermined objectives at the expected level. But surely we hope India will achieve its target to empower women in future with the support of framing of effective policy and through its outstanding implementation to enhance the status of women’s life and increase the standard of our nation with huge delight.

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