



## REVIEWING WOMEN EMPOWERMENT POLICIES FOR VIKSIT BHARAT@2047: STRATEGIES AND CHALLENGES

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### Abstract

*Women's empowerment is central to the realization of Viksit Bharat@2047, India's vision of becoming a developed, inclusive, and equitable nation by the centenary of independence. India has built a broad policy framework for women's development through constitutional guarantees, gender-sensitive legislation, flagship programmes of the Ministry of Women and Child Development, financial inclusion initiatives, and entrepreneurship support platforms. Recent policy consolidation under schemes such as Mission Shakti and Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0 reflects an effort to move from welfare-based support to multidimensional empowerment that includes safety, nutrition, care, livelihood, and access to public services. At the same time, persistent barriers remain: women's work is still heavily informal, unpaid care responsibilities reduce labour market continuity, access to quality childcare and safe mobility remains uneven, and progress in leadership and political representation is slower than needed for transformational change.*

*This paper reviews the major women empowerment policies relevant to Viksit Bharat@2047 and analyses their strategic significance, implementation gaps, and future challenges. It argues that India's policy direction is increasingly aligned with women-led development, but the success of this vision will depend on stronger inter-ministerial coordination, better gender budgeting, state-level delivery capacity, digital and financial inclusion, labour-market reforms, and stronger systems for measurement and accountability. The paper concludes that women's empowerment must be treated as a cross-sector development strategy rather than as a stand-alone social policy field.*

**Keywords:** *Women empowerment; Viksit Bharat@2047; gender equality; Mission Shakti; financial inclusion; female labour force participation; gender budgeting; women-led development; India public policy; social inclusion.*

### Introduction

Viksit Bharat@2047 envisions India as a developed nation that is economically strong, socially just, technologically advanced, and institutionally inclusive. Within that vision,

women's empowerment is not merely a welfare concern but a structural requirement for inclusive growth, demographic dividend realization, improved family well-being, and democratic deepening. When women have greater access to education, nutrition, healthcare, finance, and productive work, the gains extend beyond individual advancement to households, communities, and the national economy.

India's policy discourse has also shifted from "development for women" toward "women-led development." This shift signals that women are not only beneficiaries of state policy but also agents of growth, enterprise, governance, and social transformation. However, a policy review is necessary because the existence of schemes does not automatically produce empowerment outcomes; the effectiveness of these policies depends on implementation quality, institutional convergence, and the ability to address deep-rooted social constraints.

### **Conceptual framework**

Women's empowerment is multidimensional. It includes educational attainment, bodily autonomy, reproductive and maternal health, freedom from violence, economic participation, ownership or control over assets, financial access, digital inclusion, voice in household and public decision-making, and representation in leadership. A Viksit Bharat approach therefore requires policy design that links empowerment with human capital formation, labour markets, social protection, and democratic participation rather than treating these domains in isolation. For policy analysis, this paper uses three lenses. First, the capability lens asks whether women gain substantive freedoms and opportunities. Second, the institutional lens examines whether laws, budgets, and delivery systems support equality in practice. Third, the transformation lens asks whether policies are shifting social norms and redistributing unpaid care work, which is essential for long-term gender justice.

### **Policy Landscape in India**

India's women empowerment framework rests on constitutional commitments to equality, non-discrimination, and affirmative action, supported by sectoral laws on maternity benefits, workplace protections, and measures against discrimination and violence. In the current policy architecture, the Ministry of Women and Child Development acts as the apex body for formulating and administering policies related to women and children while coordinating with other ministries and state governments.

A major recent development is the consolidation of several schemes under umbrella programmes. The Ministry now implements three major centrally sponsored schemes: Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0, Mission Shakti, and Mission Vatsalya. Of these,

Mission Shakti is directly focused on support for women through care, safety, protection, rehabilitation, and empowerment, with the sub-schemes Sambal and Samarthya.

Mission Shakti is especially relevant to Viksit Bharat@2047 because it combines safety and empowerment functions within one umbrella design. Sambal includes interventions related to safety and security, while Samarthya covers empowerment-oriented initiatives such as support systems for women in distress, maternity benefits, working women's hostels, and the National Crèche Scheme through its broader scheme lineage. This reflects a recognition that women's economic agency cannot be separated from care infrastructure, safety systems, and social support.

The 2025-26 budget pattern also shows an important policy signal. PRS reports that Mission Shakti received Rs 3,150 crore in 2025-26, a 117 percent increase over the revised estimates of the previous year, while the Samarthya component rose by 145 percent. This rise suggests greater emphasis on empowerment-oriented spending, although the overall Ministry budget still remains a small share of total central expenditure.

Nutrition policy is also foundational to women's empowerment. Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0 addresses malnutrition among children, adolescent girls, pregnant women, and lactating mothers, integrating earlier programmes under a common framework. This matters for Viksit Bharat because women's empowerment begins with survival, nutrition, and health across the life cycle, especially during adolescence and motherhood.

Financial inclusion and entrepreneurship have become another major policy frontier. NITI Aayog's 2025 release on women's role in India's financial growth story reported that 27 million women were monitoring their credit as of December 2024, up 42 percent from the previous year, and that women's share in business loan origination had increased since 2019. These trends indicate that credit awareness and enterprise participation are expanding, although structural constraints in collateral, guarantors, and banking experience remain significant.

### **Strategic Relevance for Viksit Bharat@2047**

Women's empowerment contributes directly to economic growth through higher labour supply, entrepreneurship, productivity, and human capital development. Reports summarizing Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2023-24 indicate that female labour force participation has risen substantially in recent years, reaching 41.7 percent by usual status measures, yet much of this increase is linked to rural and informal work rather than secure formal

employment. This means India may be seeing rising participation without a corresponding rise in quality employment, income security, or career progression.

This distinction is crucial for Viksit Bharat@2047. A developed economy cannot rely on statistical increases in labour participation alone; it needs women in decent work, skilled sectors, management, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) roles, and enterprise ownership. Therefore, the strategic objective should be not only more women working, but more women working safely, productively, formally, and with social protection. Women's empowerment is equally important for intergenerational development. Better nutrition, maternal health, education, and decision-making autonomy among women improve child survival, school outcomes, and long-term productivity. Research perspectives connected to Viksit Bharat repeatedly emphasize that empowering women across the life course strengthens both public health and national development.

There is also a territorial dimension. NITI Aayog's financial inclusion update notes that non-metro women showed stronger growth in credit monitoring than metro women, and several northern and central states recorded high growth in active women borrowers. This indicates that policy opportunity is no longer limited to major urban centers; however, it also means that region-specific institutional support, mentoring, and access-to-market systems are essential.

### **Strategies for Strengthening Policy Impact**

- **Move from scheme delivery to systems integration**

India has many relevant schemes, but women's empowerment outcomes are spread across ministries dealing with health, education, skills, rural development, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), transport, housing, labour, and digital infrastructure. The next strategic step is convergence: a woman should be able to move seamlessly across nutrition support, childcare, skilling, credit, market linkages, safety services, and legal aid. Without integrated delivery, even well-designed schemes remain fragmented.

- **Prioritize quality employment, not participation alone**

The rise in women's labour force participation is encouraging but insufficient when women remain concentrated in unpaid family work, low-productivity agriculture, or insecure informal jobs. Policy must therefore focus on safe transport, urban childcare, flexible work norms, skilling for growth sectors, anti-harassment mechanisms, and incentives for formal-sector hiring and retention of women. This is especially important for educated women whose labour market potential remains underused.

- **Expand care infrastructure**

Unpaid care work remains one of the deepest structural barriers to women's economic participation. Crèches, working women's hostels, maternity support, community childcare, and eldercare services should be treated as productive infrastructure rather than social expenditure. Mission Shakti's empowerment components already point in this direction, but scale, accessibility, and quality need major strengthening.

- **Deepen financial and digital inclusion**

Women's entrepreneurship requires more than credit announcements. It depends on digital identity, financial literacy, collateral alternatives, credit histories, mentoring, e-commerce access, and market integration. NITI Aayog's data on rising credit awareness among women is promising, but the same source notes continuing barriers such as credit aversion, poor banking experiences, and difficulties around collateral and guarantors.

- **Strengthen gender budgeting and accountability**

The increase in Mission Shakti allocation is important, but a Viksit Bharat strategy needs stronger outcome-based budgeting across ministries, not only within the Women and Child Development Ministry. Gender budgeting should track access, utilization, quality, and outcomes across transport, digital infrastructure, skilling, policing, higher education, and public procurement. This would shift policy evaluation from expenditure counts to empowerment impact.

- **Support leadership and decision-making**

Economic empowerment is incomplete without voice and representation. Women need stronger presence in local governance, administration, technology leadership, academia, business leadership, and political institutions. Development by 2047 will require institutional cultures that normalize women's authority in decision-making spaces rather than restricting them to symbolic inclusion.

### **Major Challenges**

- **Implementation gaps**

The most persistent challenge is implementation quality. PRS notes that in the last nine years, actual expenditure by the Ministry has often been lower than budget allocations, and underutilization has been linked to implementation gaps and state-level funding and utilization conditions. This suggests that budget announcements alone are not reliable indicators of impact.

- **Social norms and unpaid care**

Patriarchal norms continue to shape women's educational choices, mobility, safety, marriage timing, and work continuity. Even when legal and programmatic support exists, women often face resistance at the household and community level, especially in relation to paid work, migration, leadership, and ownership of assets. These norms interact with unpaid domestic labour to restrict autonomy.

- **Informality and poor job quality**

A large share of women's work remains informal, vulnerable, and poorly paid. Reports drawing on recent labour data emphasize that rural women have driven much of the participation increase, raising concerns that distress-driven or low-quality work may be inflating progress indicators. For Viksit Bharat, the challenge is to convert participation into productive, remunerative, and dignified employment.

- **Weak support ecosystems**

Credit access without mentoring, market access, digital fluency, and legal support has limited transformative value. Similarly, skill training without employer linkages or safe mobility tends to produce weak outcomes. The policy challenge is therefore ecosystem design, not only scheme proliferation.

- **Uneven federal capacity**

State capacity varies significantly across India. Since many centrally sponsored schemes depend on state co-funding, administrative readiness, and utilization reporting, women's empowerment outcomes can become geographically uneven. This creates a risk that Viksit Bharat progress will be uneven across regions unless stronger cooperative federal mechanisms are developed.

### **Policy Recommendations**

A future-ready women empowerment agenda for Viksit Bharat@2047 should include the following:

- Adopt a whole-of-government gender strategy with measurable 2030, 2035, and 2047 targets linked to employment quality, entrepreneurship, safety, health, digital inclusion, and leadership.
- Expand affordable childcare, hostels, and care services as economic infrastructure that directly supports women's labour market continuity.

- Improve job quality by linking women's skilling programmes to formal-sector placement, social security coverage, and career progression in high-growth sectors.
- Build gender-smart finance systems through collateral-light products, women-focused business advisory services, and stronger bank accountability for inclusion.
- Use district-level gender dashboards to monitor service access, labour outcomes, violence response systems, and entrepreneurship support across states.
- Strengthen norm-change strategies through schools, media, workplaces, and community institutions so that policy reform is matched by social transformation.

### Conclusion

The review shows that India has created a significant policy base for women's empowerment and has begun aligning it with the broader ambition of Viksit Bharat@2047. The expansion of Mission Shakti, the continued focus on nutrition and care, and the growing policy emphasis on women's entrepreneurship and financial inclusion all indicate a shift toward women-led development. The distance between policy design and empowerment outcomes remains substantial. To make Viksit Bharat genuinely inclusive by 2047, India must move beyond fragmented schemes toward integrated systems that reduce unpaid care burdens, improve job quality, support women's enterprise, and ensure that empowerment is measurable not only through access but through agency, dignity, and leadership.

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