

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF GOVERNMENT POLICIES, PLANS, AND INITIATIVES FOR WOMEN

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Abstract

Education is essential for achieving full human potential; women's education is the issue raised before independence and repeatedly raised to utilize all the nation's human resources and promote gender equality. After the independence of India, the constitutional makers and national leaders strongly demanded equal social positions for women and men. Education for women is crucial for societal progress and gender equality. Governments and organizations worldwide recognize the significance of empowering women through education. In India, various initiatives have aimed at promoting education for women, including campaigns to increase enrollment, provide scholarships, and create a conducive environment for learning. The Indian constitution and policymakers mentioned some constitutional provisions and special initiatives for women. Therefore, the constitution of India incorporated the government plan and policies of women's empowerment in different ways, which became effective in the year 1950. Article 14 ensures the right to equality for women; Article 15 (1) Prohibits gender discrimination; Article 15 (3) empowers the state to take affirmative steps in favor of women. The Equal Remuneration Act of 1976, The Maternity Benefit Act in 1961, and The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention and Protection Act) in 2013 are some of the few specific laws the Indian Parliament sanctioned concerning Women's rights. In 2001, the Government of India started a national policy for Women's Empowerment with objectives like strengthening legal systems to eliminate discrimination against women. Also, the government and Education Policy took a few initiatives for Women's empowerment. However, the importance of such initiatives lies in fostering gender equality, ensuring equal opportunities, and enhancing the socio-economic status of woman.

Keywords: Women's Empowerment, Government Plan and Policies for Women

Introduction

“You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women.”

-Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru

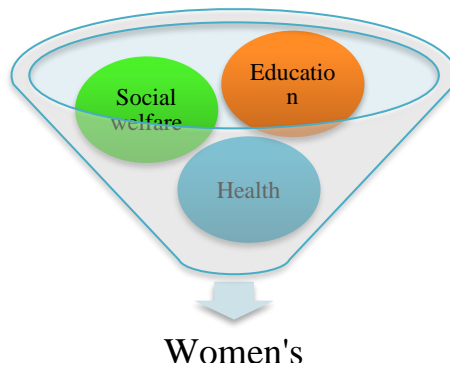
Women are a vital human resource of a nation. Developed countries have utilized this human resource thoroughly. A nation may develop if its women are given enough opportunities to contribute to national development. (Kar, P.K., 2000). So women's empowerment is a human right that will lead to the development of any country.

Empowerment: Empowerment means taking charge of your life, in your workplace, with your colleagues, your subordinates, your superiors, your illness, and for you caring for yourself.

Women's Empowerment: Women empowerment, in simple words, can be understood as giving power to women to decide for their own lives or inculcating such abilities in them so that they could find their rightful place in society. (Hasnain, Nadeem, 2004)

Women's empowerment is essential for the development of society. Empowerment means individuals acquiring the power to think and act freely, exercise choice, and fulfill their potential as full and equal members of society. As per the United National Development Fund for Women (UNIDEM), the term women's empowerment means:

- a) They are acquiring knowledge and understanding of gender relations and how they may be changed.
- b) Developing a sense of self-worth, a belief in one's ability to secure desired changes, and the right to control one's life.
- c) Gaining the ability to generate choices exercise bargaining power.
- d) We are developing the ability to organize and influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally.



Thus, empowerment means a psychological sense of personal control or influence and a concern with actual social influence, political power, and legal rights. It is a multi-level construct referring to individuals, organizations, and communities.

Government initiatives for women's empowerment can vary by country and region, and they often include efforts to promote gender equality, support female entrepreneurship, enhance education and healthcare access, and address gender-based violence.

A. Indian Government Plans regarding Women's Empowerment: The Indian Planning Commission defined three significant areas in which they had paid particular attention to women's development.

A planned approach to provide special thrust to the welfare of women was adopted with the launching of the first five-year plan in 1951.

- a) **The First Five Year Plan (1951-56):** This plan contemplated welfare measures for women. To implement welfare measures for the benefit of poor women, the Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) was established to deal with women's problems. The CSWB recognized and realized the need for organizing women into Mahila Mandals or women's clubs as an approach to community development.
- b) **The Second Five Year Plan (1956-61):** This plan intimately concentrated overall intensive agricultural development. However, recognizing women as workers further determined the welfare approach to women's issues, protection against injuries at work, maternity benefits, and crèches for their children.
- c) **The Third Five Year Plan (1961-66):** This plan gives importance to education for women, which has been a significant welfare strategy for women. This plan allocated the largest share for expanding social welfare services and condensed education courses. Regarding wealth, maternal and child welfare programs were proclaimed regarding maternal and child welfare, health education, nutrition, and family planning.
- d) **The Fourth Five Year Plan (1969-74):** This basic policy promoted women's welfare as the base of operation. The outlay on family planning was stepped up to reduce the birth rate through education.
- e) **The Seventh Five Year Plan (1986):** The Indian Parliament adopted a National Policy on Education in 1986, including a chapter on Education for Women's Equality.

The National Perspective Plan's main aim is to promote a holistic perspective on the development of women. Some of the main recommendations of the National Perspective Plan are as follows:

- a) While programs for women will continue to be implemented by different ministries, there is a need for a solid inter-ministerial coordination and monitoring body in the Department of Women and Child Development.
- b) Education for girls should be given priority, and awareness needs to be generated regarding the necessity of educating girls to prepare them to contribute effectively to the country's socio-economic development.
- c) There is a solid need to eliminate all forms of discrimination in employment, significantly to eliminate wage differentials between men and women.
- d) The Planning Commission and all ministries and government departments must have a women's cell.

B. Constitutional Provisions: The Constitution of India not only grants equality to women but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favor of women to neutralize the cumulative socio-economic, educational, and political disadvantages they face. Fundamental Rights, among others, ensure equality before the law and equal protection of the law; prohibit discrimination against any citizen based on religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth; and guarantee equality of opportunity to all citizens in matters relating to employment.

- a) Article 14 – Equality before the law for women
- b) Article 15 (i) – The State is not to discriminate against any citizen based on religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth, or any of them.
- c) Article 15(3) – The State to make any special provision in favor of women and children.
- d) Article 16 – Equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the state
- e) Article 39 (a) & (d) – The State to direct its policy towards securing for men and women the right to an adequate means of livelihood and equal pay for equal work for both men and women.
- f) Article 42 – The State to make provision for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief.

- g) Article 46 – The State to promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people and to protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation.
- h) Article 47 – The State to raise the level of nutrition and the standard of living of its people.

C. Government Initiatives for Women's Empowerment:

1. Specific Laws for Women Empowerment in India: Here is the list of some specific laws that the Parliament enacted to fulfill the Constitutional obligation of women's empowerment:

- a) The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976
- b) The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961
- c) The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1971
- d) The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961
- e) The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971
- f) The Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987
- g) The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006
- h) The Pre-Conception & Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act, 1994
- i) The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Protection) Act, 2013
- j) Those mentioned above and several other laws are there that not only provide specific legal rights to women but also give them a sense of security and empowerment.
- k) Special Initiatives for Women by India

Here is a list of operational schemes that aim to empower women in India:

- 1. Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) – 1953:** This scheme was launched to promote social welfare activities and appliance welfare programs for women and children through spontaneous organizations.
- 2. Short Stay Home for Women and Girls (SSH) – 1969:** This scheme provides temporary residence to women and girls in social and moral danger due to family problems, mental strain, violence at home, social ostracism, exploitation, and other causes.
- 3. Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA) – 1982:** The government launched this scheme to improve the socio-economic status of the poor women in the rural areas.

4. **National Commission for Women (1992):** In January 1992, the Government set up this statutory body with a specific mandate to study and monitor all matters relating to the constitutional and legal safeguards provided for women, review the existing legislation to suggest amendments wherever necessary, etc.
5. **Reservation for Women in Local Self-Government (1992):** The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Acts passed in 1992 by Parliament ensure one-third of the seats for women in all elected offices in local bodies, whether in rural or urban areas.
6. **The Notional Plan of Action for the Girl Child (1991-2000):** Action plans to ensure the girl child's survival, protection, and development with the ultimate objective of building up a better future for the girl child.
7. **Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK) – 1993:** The government of India created this scheme to provide loans to poor women to begin small businesses.
8. **Swadhar (1995):** This scheme supports women to become independent. Swadhar makes women strong and independent by spirit, thoughts, and action and provides complete control over their lives rather than be the victim.
9. **Swayam Siddha (2001):** This scheme organizes women into self-help groups.
10. **National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (2001):** The Department of Women & Child Development in the Ministry of Human Resource Development prepared a “National Policy for the Empowerment of Women” in 2001. The goal of this policy is to bring about the advancement, development, and empowerment of women.
11. **Mother and Child Tracking System (MCTS) – 2009:** This program helps to monitor the health care department to ensure that all mothers and children have access to all the required services and medical care during pregnancy and delivery. Also, the system maintains a database of all pregnancies registered and all births from 2009 to December.
12. **Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana Conditional Maternity Benefit Plan (IGMSY-CMB) – 2010:** The Central Government sponsors this scheme for pregnant women aged 19 and over for their first two live births. This program provides money to help better the health and nutrition of pregnant women. The beneficiary gets 4000/- in 3 installments. Any government employee does not come under this scheme.

13. **Priyadarshini (2011):** Priyadarshini is a pilot program for Women's Empowerment. This scheme offers women in seven districts access to self-help groups and promotion of livelihood opportunities.
14. **Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls- Sabla (RGSEAG) – 2012:** This scheme targets adolescent girls aged 11-18. The scheme offers a package of benefits for improving their health and nutrition. This program provides many services on the central level to help women become self-sufficient, get nutritional supplementation, education on health life skills, and various types of vocational training.
15. **Support to Training and Employment Programme (STEP):** The Ministry of Women and Child Development has launched this program to develop women's skills for self and employment. The main targets of this scheme are rural women and urban poor. This scheme provides funds to help the women and poor. Funds are released to NGOs and not to the State Governments.
16. **National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW):** The Indian Government has also launched the National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW) for comprehensive women empowerment. This centrally sponsored scheme coordinates all the women's welfare and socio-economic development programs across ministries and departments. The Mission contributes to empowering women socially and economically, erasing crime and violence against women, educating women, establishing policies and programs, and spreading awareness.

D. The National Education Policy 2020 & Women's Empowerment: NEP 2020 in India includes provisions aimed at empowering women in education. It emphasizes equal access to education for all, irrespective of gender, and encourages the creation of a gender-inclusive and equitable education system. Some critical aspects related to women's empowerment in the policy include promoting girl child education, addressing gender bias in curricula, supporting female teachers, and providing a safe and supportive learning environment for girls. The policy seeks to ensure that women have equal opportunities in education and are better equipped to participate in various sectors of society. National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has introduced **the "Gender Inclusion Fund"** to target the development of girl children. The GOI will constitute a "Gender Inclusion Fund" to provide quality and equitable education for all girls. The fund will ensure 100% enrollment of girls in schooling and a record participation rate in higher education, decrease gender

gaps at all levels, practice gender equity and inclusion in society, and improve the leadership capacity of girls through positive civil dialogues. Funds will also enable States to support and scale effective community-based interventions that address local context-specific barriers to girls and transgender students.

NEP 2020 will focus on the **safety and security** of school-going girls inside and outside the campus. The schools must ensure harassment, discrimination, and a domineer-free campus before enlisting for yearly accreditation. This will increase the attendance of girls in the class. The policy will identify social mores and gender stereotypes that prevent girls from accessing education and cause regular dropouts.

According to the National Policy on Education from 1986, "Education" is one of the main tools that can assist a country in overcoming its backwardness and moving toward becoming a developed nation. Although "Free and Compulsory Education for All" was started, its implementation has not yet been completed and achieved in real life. This was to be done in collaboration with local community organizations and state governments. This more general objective has been broken down and represented visually as the following:

- a) Ensuring that girls are enrolled in school at a rate of 100% by 2030 and 50% in higher education by 2035.
- b) Reducing gender gaps at all levels.
- c) Promoting gender equity and inclusion in society.
- d) Enhancing the leadership skills of girls through constructive, civil dialogues.

The policy suggests several measures, including a gender inclusion fund and formula-based and discretionary funding of gender-inclusionary projects at the school level, to increase the number of women who enroll in schools. NEP would transform the education sector in the country as it focuses on making education accessible, equitable, and inclusive. The New Education Policy has made several beneficial characteristics that encourage gender equity and eliminate gender stereotypes. These are vital factors in determining whether the layout will function effectively in the place of action.

Conclusion: Women's empowerment is central to human development. Women can only be empowered if their economic and social status is improved. This could be possible only by adopting definite social and economic policies with a view to the total development of women and making them realize that they have the potential to be strong human beings.

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Weblinks

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