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NATIONAL MISSION FOR EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN: A NEW HOPE FOR INDIAN WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

Of the 1.3 billion people who live in absolute poverty around the globe, 70 percent are women. For these women, poverty doesn't just mean scarcity and want. It means rights denied, opportunities curtailed and voices silenced. Women earn only 10 percent of the world's income. Where women work for money, they may be limited to a set of jobs deemed suitable for women – invariably low-pay, low-status positions. The National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW) was launched by the Government of India (GoI) on International Women's Day in 2010 with the aim to strengthen overall processes that promote all-round development of women. The convergence model project would include introduction of convergence cum facilitation centers at the district (few urban agglomerations), tehsil / ward and village/ area levels. The existing structural arrangements of participating departments wherever available shall be used and the PRIs shall be used as far as possible.

Key Words: *Women, Poverty, Income, Mission, Empowerment*

INTRODUCTION

Of the 1.3 billion people who live in absolute poverty around the globe, 70 percent are women. For these women, poverty doesn't just mean scarcity and want. It means rights denied, opportunities curtailed and voices silenced. Women work two-thirds of the world's working hours, according to the United Nations Millennium Campaign to halve world poverty by the year 2015. The overwhelming majority of the labor that sustains life like growing food, cooking, raising children, caring for the elderly, maintaining a house, hauling water is done by women and universally this work is accorded low status and no pay. The ceaseless cycle of labor rarely shows up in economic analyses of a society's production and value (United Nations Development Programme, 2013).

Women earn only 10 percent of the world's income. Where women work for money, they may be limited to a set of jobs deemed suitable for women – invariably low-pay, low-status positions. Women own less than 1 percent of the world's property. Where laws or customs prevent women from owning land or other productive assets, from getting loans or credit, or from having the right to inheritance or to own their home, they have no assets to leverage for economic stability and cannot invest in their own or their children's futures. Women make up two-thirds of the estimated 876 million adults worldwide who cannot read or write; and girls make up 60 percent of the 77 million children not attending primary school.

Education is among the most important drivers of human development: women who are educated have fewer children than those who are denied schooling (some studies correlate each additional year of education with a 10 percent drop in fertility). They delay their first pregnancies, have healthier children (each additional year of schooling a woman has, is associated with a 5 to 10 percent decline in child deaths, according to the United Nations Population Fund) and are far more likely to send their own children to school. Yet where women do not have the discretionary income to invest in their own or their children's education, where girls' education is considered frivolous, and where girls are relied on to

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contribute labor to the household, they miss this unparalleled opportunity to develop their minds and spirits.

India is the world's largest democracy and the second most populous country. Home to a wide variety of different linguistic, cultural, religious and ethnic groups, the country achieved independence from British colonial rule in 1947, and since then has been governed under a federal system. The country's economy is growing rapidly, with a large, well-educated middle class emerging; however at the same time, social and economic inequality is becoming more entrenched. India is classed as a lower-middle income country by the World Bank (Women's Empowerment Care, 2013).

Within the framework of a democratic polity, our laws, development policies, plans and programmes have aimed at women's advancement in different spheres. From the fifth five year plan (1974-78) onwards has been a marked shift in the approach to women's issues from welfare to development. In recent years, the empowerment of women has been recognized as the central issue in determining the status of women. The National commission for women was set up by an Act of parliament in 1990 to safeguard the rights and legal entitlements of women. The 73rd and 74th amendments (1993) to the constitution of India have provided for reservation of seats in the local bodies of panchayats and municipalities for women, laying a strong foundation for their participation in decision making at the local levels. India has also ratified various international conventions and human rights instruments committing to secure equal rights of women. Key among them is the ratification of the convention on elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW) in 1993.

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 unreservedly endorsed 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 (National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, 2001).

However, there still exists a wide gap between the goals enunciated in the Constitution, legislation, policies, plans, programmes, and related mechanisms on the one hand and the situational reality of the status of women in India, on the other. This has been analyzed extensively in the Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India, "Towards Equality", 1974 and highlighted in the National Perspective Plan for Women, 1988-2000, the Shramshakti Report, 1988 and the "Platform for action, five years after-an assessment".

Gender disparity manifests itself in various forms, the most obvious being the trend of continuously declining female ratio in the population in the last few decades. Social stereotyping and violence at the domestic and societal levels are some of the other manifestations. Discrimination against girl children, adolescent girls and women persists in parts of the country.

The underlying causes of gender inequality are related to social and economic structure, which is based on informal and formal norms, and practices.

Consequently, 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 (Ramesh Verma, 2011).

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Goal and Objectives

The goal of this policy is to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women. The policy will be widely disseminated so as to encourage active participation of all stakeholders for achieving its goals. Specifically, the objectives of this policy include

(i) Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential.

(ii) The *de-jure* and *de-facto* enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedom by women on equal basis with men in all spheres – political, economic, social, cultural and civil.

(iii) Equal access to participation and decision making of women in social, political and economic life of the nation.

(iv) Equal access to women to health care, quality education at all levels, career and vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security and public office etc.

(v) Strengthening legal systems aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.

(vi) Changing societal attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women.

(vii) Mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process.

(viii) Elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and the girl child and

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

The National Mission for Empowerment of Women

The National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW) was launched by the Government of India (GoI) on International Women's Day in 2010 with the aim to strengthen overall processes that promote all-round development of women. It has the mandate to strengthen the inter-sector convergence; facilitate the process of coordinating all the women's welfare and socio-economic development programmes across ministries and departments. The Mission aims to provide a single window service for all programmes run by the government for women under aegis of various Central Ministries. In light with its mandate, the mission has been named Mission Purna Shakti, implying a vision for holistic empowerment of women.

The National Resource Centre for Women has been set up which functions as a national convergence centre for all schemes and programmes for women. It acts as a central repository of knowledge, information, research and data on all gender related issues and is the main body servicing the National and State Mission Authority (National Mission for Empowerment of Women, 2010).

Mission Statement

NMEW will achieve gender equality and gender justice and holistic development of women through inter-sectoral convergence of programmes relating to women, forging synergy between various stakeholders and creating an enabling environment conducive to social change.

Focus Area of the Mission (National Mission for Empowerment of Women, 2010)

- Access to health, drinking water, sanitation and hygiene facilities for women
- Coverage of all girls especially those belonging to vulnerable groups in schools from primary to class 12
- Higher and Professional education for girls/women
- Skill development, Micro credit, Vocational Training, Entrepreneurship, SHG development
- Gender sensitization and dissemination of information
- Taking steps to prevent crime against women and taking steps for a safe environment for women

Key Strategies of the Mission

- Facilitating inter-sector convergence of schemes meant for women, monitor and review the progress on regular basis
- Strengthening institutional framework offering support service for women

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- At policy level commission research, evaluation studies, review schemes, programmes and legislation, do gender audit and outcome assessment to build the evidence for policy and programme reform and scale up implementation of the initiatives
- Enhance economic empowerment of girls and women through skill development, micro credit, vocational training and entrepreneurship and SHG development
- Evolve with the support of community representatives and groups appropriate and localized communication to strengthen public education on gender, behavior change and social mobilization using 360 degree approach on media and communication.

Convergence Model

The convergence model is a project to test a model of delivery for convergent implementation of programmes intended for welfare and development of women. It has been originally intended to test this model in 30 districts spanning all states and UTs (Except Delhi), covering 640 identified villages. The model would include introduction of convergence cum facilitation centers at the district (few urban agglomerations), tehsil / ward and village/ area levels. The existing structural arrangements of participating departments wherever available shall be used and the PRIs shall be used as far as possible.

The women centre at the village level, the first point of contact for women will be known as the Poorna Shakti Kendra (PSK). The PSK is the point of focal point action on ground through which the services to grassroots women would be facilitated. Village coordinators at the Kendras would reach out to the women with the motto "*HUM SUNENGE NAARI KI BAAT!*" The various Ministries & Departments for programmes related to empowerment of women facilitated by NMEW: Ministry of Human Resource Development, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Housing & Urban Poverty Alleviation, Ministry of Rural Development, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Department of Agriculture and Cooperation, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Ministry of Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises, Ministry of Law & Justice, Ministry of Environment & Forests, Ministry of Labour & Employment, Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment.

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