

## WOMEN: DRIVING FORCE OF DEVELOPMENT

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Rural women are key agents for achieving the transformational economic, environmental and social changes required for sustainable development. Empowering them is crucial not only to the well-being of individual families & rural communities, but also to overall economic productivity given women's large presence in the agricultural work force. To restore their rightful & dignified status, the present government has initiated empowerment programmes for rural women that provide a solid foundation to nurture the inner strength & self-esteem for the rural women.

**R**ural development aims at improving rural people's livelihoods in an equitable and sustainable manner, both socially and environmentally, through better access to assets (natural, physical, human, technological and social capital) and services, and control over productive capital.

Sustainable rural development refers to improving the quality of life for the rural poor by developing capacities that promote community participation, health and education, food security, environmental protection and sustainable economic growth thereby enabling community members to leave the cycle of poverty & achieve their full potential. Sustainable rural development is vital to economic, social and environmental viability of nations. A healthy & dynamic agricultural sector is an important foundation of

rural development, generating strong linkages to other economic sectors.

Rural women are the key agents for achieving the transformational economic, environmental and social changes required for sustainable development. But limited access to credit, health care and education are among the many challenges they face, which are further aggravated by the global food & economic crises & climate change. Empowering them is crucial not only to the well-being of individual families & rural communities but, also to overall economic productivity given women's large presence in the agricultural work force. Developing multiple roles every single day, women are undoubtedly the backbone of any society. However, they have also been an ignored fraction of the society in many parts of the world. A woman is the nucleus of the family, particularly in





rural India. She not only collects water, fuel, wood, fodder and food, but also plays a significant role in preserving the culture, grooming the children and shaping their destiny.

Therefore, empowerment of women that will have lasting impacts must involve consciousness raising before the social construction of gender, which subordinates women in the family, class, caste, religion or society can be changed. Empowerment is a multi-faceted, multi-dimensional & multi-layered concept. Women's empowerment is a process in which women gain greater share of control over resources – material, human & intellectual, like knowledge information, ideas & financial resources like money – and access to money & control over decision making in the home, community, society & nation and to gain “power”.

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### Government Empowerment Programmes For Rural Women

- **Deen Dayal Upadhyay Antyodaya Yojana (DAY-NRLM): Ajeevika** is a major project of Ministry of Rural Development. It focuses on rural women and aims to achieve universal social mobilization by involving rural women. At least one woman member from each identified poor rural household, is to be brought under the Self Help Group (SHG) network in a time bound manner NRLM has devised special strategies to reach out to all these vulnerable communities

and help them graduate out of poverty.

There are other two important components of Ajeevika, relevant for improvement of livelihoods of rural women. **Deen Dayal Upadhyay Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY)** aims to skill rural youth who are poor and provide them with jobs having regular monthly wages or above the minimum wages. It is one of the clusters of initiatives and full social inclusion of the candidates is ensured by the mandatory coverage of socially disadvantaged group, where one third of the persons covered should be women. **Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran**

**Pariyojana (MKSP)** is another component that aims to improve the present status of women in Agriculture and to enhance the opportunities for empowerment.

- **Empowering Elected Women Representatives (EWRs):** Ministry of Women & Child Development has launched an extensive training programme with an objective of empowering Elected Women Representative (EWRs) and to help them assume the leadership roles expected of them and guide their villages for a more prosperous future. Past experience at the grassroots level has led to the realization that capacity building of EWRs is critical to empower women to participate effectively in governance processes. An empowered EWRs can ensure that the same can be translated among women in her community. This percolation of knowledge, awareness and legal empowerment will help safeguard their basic rights and entitlements. Women's representation in local governments can actually make a difference with her prime focus on development issues like health, education and livelihood which are mostly overlooked by male members.
- **Rastriya Mahila Kosh (RMK):** Rastriya Mahila Kosh (RMK), of Ministry of Women & Child Development, extends micro-credit to the women in the informal sector through a client friendly, without collateral and in a hassle-free manner for income generation activities. RMK has taken a number of promotional measures to popularize the concept of micro financing, enterprise development, thrift and credit,

formation and strengthening of Women-SHG through intermediary organizations. Education of credit management has been integrated with the provision of credit, along with literary and skill training for individual women, leadership training among groups for self management.

- **Mahila Shakti Kendra (MSK)** : In order to support rural women and provide them with convergent support, Ministry of Women & Child Development, Government of India approved a new scheme namely Mahila Shakti Kendra (MSK) as a sub scheme under the **Umbrella Scheme of Mission for Protection and Empowerment for Women** for implementation during 2017-18 upto 2019-20 to empower rural women through community participation. MSK Scheme is envisaged to provide an interface for rural women to approach the government for availing their entitlement and for empowering them through training and capacity building. Convergent support is being proposed for equal access to healthcare, quality education, career and vocational guidance, employment, health and safety, social security and digital literacy at Gram Panchayats level in selected districts / blocks across the country with a view to create an environment in which women realize their full potential. The scheme is committed to play an important role for empowerment of rural women especially in the most backward 115 districts of the country.

Community engagement through **College Students Volunteers** is envisioned in 115 most backward districts as part of the MSK Block level initiatives. Student volunteers will play an instrumental role in awareness generation regarding various important government schemes / programmes as well as social issue and association with NSS / NCC cadre students will also be an option. The scheme at the block level will provide an opportunity to Student Volunteers to participate in the development process by bringing change in their own communities and ensuring that women are not left behind and are equal



partners in India's progress. At the national, state, block level, websites/IT tools will be made available for monitoring and feedback. Web based/online feedback mechanism will be developed for submission of queries, feedback and grievance redressal.

- **National Repository of Information for Women (NARI)** : Ministry of Women & Child Development, has also prepared a portal namely National Repository of Information for Women (NARI) that will provide citizen easy access to information on government schemes and initiative for women. Rural women can access these schemes on their own or with the help of various frontline workers associated with government schemes at the ground level. The portal summarizes over 350 government schemes and other important information for the benefit of women, with more being added every day. Portal also provides information to women on issues affecting their lives – for example, there are tips on good nutrition, suggestions for health check-ups, information on major diseases, tips for job search and interview, investment and savings advice, information on crimes against women and reporting procedures, contacts of legal aid cells and much more. All the information on various schemes / programmes relevant for women will be updated on a regular basis This will be used by MSK staff to improve access and utilization of government schemes by rural women at the ground level.
- **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP)** : Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP), the flagship scheme was

launched initially to address the declining Child Sex Ratio. As it graduated, it broadened and took under its ambit other concerns such as strict enforcement of PC & PNDT Act, provisions to motivate higher education for girls and related issues of disempowerment of women on a life-cycle continuum. Since its inception in 2015, it has been independently growing widely in local domains as well.

All India expansion of BBBP to cover all 640 districts was launched by the Prime Minister on 08.03.2018 for deeper positive impact on CSR with an outlay of Rs. 1133 crore during 2017-18 to 2019-20 which will include multi-sectoral intervention in 244 districts in addition to existing 161, where physical implementation of the scheme will happen while 235 districts, will be covered through Alert District Media, Advocacy and Outreach.

- **National Nutrition Mission (NNM)**: To deal with the problem of malnutrition, government has set-up the **National Nutrition Mission (NNM)** with a budget of Rs. 9046 Crore. The aim is to achieve an improvement in the nutritional status of children of 0-6 years and pregnant and lactating women in a time bound manner, during the coming three years beginning 2017-18, with defined targets. Some of them are to prevent and reduce stunting in children (0-6 years) by 6% @ 2% p.a., prevent and reduced under nutrition in children (0-6 years) by 6% @ 2% p.a., reduce the prevalence of Anaemia among young children (6-59 months) by 9% @ 3% p.a.; reduce the prevalence of Anaemia among women and adolescent girls in the age group of 15-49 years by 9% @ 3% p.a.; reduce low birth weight by 6% @ 2% p.a.
- **Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY)**: The Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) is a maternity benefit programme that has been made a pan-India phenomenon since 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2016. The beneficiaries would receive cash incentive of Rs. 6000/- during pregnancy and after institutional delivery. The scheme implementation guidelines, the software for its roll out i.e. PMMVY – CAS and its user manual were launched on 01.09.2017. Under

PMMVY, Rs. 2016.37 crores to all 36 states / UTs had been sanctioned during 2017-18 with a release of Rs. 1991.72 crores.

- In 2017, government notified **Supplementary, Nutrition (ICDS) Rules, 2017** to regulate entitlement of 'nutrient dense food' for every pregnant and lactating woman till 6 months to 6 years for 300 days in a year.
- In 2015, **Swadhar Greh** scheme was launched to cater to primary needs of women in difficult circumstances. Setting up of shelter, food, clothing, medical treatment and care are exclusively provided, meanwhile, they are provided with legal guidance to enable their readjustment in family/society. Rehabilitation for their emotional and economic state is rendered to enable them to start life afresh. Presently, 561 Swadhar Greh are functioning in the country benefiting 17,291 women. In addition, one widow home with 1000 inmates capacity, has been constructed at Sunrakh Bangar, Vrindavan.
- **Mahila Shakti Kendra** scheme was launched in 2017 to address women's issues at the rural level wherein over 3 lakh student volunteers would be engaged in 115 most backward districts for three years. These volunteers, mobilized from local colleges, NCC, NSS, NYK etc. will work with local women to help them access government schemes for their benefit and to provide 'one stop convergent support services for their skill development, employment, digital literacy, health and nutrition.



- **Mahila Police Volunteers (MPVs)** will prove to be an effective alternative against the local police for women. MPVs were launched in all States and UTs to serve as a public-police interface and facilitate women in distress. The MPVs report incidences of domestic violence, child marriage, dowry harassment, and violence faced by women in public spaces, initiated in 2016, the MPVs is operational in 5 States.
- **Mahila e-Haat** is an initiative to economically empower women through financial inclusion. The government launched a bilingual portal Mahila e-Haat, a direct online digital marketing platform for women entrepreneurs/SHGs/NGOs in March 2016. It received over 1450 lakh visitors. Women entrepreneurs/SHGs / NGOs from 22 states showcased approximately 1800 products / services. It has 23000 registered SHGs with 3 lakh beneficiaries. In 6 months, women entrepreneurs/ SHGs / NGOs have transacted business of over Rs. 20 lakh.

The **Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana** is an effective scheme to aid poor section of Indian society. The programme is anticipated to be implemented over a period of three years till fiscal 2018-19. The intent of this scheme is to make cooking gas (LPG) available to women from families that are financially backward. It is estimated that the P.M. Ujjwala Yojana will assist approximately 1 crore 50 lakh households that presently live below the poverty line. The programme is also expected to cover five crore such households in all.

The main objectives of P. M. Ujjwala Yojana are the following :

- Enhance the status of women and caring for their health.
- Help to decrease air pollution due to use of fossil fuel.
- Lessening the serious health risks related with cooking based on fossil fuels.
- Reducing the number of deaths due to unclean cooking fuels, which is almost 5 lakh every year in India.
- Preventing young children from acute respiratory illness caused due to indoor air pollution by burning the fossil fuels.

This Yojana is basically a social welfare scheme to help the poor rural women. For holistic empowerment of rural women to happen, an effective convergence of all aspects impacting a women's life is needed – be it social, economic or political. The process of empowering rural women is a continuous process. The need of the hour is to make women realize their potential, make them aware of the bright future that awaits them, guide them and nurture them. Growth is never merely by chance, it is the result of forces working together. And in India, the forces are marching in the right direction to take the nation to new horizons.

### Conclusion:

Empowerment means having control over one's life as an individual. To women, it means freedom from gender-based discrimination. Women are the most important tool to ensure any nation's development. In the words of Prime Minister Narendra Modi "Empowering women tantamounts to empowering the entire family." In India however, for women especially rural women, the struggle for empowerment starts from birth, from the fact that the girl child has to fight even for her right to be born. Realising this, the government has taken many initiatives to make women empowerment the prime focus of the government.

Therefore, the role of rural women outside the home has become an important feature of the social and economic life of the country and in the years to come this will become still more significant. From this point of view, greater attention will have to be paid to the problems of training and development of rural women. The education of rural girls, therefore, should be emphasized not only on grounds of social justice, but also because it accelerates social transformation. In addition, the government programmes promoting women education and skill development should be pursued more vigorously. It is a challenging task and it requires multipronged efforts. With a strong determination, commitment and involvement of people and organisations with philanthropic motive and a rational outlook, this problem can be solved and hurdle be overcome for promoting empowerment of rural women.

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