

Financial Empowerment of Women

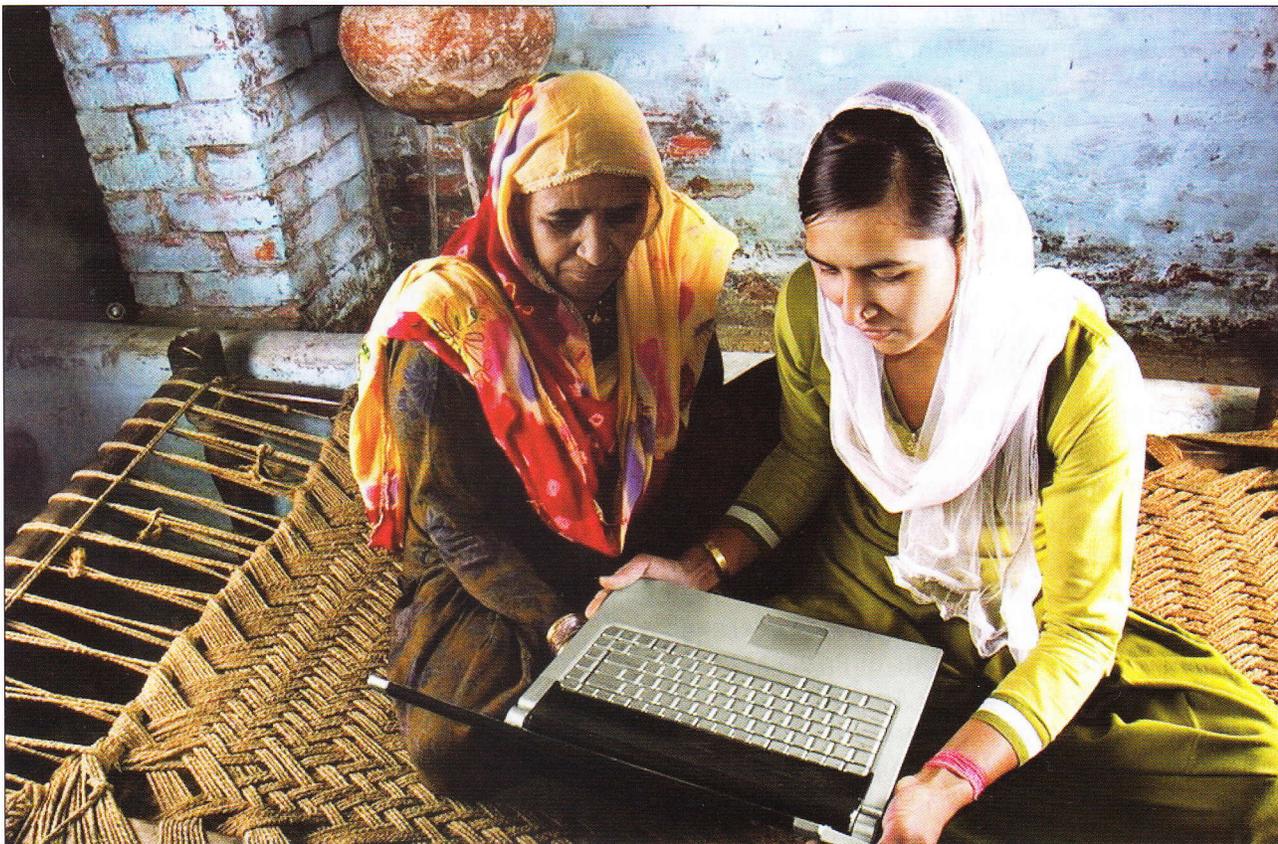
Vishnu Sharma and Dr Tasneem Q. Khan

Financial empowerment of rural women is a priori for the overall development of the Indian society. Financially empowered rural women, are key to the success of families, communities and national economies. In recent years, the Government of India has given major impetus in this direction and the results of its efforts have been overwhelming.

According to UN Women, the United Nations entity dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women, rural women are key agents for achieving the transformational economic, environmental and social changes required for sustainable development. With this the agency also highlights that limited access to credit, healthcare and education are among the many challenges rural women, in several parts of the world, face which are further aggravated by the global food and economic crises and climate change. Hence, empowering rural women is a key not only to the well-being of individuals, families and rural communities, but also to overall economic productivity.

UN Women says that gender equality is not only a basic human right, but its achievement has enormous socio-economic ramifications. Empowering women fuels thriving economies, spurring productivity and growth. Yet gender inequalities remain deeply entrenched in every society.

Today, women, in most of the countries, lack access to decent work and face occupational segregation and gender wage gaps. They are too often denied access to basic education and healthcare. Also, women in all parts of the world suffer violence and discrimination. They are under-represented in political and economic decision-making processes.



In India, economical and social condition of its women population has been a matter of concern since long time. As per the Global Gender Gap Index Report 2020 published by the World Economic Forum, India ranks 112 out of 153 countries with a score of 0.668 out of 1. India ranked 108 out of 149 countries with a score of 0.665 as per the Global Gender Gap Index Report 2018. Thus, India's performance has marginally improved from 0.665 in 2018 to 0.668 in 2020.

Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) consists of four dimensions, namely, (i) economic participation and opportunity (ii) educational attainment (iii) health and survival, and (iv) political empowerment. As per the computational mechanism of GGGI, highest performance score on each of these four dimensions is 1. According to the GGGI Report 2020 India has scored 0.354 in economic participation and opportunity, 0.962 in educational attainment, 0.944 in health and survival and 0.411 in political empowerment.

In an interaction with women associated with various Self Help Groups (SHGs) in July 2018, Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi had said, "For women empowerment, financial independence is necessary. Women are enterprising, they don't need to be taught, only need to be given opportunities to perform." In the same programme Prime Minister also highlighted the importance of empowerment of rural women for the holistic progress of the Indian society. He said that rural women have huge potential and our country needs to realise their capabilities. He said, "Financial independence makes a woman assertive and empowered. Financially empowered women are a bulwark against societal evils."

Based on the above principle, the Government of India has been running various schemes for the rural women under its several ministries. These schemes and programmes have been designed to have a positive impact in overall condition of our rural women. Financial empowerment through financial inclusion of rural women has been one of the significant achievements of Prime Minister Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY). By August 2021, seven years since its inception, there are 43.04 crore PMJDY accounts. PMJDY was announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his Independence Day address on 15 August 2014. While launching the

programme on 28th August, the Prime Minister had described the occasion as a festival to celebrate the liberation of the poor from a vicious cycle. On the 7th Anniversary of PMJDY, Finance Minister Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman had reiterated the importance of this scheme for the financial inclusion of country's marginalised sections, including rural women. She said, "The journey of PMJDY led interventions undertaken over a short span of seven years has in effect, produced both transformational as well as directional changes thereby making the emerging financial-inclusive ecosystem capable of delivering financial services to the last person of the society-the poorest of the poor. The underlying pillars of PMJDY, namely, Banking the Unbanked, Securing the Unsecured and Funding the Unfunded has made it possible to adopt multi-stakeholders' collaborative approach while leveraging technology for serving the unserved and underserved areas as well."

On the same occasion Minister of State for Finance Dr Bhagwat Karad also said, "Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) has been one of the most far reaching initiatives towards financial inclusion not only in India but in the world. Financial Inclusion is among top-most priorities of the government as it is an enabler for inclusive growth. It provides an avenue to the poor for bringing their savings into the formal financial system, an avenue to remit money to their families besides taking them out of the clutches of the usurious money lenders."

As per the government data 55 percent Jan-Dhan account holders are women and 67 percent Jan Dhan accounts are in rural and semi-urban areas. For rural women, this scheme has played a very vital role in securing their interest during COVID-19 pandemic. Under PM Garib Kalyan Yojana, a total of Rs. 30,945 crore have been credited in accounts of women PMJDY account holders during COVID lockdown. Within 10 days of nationwide lockdown more than about 20 crore women PMJDY accounts were credited with ex-gratia.

Apart from this there are several other schemes currently running for the empowerment of women. Women and Child Development Ministry, has adopted a two-pronged strategy (i) Monitoring the performance by engagement

with publishing agency of GGGI, namely, World Economic Forum (ii) Identification of Reform Areas and Reform Actions in consultation with concerned Ministries and Departments.

Some major initiatives taken by Government of India in this regard are:

1. Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) to ensure the protection, survival and education of the girl child.
2. Mahila Shakti Kendra (MSK) aims to empower rural women with opportunities for skill development and employment.
3. Working Women Hostel (WWH) ensures the safety and security for working women.
4. Scheme for Adolescent Girls aims to empower girls in the age group 11-18 and to improve their social status through nutrition, life skills, home skills and vocational training.
5. Mahila Police Volunteers (MPV) envisages engagement of Mahila Police Volunteers in States/UTs who act as a link between police and community and facilitates women in distress.
6. Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK) is an apex micro-finance organisation that provides micro-credit at concessional terms to poor women for various livelihood and income generating activities.
7. The National Crèche Scheme ensures that women take up gainful employment through providing a safe, secure and stimulating environment to the children.
8. Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandna Yojana aims to provide maternity benefit to pregnant and lactating mothers.
9. Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana aims to provide housing under the name of the women also.
10. Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) aims to enable a large number of Indian youth including women to take up industry-relevant skill training in securing a better livelihood.
11. Deen Dayal Upadhyay National Urban Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NULM) focuses on creating opportunities for women in skill development, leading to market-based employment.
12. Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana empowers women and protects their health by providing LPG cylinder free of cost.
13. Sukanya Samridhi Yojna(SSY) scheme has empowered many girls economically by opening their bank accounts.
14. Skill Upgradation and Mahila Coir Yojna is an exclusive training programme of MSME aimed at skill development of women artisans engaged in coir industry.
15. Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP) is a major credit-linked subsidy programme aimed at generating self-employment opportunities through establishment of micro-enterprises in the non-farm sector.
16. Female Entrepreneurship: To promote female entrepreneurship, the government has initiated Programmes like Stand-Up India and Mahila e-Haat (online marketing platform to support women entrepreneurs/ SHGs/NGOs), Entrepreneurship and Skill Development Programme (ESSDP). Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY) provides access to institutional finance to micro and small businesses.

Likewise several steps and initiatives have been taken up in school education system such as National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 and flagship programmes like Samagra Shiksha and the subsequent Right to Education Act (RTE). Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas (KGBVs) have been opened in Educationally Backward Blocks (EBBs).

KGBVs, under Samagra Shiksha, now provide access and quality education to girls in the age group of 10-18 years aspiring to study in Classes VI to XII; belonging to SC, ST, OBC, Minority communities and BPL families to ensure smooth transition of girls from elementary to secondary and up to class XII wherever possible. KGBVs provide the facility to have atleast one residential school for girls from Classes VI-XII in every EBB. Gender sensitisation is also done which includes gender sensitisation Module - part of in-service training, construction of toilets for girls, construction of residential quarters for female teachers and curriculum reforms.

More so, to bring women in the mainstream

of political leadership at the grassroots level, government has reserved 33 percent of the seats in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) for women. Clause (3) of Article 243D of the Constitution ensures participation of women in PRIs by mandating not less than one-third reservation for women out of total number of seats to be filled by direct election and number of offices of chairpersons of Panchayats. As per the information provided by the Rural Development and Panchayati Raj Ministry in September 2020, 20 states namely Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Punjab, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Tripura, Uttarakhand and West Bengal have made provisions of 50 percent reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions in their respective State Panchayati Raj Acts.

Also, gender Budget has been made a part of Union Budget of India since 2005 that entails fund allocation towards programmes/schemes dedicated to women. Through this effort the Government is continuously promoting gender parity/equality with a focus on alleviating gender gap in all sectors and at all levels of governance. As per the Gender Budget Statement, Government has earmarked Rs.15,3,326.28 Crore for FY 2021-22 to be used by the Ministries towards schemes/programmes aimed at reducing gender gap in all aspects of social, economic and political life.

Likewise, Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, Giriraj Singh, informed while replying to a question in Lok Sabha on 11 February 2019 that his ministry, through Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC), is implementing a number of schemes for rural women so as to improve their social and economic conditions, including those living below the poverty line.

The MSME Ministry through the Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP), a major credit-linked subsidy scheme since 2008-09, is setting up micro enterprises to generate employment in rural and urban areas of the country. The maximum cost of the project under PMEGP scheme is Rs. 25 lakh for manufacturing sector units and Rs. 10 lakh for units under service sector. Under the scheme, women

entrepreneurs are covered under special category and are entitled to 25 percent and 35 percent subsidies for the project set up in urban and rural areas respectively. For women beneficiaries, own contribution is only 5 percent of the project cost while for general category it is 10 percent. About 30 percent projects have been setup by women out of total projects set up under PMEGP. Since its inception till January 2019, women entrepreneurs have set up 1,38,516 projects.

The ministry of MSME, through KVIC, implements schemes under its Khadi Programme with the support of 34 States/UTs Khadi and Village Industries Boards (KVIBs), and 2,518 Khadi Institutions. These schemes are providing employment to 4.65 lakh people (cumulative) out of which more than 80 percent artisans are women. During 2016-17, 14,768 projects were set up by women entrepreneurs and Margin Money (MM) of Rs. 38,949.15 lakh were disbursed. During 2017-18 the number of projects set up by women entrepreneurs was 15,669 with MM of Rs. 46,355.86 lakh. The MSME Ministry's Village Industries Programme, Mission Solar Charkha, Khadi Reform and Development Programme, Scheme of Fund for Regeneration of Traditional Industries, Capacity Building through training programmes and Research and Development (R&D) for stepping up productivity have helped women entrepreneurs.

In conclusion, the economic empowerment of rural women is a priori for the overall development of the Indian society. Financially empowered rural women, are key to the success of families, communities and national economies. In recent years, the government of India has given major impetus in this direction and the results of its efforts have been unprecedented.

Data Source

<https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1707475>

<https://pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=1563819>

(The authors are journalist and Assistant Professor in Lloyd Law College. Views expressed are personal. Email: tasneemkhan2204@gmail.com)