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National Policy for the Empowerment of the Rural Women – An Overview

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ABSTRACT

The realities of rural life in India are difficult to comprehend. While a small minority of people in major cities have benefited from the information revolution of the past decade, the lives of most people in rural India (over 650 million) have hardly improved. There is a lot of talk about the "digital divide;" the government is planning to bring the Internet to villages, but it is difficult to see how this project will help when the basic necessities of life are absent. A majority of villages do not have sustainable economies, and only through oppression of women and lower castes can the landlords, upper castes, and government officials support a better life for themselves. The social injustice that underlines this perennial problem cannot be addressed by a frontal attack on women's issues by targeting women alone, but it requires a comprehensive effort in which communities develop through sustainable and integrated programs that impact everyone. Empowerment of women involves many things - economic opportunity, social equality, and personal rights. Women are deprived of these human rights, often as a matter of tradition. In rural areas, women are generally not perceived to have any meaningful income generation capacity, and hence, they are relegated mainly to household duties and cheap labor. Without the power to work and earn a good income, their voices are silenced. Even in matters of sex and child bearing, women often do not have the ability to oppose the wishes of their men. In a society where men control the destiny of women, how is it possible to empower women? Simply encouraging women to resist the wishes of men would not only fail, but would create mistrust of any goodwill attempts from "the outside" to help rural communities. Women will gain power only when both men and women begin to respect and accept the contribution of women. Developing women's capacity for income generation without threatening men is key. Past experience has taught us that attempts to control the number of children through behavioral changes in men have failed because families do not see the benefit of fewer children. Children, especially boys, are viewed as extra hands that can provide income and help with family chores. The poorer the family, the more children they seek. Hence, it is evident that the economic status of the family plays a major role in family planning. Birth control and reproductive health of women are behavioral issues affected mostly by economics, access to health care, and education. Until this reality is accepted, the desired changes may not be attainable in the foreseeable future. Hence, the present study focuses on an overview of national policies of India for the empowerment of the rural women and study based on secondary sources of data collection.

KEYWORDS Information Revolution, Digital Divide, Income Generation Capacity, Household Duties, Mistrust, Behavioral Changes, Economic Status and Foreseeable Future.

INTRODUCTION

Empowerment of women is the key-device to enable them resurrects their status multifariously in the society and reconciles them to share virilities of the fast developing world. It had come out of the consensus arrived at the 40th Session of the UN commission on status of women in New York on March 11, 1996. This device is significant in view of the role that the women can more effectively play in all vital areas the male factor alone is not capable of any effective and reliable performance in socioeconomic spheres and a partnership is a must throughout the world in these spheres between men and women to ensure the progress in the right direction. Noteworthy is the fact that there exists car in between the present miserable plight of the women due to the socioeconomic inequalities that have been persistent throughout the world and the new mandates that require a decisive role of women side by side with the men folk. The commission has warned all the member states of the UNO that the women concerns are mainstreamed to with the impact of the economic and social changes on families. Eradications of Poverty, elimination of gender prejudices discriminations, and providing equal opportunities to women to exp their views, are essential to check further drift in the socioeconomic situations in their respective countries. The commission has stressed this is not just a formality to oblige the women folk with a view of their morale or pacify them. But it is an integral part of empowerment women that they participate in decision making at all levels in all are the critical concerns that were identified in the world women conference held in China in 1995.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present study aims with following objectives:

1. To know about empowerment of women in India
2. To know the statistical data about women and rural women in India
3. To know about special initiatives by Government of India for women
4. To study Entrepreneurship Development of Rural Women Through Self Help Groups (SHGS)

EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

By empowerment of women is meant that the conferment of power by means of law in all matters affecting gender interests, related to family well-being and socioeconomic national affairs, providing for participation in decision making in all such matters. As a matter of all such matters that were categorically termed as 'critical concerns the women in the world women conference in Chine in 1995 were required to be mainstreamed to deal with the impact of economic and social changes on families. In eradication of poverty, counter sexism and viol in the global media. It is not India alone where the plight of women is pitiable and status has been depleting and losing day by day, but it is an international phenomenon. Because exploitation of women in the forms of domestic violence, rape and sexual abuse, in one form or the other is equally found throughout the world, including the advanced and developed countries of the west. And this is the main reason that the status of women their plight have grown into an international problem and a concern the Economic and Social Council of the UN. Experts of the economy have arrived at

the consensus that so eradication of poverty is concerned, it requires full and equal participation of women in decision-making at all levels for which their empowerment and autonomy are essential prerequisites. It implies legislative administrative measures to give right to women no inheritance ownership, to credit and to natural resources and technology. It is necessitates to promote women's participation in employment and employment and ensure economic and social protection, unemployment, ill-health, maternity, child bearing, widowhood, disability and old-age.

Meanwhile in India, reservation of seats in parliament and legislatures for women is being actively pursued at the government to offer a political toast to entertain women. Many important court rulings regarding relating to harassment of women at work, maintenance of even if not legally married etc. have made the womenfolk stronger. Many savings and insurance schemes, announced from time to time by the central government and various state governments, have helped women to become economically stronger, resulting in their better social status. The constitutional amendment regarding reservation of one-third seats for women at the level of Panchayat has enabled one million women to participate in the decision-making process, right from the grassroots up district level. At the international level, however, the initiatives to improve editions for the women have resulted in the creation of an international legal framework to achieve legal equality by. UN bodies are also continually striving to bring about equality by raising public awareness and by a commitment to change long-ingrained traditions and attitudes, rich prolong discriminations.

Table 1: Workforce Participation Rate by Level of Education, 2004-05

Highest Level of Educational Attainment	*Rural*		*Urban*	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Illiterate	50.8	39.2	37.6	20.1
Literate-&-up to-primary	44.9	21.3	42	12
Middle	70.3	31.8	66	13.6
Secondary	72.6	30.3	67	12.2
Higher-Secondary	70.8	25.1	60.8	12.9
Diploma/Certificate-course	81.5	52.2	79.6	48.4
Graduates and Above	85	34.3	79.5	28.9
All	54.6	32.7	54.9	16.6

Source: Computed From Employment-Unemployment Survey NSSO 2004-05, Unit Level Data

Table 2: Percentage of Rural Male and Female Workers in Agriculture for Different Years

Gender	*1972 – 73*	*1977 – 78*	*1983*	*1987 – 88*	*1993 – 94*	*1999 – 2000*	*2004 – 2005*
Male	83.2	80.7	77.8	74.6	74.1	71.3	66.5
Female	89.7	88.2	87.8	84.8	86.1	85.2	83.2

Source: NSSO Employment – Unemployment Surveys, Various Years.

Table 3: Percentage Distribution of Male and Female Workers in Rural Areas by Activity, 1999 – 2000

Operation	*Male*	*Female*	*Total*
Ploughing	91.5	8.5	100
Sowing	64.5	35.5	100
Transplanting	56.4	43.6	100
Weeding	51.7	48.3	100
Harvesting	64.5	35.5	100
Other Cultivation activities	70.5	29.5	100
Forestry	58.7	41.3	100
Plantation	69.1	30.9	100
Animal Husbandry	49.6	50.4	100
Fisheries	88.8	11.2	100
Other agricultural activities	71.7	28.3	100
Non-manual labour in cultivation	84.8	15.2	100
Total	67	33	100

Source: Computed from Employment-Unemployment Survey NSSO 1999 – 2000, Unit Level Data

Table 4: Percentage Distribution of Rural Female Casual Workers and Wages by Industry Divisions 2004 – 05

Industry	*%Distribution (Female)*	*Wages (Rs. Per day)*
Agriculture, Forestry Fishing	89.5	33.20
Mining & Quarrying	0.8	45.7
Manufacturing	3.8	37.6
Electricity, Gas and Water	0	26.4
Construction	4.4	49.8
Wholesale & Retail Trade	0.1	41.6
Hotels & Restaurant	0	46.7
Transport Storage & Communication	0.1	36.3
Real Estate, Renting and Business	0	139.5
Public Admin	0.1	40.5
Education	0.1	48.6
Health & Social Work	0.1	52.8
Community Social & Personal Service	0.2	34.9
Private Households	0.9	40.4
Non-Agriculture	10.5	44

Source: Computer from Employment – Unemployment Survey NSSO 2004 – 05, Unit Level Data

SPECIAL INITIATIVES FOR WOMEN

National Commission for Women

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.

Reservation for Women in Local Self -Government

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Acts passed in 1992 by Parliament ensure one-third of the total seats for women in all elected offices in local bodies whether in rural areas or urban areas.

The National Plan of Action for the Girl Child (1991-2000)

The plan of Action is to ensure survival, protection and development of the girl child with the ultimate objective of building up a better future for the girl child.

National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, 2001

The Department of Women & Child Development in the Ministry of Human Resource Development has prepared a "National Policy for the Empowerment of Women" in the year 2001. The goal of this policy is to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The rural-urban differences in female literacy levels continue to exist but these are reducing more so during the last two decades. During the last 50 years the literacy levels have improved in rural areas at the rate of one per cent per annum.
- Gross Enrolment Ratio and Drop-out rates of girl students are some of the important concerns of development in India. Overtime, the drop-out phenomenon has been reducing while enrolments have been exhibiting a rising trend.
- Considerable proportion (46 per cent) of women workers are marginal workers. Almost 90 per cent of women workers are dependent upon agriculture and 98 per cent of rural women workers are participating in unorganized sector. Nearly 85 per cent of rural female workers are either illiterate or educated up to primary level.

- Work participation rates of females in rural areas are either declining or stagnant. Casualisation among female workers is high and is on rise.
- The major flagship programme of Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) for livelihood security is MGNREGS and female worker participation is remarkably high in Kerala, Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu in MGNREGS.

Table 5: Female Literacy in India – 1961 to 2001 (%)

Year	*Rural*	*Urban*	*Overall*
1961	10.10	40.50	15.35
1971	15.50	48.80	21.97
1981	21.70	56.30	29.76
1991	30.62	64.05	39.29
2001	46.58	72.99	54.16
2011	58.75	79.92	65.46

Source: GOI, www.censusindia.net, as on Jan, 2012

Table 6: Education Levels of Rural Females

S. No.	*Year*	*Not literate*	*Literate & Up to primary*	*Middle*	*Secondary & above*
1	2009 – 10	46.7	31.8	11.1	10.3
2	2004 – 05	55.0	29.3	8.9	6.7
3	1999 – 00	61.5	26.0	7.5	5.0
4	1993 – 94	67.9	23.0	5.6	3.4

Source: GOI, NSSO, Employment & Unemployment Situation in India, Report on 515

Table 7: Literacy levels of Rural Females – Social Class-wise 2001 & 2009 – 10

S. No.	*Year*	*SC*	*ST*	*Overall*
1	2001	37.84	32.44	46.58
2	2009 – 2010	52.10	52.10	53.20

ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL WOMEN THROUGH SELF HELP GROUPS (SHGS)

Women comprise half of human resources they have been identified as key agent of sustainable development. The contribution of women and their role in the family as well as in the economic development and social transformation are essential. Women constitute 90% of total marginal workers of the country. Rural women who are engaged in agriculture form 78% of all women in regular work. Men and the project administrators are low that determine extent to which empowerment may or may not take place. Micro credit is promoting the small scale business enterprises and its major aim is to alleviate poverty by income generating activities among rural women. Therefore they could achieve self-sufficiency. Role of Self Help Group's is to improve the social and economic development of women and give the better status to women in households and communities at large. The micro entrepreneurship is strengthening the women and removing the gender inequalities. Self Help Group's micro credit mechanism makes the members to involve in other community development activities.

Now-a-days economic development is such a strong factor that has changed the entire scenario of social and cultural environment within the country especially for the women. The rural women are engaged in small scale entrepreneurship programs with the help of Self Help Groups. Through that they were economically empowered and attaining very good status in family and community. Because development of society is directly related with the income generation capacity of its members with agriculture, as the key income generation activity the entrepreneurship on farm and home can directly affect the income of a major mass of Indian population. Entrepreneurship on small scale is the only solution to the problems of unemployment. The delivery of micro finance to the poor is smooth, effective and less expensive if they are organized into Self Help Groups. All Self Help Groups are promoting micro enterprise through micro-credit intervention.

INDIA'S POLICY AND DEVELOPMENT APPROACH TO WOMEN

Since independence, the Government of India's policy on women's development has undertaken various shifts of emphasis. The most significant changes occurred in the mid-1980s with the Seventh Five Year Plan which started a move towards equality and empowerment. New institutions were established to expedite action. This included the Department of Women and Child Development within the Ministry of Human Resource Development and its counterparts in the states. In addition, Women's Development Corporations were set up in most states to implement the new strategy of economic development by facilitating access to training, entrepreneurship development, credit, technical consultancy services and marketing facilities. The Eighth Five Year Plan marks a further shift towards empowerment of women, emphasizing women as equal partners in the development process. The government's continued advocacy for equitable growth opportunities for women is increasingly being reflected in state government policies and plans. These have resulted in:

- Increased participation by women in local governments and decision-making processes;
- An increasing focus of poverty alleviation programs for women;
- A mandate to eliminate discrimination against girl children and adolescents in matters of food, health, education, and child labor;
- Greater spread of community-based organizations, including women's groups;
- Recognition of the need to sensitize all levels of bureaucracy, legislators, and law enforcement agencies to gender issues;
- More recently, the promotion of income activities and thrift and credit self help groups for women.

WOMEN' EMPOWERMENT

Two major initiatives taken by P.R.I.D.E. INDIA with regard to the empowerment of women are the formation of various Self-Help Groups (SHG's) and the initiation of the Vipula Credit Co-operative Society. Since the financial services of the formal banking system have traditionally remained inaccessible to a majority of the poorer sections of the rural population, especially women, an initiative was made by P.R.I.D.E. INDIA to initiate a women's cooperative on the principle of mutual help. However, its success was limited as the operational area was in selected pockets only due to limited resources. Against this background, to meet the credit needs of rural women from the operational areas, P.R.I.D.E. INDIA initiated the creation of Self-Help Groups.

The following are the core principles that apply to all P.R.I.D.E.'s micro-finance programs:

- Serve the poorest clients, with a focus on women
- Promote solidarity and group guarantees
- Savings Mobilization
- Support capacity building/training
- Increase productive assets
- Ensure a child-focused perspective
- Promote culturally appropriate program approaches
- Plan for sustainability

As of today, P.R.I.D.E. has 840 SHG's, and the Vipula Credit Co-operative has a total of 2683 members. 13824 women have availed of the benefits of programs for the empowerment of women. P.R.I.D.E. has also been running an integrated development program for adolescent girls to impart non-formal education and vocational training to them. One of the major objectives of the program is to familiarize adolescent girls with knowledge about diverse but interrelated areas such as governance, public services, sanitation, child care etc. that will make them confident and enable them to become economically and socially independent in life.

SAVE OUR SISTERS (SOS)

Save Our Sisters (SOS) is a joint initiative of PRIDE India and Save the Children India that works to prevent the trafficking of young girls and women for purposes of commercial sexual exploitation. The Sahas Kendra Livelihood Programme for victims of trafficking is a way for these women to get their lives back on track through non-formal literacy, life skills education, and counselling.

CONCLUSION

For a country to truly progress each sector of the community should be empowered so that they can solve their problem on the grassroots and they can on themselves find way to improve their status. In this case a nation will not fully progress if the women in the community are limited by the gender constraints in the field of economic power. Once they gain the economic power through the support of the rest of the community it is possible for them to be a part of nation building and not just mere dependents of their male ties. A strong nation is built by economically empowered individuals not limited to the men but is shared to the women population.

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