

EMPOWERMENT OF RURAL WOMEN FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

* Dr. (Mrs.) Kalpana Gupta

The very issue of women empowerment arises because of the stark reality that women are still marginalised and sidelined from the mainstream as a use-and-throw commodity. The patriarchal canopy had always denied women the warm rays of autonomy and freedom. Empowerment of women involves many things, economic opportunity, property rights, political representation, social equality, personal rights and so on.

The Department of Women and Child Development (DWCD), Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India is the nodal agency looking after the social and economic empowerment of women to ensure gender equality,

equity and also responsible for the welfare and development of children. In recent years, the empowerment of women has been recognized as the central issue in determining the status of women.

In reality rural women are invisible in statistics, they remain unreached

and unattended in planned development efforts and are with no access and control on the resources. Women are engaged in a wide variety of occupations especially in the unorganized sector. In rural unorganized sector, women care for cattle, sowing, transplanting, harvesting, weaving, working in the hand-looms and producing handicrafts mostly as low paid earners or unpaid family workers. They are also engaged in producing and selling a variety of goods such as vegetables, fruits, flowers etc. Their role range from managers to landless labourers.

Government has been implementing various programmes which support women to take up new ventures and start self employment, which has been categorised under four heads :-

1. EMPOWERING STRATEGIES : Indian Mahila Yojana, Mahila Samridhi Yojana. The rural women's development and empowerment project now called as Swa-shakti Project, development of women and children in rural area.

2. EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME GENERATION: Training of Rural youth for Self Employment, Swayamsidha, Swawlamban, Support for Training and Employment Programme, Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation Socio-Economic Programme. Condensed Courses of

Education and Vocational Training, Swamjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojna, Women's Vocational Training Programme, Swama Jayanti Shahari Rozgar Yojna, Urban Self Employment Programme, Development of Women and Children in Urban Areas, Jawahar Rozgar Yojna, Trade Related Entrepreneurship Assistance and Development, National Rural Health Mission, National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme. Efforts are being made to merge support for Training and Employment Programme with other three programmes i.e., NORAD, SEP and CCEVT thus bringing out an umbrella scheme of training and employment for women.

3. WELFARE AND SUPPORT SERVICES: Hostels for working women, short stay homes, Swadhar, Creches/Day care centres for the children of working and ailing mothers.

4. OTHER ENABLING MEASURES : Rashtriya Mahila Kosh, a national mechanism to meet micro credit needs of poor and asset less women in the informal sector. Also known as the National Credit Fund for Women.

ROLE OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS (NGOS) IN RURAL WOMEN DEVELOPMENT:

The major NGOs in Rural Women Development are: Bihar Rural Livelihood Promotion Project (BRLP), National Alliance of Young Entrepreneurs World Assembly of Small and Medium Entrepreneurs, Xavier Institute for Social Studies, Self Employment Women's Association of Ahmedabad 'Y' Self Employment of Kolkata, Association of Women Entrepreneurs of Kamataka, Rural Development and Self Employment Training Institute based in Kamataka.

FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS:- There are good number of financial institutions that support women to start any new enterprises. Some of them are: Rashtriya Mahila Kosh, National Agricultural Bank of Rural Development, Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI), Council for Advancement of People's Action and Rural Technology (CAPART), Access to Credit through "Development Bank for Women Entrepreneurs" in small scale and tiny sectors, Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

NATIONAL POLICY FOR THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN:- The government

* Reader, Deptt. of Home Science, Mahila Mahavidyalaya-Banaras, Hindu University, Varanasi (U.P.)

has adopted the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women on 20th March, 2001. The main objective of this policy is to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and to ensure their active participation in all spheres of public life and activities. The themes and issues covered by the policy include judicial - legal system, economic empowerment of women, social empowerment (health, education, violence, science and technology, drinking water and sanitation etc.), women in decision-making, media, the girl child etc. The policy provides prescriptions under each of above and calls upon different departments and ministries to coverage their resources and action. The policy also stresses the importance of earmarking allocations under the women's earmarking allocations under the women's component plan and priorities need for gender budgeting.

The approaches for empowerment of rural women can be divided into four broad heads :- Educational Empowerment Social Empowerment Economic Empowerment Technological Empowerment

Educational Empowerment:-Education is the key which opens the door to life, develops humanity and promotes national development. Education can be an effective tool for women's empowerment. It enables rural women to acquire new knowledge and technology required for improving and developing their tasks in all fields. Therefore, at least one Functional Literacy Centre should be opened in each Gram Panchayat area with a view to make all and rural farm women functionally literate and adult education necessary.

Social Empowerment:-Empowering women contribute to social development. Economic progress in any country whether developed or underdeveloped could be achieved through social development. Hence, women's empowerment cannot be ignored, while devising various policies for rural and socio-economic development. **Status of Women:** Even country has made progress in developing women's capabilities, but inequalities continue to exist between women and men. The low status of women is the outcome of a variety of causes in which patriarchal values reinforced by tradition, media and other socio-political institution play a major role. Thus, the institutional bases of women's oppression have to sensitized to accept the gender equality and moreover, women's perception of themselves would also need to be changed. **Cultural Bias:** Cultural traditions and economic necessity have always mean a significant role for women in agriculture. In India it is not uncommon that women do not have control over the land. Even, where women constitute

a larger share of a agricultural producers but, there are cultural constraints to easy communication between men and women, because almost all extension workers are men. **Health and Nutrition:** Health and nutrition are two very important basic needs for empowerment of rural women. To achieve real and quicker development in health sector, an extensive as well as intensive "Health Education and Awareness Campaign" (HEAC) needs to be given topmost priority and it should mainly stress on nutritional education, benefits of immunization, family planning etc.

Economic Empowerment:-Empowering women with economically productive work will enhance their contribution to agricultural development.

Access to Resources: The farm women need to have control over limited resources like land and livestock, so that they could take away decisions and implement them in any way that is required. Ownership and control over productive assets will create a sense of belonging and owning. It will thus help to take responsibility in family and local group activities. Other impact of control is to enhance their decision-making ability to meet some physiological needs like self-esteem and confidence.

Micro-Credit Programmes:-Micro-credit programmes extend small loans to poor people for self-employment projects that generate income allowing them to care for themselves and their families. In most cases, micro-credit programmes offer a combination of services and resources to their clients in addition to credit for self-employment. Access to productive resources is critical for enhancing women's economic choices. Since, formal credit institutions rarely lend the poor, special institutional arrangement may become necessary to extend credit to those who have no collateral to officer their enterprises. In order to have access to credit, setting up self-help group, local banking system by women, Non Governmental Organizations and provision of facilities by Government need to be established. The policy challenge is to support effective grass-roots credit schemes and intermediaries and ensure that low-income have assured credit from the formal financial system. Access to Cooperatives -and Local Women's Organizations Collectivization has been recognized as a tenet of women's empowerment. It has been defined as a process of bringing a group of women together at a base to become an integral part of an economic activity. Organizational efforts should be made for integrating farm women into development. Organization of Mahila Mandals, Cooperatives, Societies and Discussion Groups will serve this purpose. The control of these organizations should be in the hands of womenfold themselves. Also, the

present beneficiary to women's development should be replaced by participatory approach. Technological Empowerment: Through women are involved in almost all agricultural operations, in rural areas yet, they have inadequate technical competency due to their limited exposure to outside world. This has compelled them to follow the age old practices which in turn result in poor work efficiency and drudgery and needed computer, internet latest informations.

Capacity Building: Capacity building and empowerment are important for which there should be decentralized capacity building among the rural women particularly farm women. Empowerment projects should go beyond the provision of basic social services for all. They should include components vital for enabling the poor to participate in economic activities. It is important to develop the skills among farm women in order to increase their productivity and to keep them abreast of modernization and technological changes for being competitive in the market. **Exposure to Mass Media:** The transfer of technology approach, which mainly includes mass media are also not paying due attention towards dissemination, of adequate and timely agricultural & marketing information to the farm rural women. Therefore, there is utmost need to provide adequate coverage to the programmes related to women and they must get exposure to mass media for improving their communication and mediation skills to strengthen their capacity to contact and mediate with external world.

Appropriate Training Programme- Training is an important component of HRD which enhances knowledge, skill and attitude. For building technical competency among farm women, need-based skill-oriented training programmes to reinforce their role in farm activities need special attention. The training programmes should initially be organized on their felt-needs and then be switched over to unmet but essential needs. To achieve this sacred task, infrastructural facilities in terms of more numbers of KVKs, FTCs and BRLP should be established in the district on priority basis. **Appropriate Technology For Women:** In order to cater the technological needs of farm rural women, women specific technologies should be developed. While evolving agricultural technologies, indigenous practices used by women should be paid due attention for blending with the frontier ones for greater adoption. Also there is need to strengthen linkage between various research and extension organizations engaged in transfer of technology. Measures to strengthen women's empowerment and rural development: Empowerment of women is the prime objective of all development programmes and policies. These

programmes could be planned properly and implemented effectively in order to attain self-sufficiency and self-reliance. U.N. Commission on Status of

Women says- Women constitute half of the world's population, accomplish about two thirds of its work hours, receive one tenth of the world's income. The following measures can strengthen self-employment in rural area in the service sector, which will generate additional income leading to economic independence of women Identification and organization of innovative and high income generating activities suitable for women. Development of entrepreneurial abilities of women by organizing special types of training. Encouraging women to take up part-time jobs while being in the house itself, to earn additional income to support the family. Effective planning at the micro-level. Encouraging women through formal and non-formal education to involve themselves in the service sector. Organizing women labourer in the service through women's associations, cooperative societies or mahila mandals, self-help groups etc. Steps to make women aware of technical and financial assistance available to women entrepreneurs, and to encourage them through concessions and incentives to enter into the service sector related to women. Government should encourage research and development in the service sector to find out high income generating activities suitable for women. . Wide publicity to training programmes in the service sector. . Creating awareness among educated and uneducated about the availability of facilities and concessions for entrepreneurs.

Women are very important segment in development at local to global levels. Economic independence and education of women will go a long way in attaining self-reliance for women. Experience, awareness, education and competence, willingness, confidence, self-motivation, encouragement from family and society contribute to empowerment of rural women.

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