

Policies and Programmes for Development of Poor Women

Dr. G. Somasekhara

Associate Professor in History, Acharya Nagarjuna University, Ongole Campus, Ongole -523001 (India)

1. Status of Women in India

The status of women in India, determines the factors such as the role of women in decision making in the family and in the community; their educational status; their participation in social, economic and political activities; their position in various professions as their legal status in terms of marriage, divorce and inheritance of property could be taken into consideration. Women in general are discriminated against in all walks of life and gradually the status of women has declined.

According to Devi (1982: 9-12), there were distinct stages of rise and fall of status of women in India. Woman in the Vedic times enjoyed a very high status. She had as many rights to enjoy life as man had. Woman was man's friend, his co-worker and never his inferior; she had enjoyed the property rights and had access to the property of her father and husband. After the Vedic period the position of women deteriorated considerably. The Hindu lawgiver Manu had made women entirely dependent on man and subjected her to the authority of a father, husband, and son in the different periods of her life as daughter, wife and mother. His dictum was that "for women there can be no freedom at any stage in life". This position of women continued throughout the Hindu period and was reinforced by the Muslim masters whose custom and tradition were noted for the complete subordination of women by man and which considered women as inferior to men.

Muslim rule brought a further deterioration in the status of women. Purdah and polygamy were two most important institutions of the Muslim conquerors bringing in more and more restrictions on the rights and freedom of women. Moreover, both Muslim and Hindu women were economically and socially, totally dependent on men. This period is known as the darkest period for women in Indian history (Beena Shah, 1995:4-8).

According to Devi (1982), the British people at first followed a policy of non-interference in the social and religious life of the people of India, to win their co-operation in the administration of the country. So women went down imperceptibly in social status. The decline in the Indian women's status was reflected in the customs relating to marriage, religion and property, widowhood, dowry, role in the family, basic attitudes with respect to the social image of women, etc.

Even though this position continued in the beginning of the British period, the spread of English education which was a characteristic of British rule and the intermixture of western and eastern cultures enabled women to realize their subordinate position and persuaded them to regain their legitimate status. The various Hindu revivalist organizations, such as the Arya Samaj gave a great impetus to the awakening of womanhood. In the 20th century, the mahila samithis and women's organizations took steps to abolish the purdah and child marriage and encouraged widow marriage. They enlightened the public on health and sanitation and pleaded for equal rights for women in franchise and education.

The movement for the emancipation of women, which slowly started from the middle of the 19th century, was quickened in the 20th century, especially after World War I. After the First World War, Mahatma Gandhi set the pace for the progress of Indian women in all spheres of life. He called Manu's dictum "a symbol of our barbarism". He advised women to emancipate themselves from the drudgery of the kitchen. Adhering to Gandhi's appeal, women came out in thousands and took part in the national movement. The World War II and the resultant socio-economic upheaval brought about changes in social relationships and to the wakening of the masses and rousing of their consciousness about the rights of man. The United Nations (UN) in its Universal Declaration of Human Rights reaffirmed the faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in equal rights of men and women.

The values set forth by the Indian constitution envisage a socialistic pattern of society under democratic form of government, wherein equality freedom and non-exploitation are assured to all sections of the people irrespective of race, religion and sex as their fundamental rights.

Article 15 of the Constitution of India provided for equality between men and women. It prohibited any discrimination on the basis of sex. This provision because of its importance was made a part of the chapter on Fundamental Rights. In the Directive Principles of State Policy, the Constitution expressed the desirability of providing equal chances to women in employment and education.

Problems of women's development cannot be viewed in isolation from other problems of society. The three key institutions in the case of India are property, caste and household. The institutions of property, caste and household have traditionally served as instruments of subordination of women. The conjunction of property and caste in an interacting system of production reinforces the subordination of women within the economy and the household (Subrate Mishra, 1995:18).

Various Acts passed by the Indian Parliament, such as the Hindu Marriage and the Hindu Succession Acts have brought the major section of the Indian women socially on a par with men. Thus the ground for equality was prepared. Scientific and technological progress all over the world has accelerated the process of change in the position of women in India also. In cities and villages women today are breaking the social psychological barriers and are assuming new responsibilities. Women's economic horizon once confined to domestic servanthood or labour on the farm has expanded considerably. Women from all shades of life started working in other fields. They are now employed as teachers, doctors, lawyers, nurses, engineers, journalists, officers in the government departments and commercial houses (Devi, 1982:12), and are astronauts too.

Women are found in large numbers in the fields of health, medicine, literacy, education, teaching, training, agriculture, office administration, catering etc. Yet in these sectors, they are hardly visible in the policy-making echelons. That is to say that even in women-dominated professions, they are at the middle and lower levels like low lying clouds content to drift across the sky. The central services too reflect poor intake of women. In the administrative cadre and even in the parliament their representation is very poor. And now through the seventy-third and seventy-fourth constitutional amendments, there is compulsory reservation for women in local bodies in rural and urban areas. Even those who have reservations about 'reservation' for women believe that it is a timely and essential move. This is a good opportunity for women to sweep these institutions clean – for are they not good at sweeping and cleaning which are their traditional chores? (Menon, 1998:36-37).

Leelamma Devasia and Devasia (1994:5-13) view that when a woman attains economic independence she naturally becomes the mistress of her own body and author of her own decisions. She can then take free choices even regarding her sex life and no one can force her to be used for his pleasure and benefit.

2. Women's development in India

The concept of the empowerment of women as a goal of development projects and programmes has been gaining wider acceptance in the 1990s. Women's participation in grassroot organizations is increasingly recognized as crucial to their empowerment and as a way for them to help shape development policies (Karl, 1995:110). According to Karmakar (199:1658), in male-dominated rural society, it is not surprising to note that prior to the 1990s, there were hardly any credit schemes designed for rural women. It is only after women-oriented studies highlighted the deprivation and struggle for survival that the concept of women's credit was born. There is growing realization that rural women have been underestimated and discriminated against in all walks of life despite their substantial contribution to the household economy and in turn the national economy.

During early reform movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, reform organizations like the Arya Samaj, the Theosophical Society, the Parathrana Samaj, the Brahmo Samaj etc., came into existence and challenged the religious hegemony perceived by them as prevailing over the social ills of the time. Indian women's struggles in the pre independence era were primarily around women's rights and the historical context lent itself. After independence, women's organizations began working with grass root women, explicitly addressing the issue of poverty, leaving the struggle around equal rights and legislation to professional women's organizations (Purushothaman, 1998:78).

In spite of constitutional guarantees given in the preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles of our Constitution, relating to equality of opportunity and equality before law, social and economic deprivation of women in India is well known. Within the framework of a democratic polity, our laws, development policies, plans and programmes have aimed at women's advancement in different spheres.

During last sixty years of planned development in India, a lot of welfare and development programmes have been initiated and implemented for the empowerment of women. According to Khan (2001:4-8), programmes for the welfare and development of women have been taken up from the onset of the five-year plan. The central social welfare board, set up in 1953 was primarily charged with the responsibility of advancing the health, education and the general situation of women, children and the handicapped, and undertook a number of welfare measures through the voluntary sector

In addition, the Government of India has brought about specific legislation to protect and safeguard the rights of women. The Department of Women and Child Development (DWCD) was set up in the year 1995 as a part of the Ministry of Human Resource Development to give the much needed impetus to the holistic development of women and children. For advancement of women and children, the department formulates plans, policies and programmes, enacts/amends legislations, guides and coordinates the efforts of both governmental and non-governmental organizations working in the field of women and child development. Besides playing its nodal role, the department implements certain innovative programmes for women & children. These programmes cover welfare and support services, training for employment and income generation, awareness generation and gender sensitization. They play a supplementary role to the other general development programmes in the sectors of health, education, rural development, etc. All these efforts are directed to ensure that women are empowered both economically and socially and thus become equal partners in national development along with men. The policy would prescribe strategies and action points to bridge the gap between the equal de-jure status and unequal de-facto position of the women in the country. It would seek to guide action at every level and in every sector by mainstreaming gender perspectives into all laws, policies, programmes, regulations and budgetary allocation of the Government. The department is in the process of setting up a National Resource Centre for Women. This would be a nodal body to mainstream gender issues in policies and programmes for women by training, policy support, information dissemination, research and documentation. India is a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

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 entitlement of women. The integration of women into development is a broad concept in which four different ideas are interlinked. These involve ensuring that (i) Women's existing contribution to development is recognized, measured and acknowledged. (ii) Women have access to the tools and resources to affect development, e.g.: education, training, land, credit-etc. (iii) Women's concerns are incorporated into the specific development programmes and projects and (iv) Women have access to the fruits of development, as they are achieved.

The credit for this change goes to the feminist impulse created through the international women's decade. The parliamentary committee on the status of women while

presenting its report to the government, just before the launching of international women's decade had already laid the foundations for this change. Then the official reference to women as "partners in development" must be seen as a great leap forward, in the attitude to women's issues.

The major policy initiatives undertaken by the Department of Women and Child Development in the recent past include the establishment of the National Commission for Women (NCW), Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK), adoption of National Nutrition Policy (NNP), strengthening of ICDS, setting up National Creche Fund (NCF), launching of Indira Mahila Yojana (IMY), Balika Samridhhi Yojana (BSY), and Rural Women's Development and Empowerment Project (RWDEP).

According to Khan (2001:6) and Sinha (2002:16-17), the eighth five-year plan (1992-97) makes a shift from 'development' to 'empowerment' of women. Policies, programmes and projects designed to assist and uplift the low-income women, have shifted from "welfare approach" to an "empowerment approach". Hence, a number of measures have been taken by the government in this direction for social and economic emancipation of women. For economic empowerment of women, an innovative programme, Mahila Samridhhi Yojana (MSY) was announced on 15th August 1993 and it was launched on 2nd October 1993. The MSY not only seeks to enable women to exercise greater control over household resources, but also tries to change the inequities in social construction of gender disparities in the development sphere. This scheme also encouraged thrift so that women can start their own saving that assure them of security in time of need.

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 level. The Gender and Development (GAD) approach shifts the focus from women as a group to the socially determined relations between men and women. It focuses on the social, economic, political and cultural forces that determine how men and women might participate in, benefit from and control project resources and activities differently.

The year 2001 was observed as "Women Empowerment Year" and a number of programmes have been planned and executed improving the access of women to national resources and for ensuring their rightful place in the mainstream of economic development. The objective of the "Women's Empowerment Year" was to create large-scale awareness with the active participation of women themselves. The Government was always committed to improve the status of women in India and towards this end, apart from the Constitutional guarantees several schemes have been implemented from time to time.

Programmes sponsored by Central Government, like the Swarna Jayanti Shahari Rozgar Yojana (SJSRY) for the urban areas and Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) for the rural areas were launched. Women Development Corporations (WDCs) were started in many states. The Women Component Plan (WCP), introduced as part of the decentralized planning process, aims at promoting gender related development exclusively to the women. This was considered more effective as they yield benefits to the women and children and to the community at large. According to Khan

et al (2001:22) the fund earmarked for WCP is to be utilized by the local bodies to prepare projects that directly benefit women.

The basic concept underlying WCP is that women development is not just providing income and employment opportunities but also better health, education, physical environment, human dignity, freedom, etc., though broad parameters are laid down regarding the type of projects to be formulated. The local bodies have the freedom to formulate location and need specific projects based on the felt needs of the women. Participation of women is ensured in all spheres of activities, be it in expressing opinion, formulating project proposals, monitoring or implementation. They were to be treated not as mere beneficiaries but partners in the development process. Three years after the inception of WCP, a study of the WCP was done with assistance from UNICEF, Chennai, to analyze the effectiveness of the gender component in the campaign, the pattern of expenditure, and the factors promoting/hindering implementation of the projects funded under this component. The report highlights several strengths of the WCP and one of them was that:

"New forms of women organizations such as neighborhood groups, and self help groups were successfully promoted in Panchayats under WCP. One positive outcome of this was the increased women participation in Panchayats which have promoted self-help groups" (Khan, 2001:iv)

3. Advancement of Women through Five-Year Plans

The development process in India as envisaged by the Five-Year Plans was to be geared to an equal share for women in development. Development for and the welfare of woman received particular attention from the beginning of the planning process. Women were provided special attention in three sectors - education, social welfare, and health. At the same time, a proactive role for women was envisaged. The Central Social Welfare Board encouraged women's organisations, especially at the grassroots, to promote welfare measure in partnership with the government, with *mahila mandals* conceived as delivery mechanisms. Thus, "... there was a conceptual thrust (even though inadequately articulated) towards actively involving and stimulating the participation of women's organisations in the processes of change'.

There has been a progressive increase in the plan outlays over the last six decades of planned development to meet the needs of women and children. The outlay of rupees 4 crores in the First Plan (1951-56) has increased to Rs. 7,810.42 crores in the Ninth Five Year Plan, Rs. 13,780 crores in the Tenth Five Year Plan and Rs.22382 crores in the Eleventh Five year Plan. There has been a shift from "Welfare" oriented approach in the First Five Year Plan to "development" and "empowerment" of women in the consecutive Five Year Plans. (22382 crores).

Programmes for Women: Some of the significant developments pertaining to Women in recent past are as follows.

Swalamban:

Swalamban, the erstwhile Training-cum-Employment Programme for Women provides skill training to women to facilitate their employment or self-employment on a sustained basis in traditional and non-traditional trades. Till December 2002, 902 projects including 262 continuing projects benefiting 58,458 women were sanctioned. During 2004-05, 24560 women benefited under the programme.

4. Gender Development Index

The Department Women and Child Welfare has initiated the gender budgeting exercise and a chapter on Gender Inequality was incorporated in the Annual Economic Survey. A gender analysis of the Budget 2001-02 has been carried out. Measures have been initiated for preparing Gender Development Index for the States and Districts.

Swayamsidha:

Swayamsidha, an integrated scheme for women's empowerment, is based on the formation of women into Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and aims at the holistic empowerment of women through awareness generation, economic empowerment and convergence of various schemes. It is to be implemented in 650 blocks benefiting 9.30 lakh women. Each block would have 100 SHGs with 15-20 women in each group. Nearly 59,940 SHGs have been formed.

Swa-Shakti:

Swa-Shakti Project, a World Bank and International Fund for Agricultural Development supported Project, is being implemented in 57 districts of 9 States with partnership of 218 NGOs. 17,647 Women's Self Help Groups have been formed benefiting 2,43,962 women.

Support and Training for Employment Programme (STEP):

Support and Training for Employment Programme (STEP) provides updated skills and new knowledge to poor and assetless women in traditional occupations for enhancing their productivity and income generation. A package of services such as training, extension, infrastructure, market linkages, etc. are provided besides linkage with credit for transfer of assets. Since its inception, about 6,55,222 women have been covered under 138 projects till 2003. In 2004-05, 13,000 women benefited under the programme.

The Rural Women's Development & Empowerment Project (RWDEP):

RWDEP has been sanctioned on 16th October 1998 as a centrally-sponsored project with an estimated cost of Rs. 191.21 crore. The project will strengthen the process of, and create an environment for empowerment of women in the six states of Bihar, Haryana, Karnataka, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.

Mahila Samridhi Yojana (MSY):

The MSY, launched in October, 1993, seeks to empower women by improving their economic status. It aims to promote the saving habit amongst rural women and to thereby improve their financial assets. The scheme offers small deposits with attractive rates of interest and operates through the network of post-offices. The MSY has enabled women not only to inculcate thrift habits but has also enhanced their participation in various developmental activities.

The National Perspective Plan for Women (NPP), 1988:

The NPP was drawn up to ease the process of linking women's issues to the mainstream policies and programmes. It recognised the need to focus on women's concerns but discouraged women's development as a separate sub stream. Its strategy was to provide for women a democratic, egalitarian,

secular and co-operative social structure. The NPP formulated an action framework for rural development, health, legislation, political participation, education, employment, support services, communication and voluntary action.

The Mahila Samakhy Scheme:

The Mahila Samakhy scheme was launched in 1989 to translate the goals of the National Policy on Education into a concrete programme for education and empowerment of women in rural areas, particularly women in socially and economically marginalised groups. The programme is currently implemented in over 9,000 villages in 60 districts spread over 10 states. The programme has enabled women's collectives to address the larger socio-cultural issues that have traditionally inhibited the participation of women and girls in the education system. Through its strategy of building grassroot women's organisations, the programme has created a forum and environment for women's education at the community level besides managing 866 NFE Centres and around 1,000 Early Childhood-Care Education Centres by the end of the Ninth Plan.

Women's Vocational Training programme:

In the field of Labour and Employment, the Women's Vocational Training programme, launched in 1974, aims to implement various skill training programmes to increase women's wage employment and self-employment opportunities. Under the Women's Occupational Training Directorate, there are 10 Regional Vocational Training Institutes (RVTIs) in different parts of the country, besides a National Vocational Training Institute (NVTI) at NOIDA. These institutes organise regular skill training courses at basic, advanced and post advanced levels. By the end of the Ninth Plan, there were 4,499 Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) with 6.6 lakh seats. Vocational training facilities exclusively for women are also provided through a network of Women Industrial Training Institutes (WITIs) and Women's wings in general ITIs under the administrative control of the State Governments. There are 765 Institutes (231 WITIs and 534 Women's wings in General ITIs/Private ITIs) with 46,750 training seats.

Swaranjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY):

In the field of Rural Development, antipoverty programmes have been a dominant feature of Government initiatives in rural areas. The Swaranjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) was launched in 1999 with the objective of bringing the beneficiary families (swarozgaris) above the poverty line by providing them income-generating assets through a mix of bank credit and Government subsidy. It is envisaged that 50 per cent of SHGs in each block should be exclusively of women, who will account for at least 40 per cent of the swarozgaris. Since inception of the scheme, 7.4 lakh SHGs have been formed. Around 4.3 million swarozgaris, 24 per cent of whom were women, were assisted during the Ninth Plan.

The Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana (JGSY) reserves 30 per cent of employment opportunities for women. During the Ninth Plan, around 3.9 million man-days constituting 28 per cent of the total employment generated under JGSY, were provided for women.

The Indira Awas Yojana (IAY) stipulates that houses under the scheme are to be allotted in the name of the female member of the beneficiary household or in the joint names of husband and wife. Priority is given to widows and unmarried women. Since its inception in 1985-86, 7.9 million houses have been built.

National Maternity Benefit Scheme:

Under the National Maternity Benefit Scheme (now transferred to the Department of Family Welfare with effect from the year 2001-02) aims at assisting expectant mothers by providing them Rs. 500 each for the first two live births, 6.5 lakh women have been benefited since 1995 when the scheme was started.

National Old Age Pension Scheme:

Under the National Old Age Pension Scheme, central assistance is provided to women and men above the age of 65 years who have little or no regular means of subsistence. Around 7.7 million women, constituting 24 per cent of the aged, benefited from this scheme during the Ninth Plan.

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

This decadal plan of action for the girl-child sought to focus on gender specific needs, with the initiatives under the plan extending to cover legislation to ban sex determination tests (a measure meant to avert female foeticide).

- A survey of the problem of female infanticide.
- Multi-media campaigns to develop a positive image of the girl-child.
- Compilation of gender disaggregated data and detailed bibliographies of studies relating to girls.

6. Health Initiatives for Women

Several Maternal and Child Health Programmes [MCH] have become a part of the various 5-Year Plans. The *Child Survival and Safe Motherhood Programme* (CSSM), initiated in August, 1992, sought to intervene in the spheres of morbidity and mortality, vitamin A prophylaxis, immunisation, prevention and treatment of anaemia, promotion of institutions for maternal care, treatment of maternal complications, management of obstetric emergencies, and the promotion of birth spacing. Efforts have also been directed towards modernising traditional maternal care and delivery techniques, including the strengthening the role of Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM), the Lady Health Visitor (LHV) and the Multipurpose Health Workers in the Health System. Health initiatives for women have taken cognisance of the following problems areas

- The lack of female medical officers in peripheral health institutes.
- The need for improvement in interpersonal communication.
- The need to rapidly organise village level groups like *mahila swasthya sangaths*.
- Low nutritional status of women - programmes like the Public Employment Programmes, the Special Feeding Programme, and the Public Distribution System have targeted women and children as special groups with a need for food inputs.

- The effect of environmental degradation on women's health.
- Women's health is affected by the use of pesticide in agriculture.

The Socio-Economic Programme (SEP)

Yet, another major programme of employment and training for poor and needy women, being implemented by CSWB, is the Socio-Economic Programme (SEP). Of the Ninth Plan outlay of Rs. 26.42 crore, expenditure incurred was Rs. 4.92 crore. Around 62 SEP Units were set up during the tenth Plan to benefit about 3,100 women. The major reason for the failure to achieve the targets set for this programme was the decision to phase out the scheme and finally drop the same in the eleventh Plan.

Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK)

The Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK), since its registration in 1993, has established its credentials as the premier micro-credit agency with its focus on women and their economic empowerment through the provision of credit to poor and asset less women in the informal sector. RMK mainly channelises its support through Voluntary Organisations, Women's Development Corporations, Women's Co-operative Societies, Block Samitis under the Swayamsidha programme. Achievements of RMK since its inception include - sanction of credit worth Rs. 109.73 crore benefiting 4.2 lakh women through 992 Voluntary Organisations/NGOs; and disbursement of Rs. 82.38 crore upto February 2002. Above all, the success of RMK lies in the fact that it has maintained a creditable recovery rate of 90 per cent and above, all these years.

7. Women and Legislation

The Indian constitution guarantees equal rights to both sexes and does not discriminate on the basis of caste, colour and creed. The concept of social security is essentially related to high ideas of Human dignity and social justice. The act was passed by the Government for the benefit and empowerment of women, her social security and welfare.

Following provisions of constitution make women on par with men:

1. Article 14 of constitution guarantees to all equal protection of laws and equality before law. Both these expressions have also been used in "universal declaration of human rights". The equality before law is guaranteed to all, without regard to sex, race colour or nationality.
2. Article 15 (3) has been empowered to make special provisions for women, women requires special treatment due to their nature.
3. Article 16 (2) lays down the rule that no citizen can be discriminated against for any employment under the state on ground only of religion, race, caste, or sex.
4. Article 21 Supreme Court has laid down some special provisions for women by way of compensation to rape victims and prevention of sexual harassment. Compensation for rape victims has been awarded in Delhi Domestic working Women's forum vs. Union of India.
5. Constitution 73rd Amendment Act 1992 Article 243 D provides that in every Panchayat, a seat shall be

reserved for women, and office of the chairperson in the Panchayat at village shall be reserved in such manner as the legislature of the State may by law provide.

6. Constitutional 74th Amendment Act, 1992 Article 243 T provides that 1/3 seats in Municipal Corporations shall be reserved for women. Such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in the municipality.

8. National Commission for Women (NCW)

The NCW was set up in January 1992 as a statutory body under the National Commission for Women Act, 1990, to safeguard the rights and interests of women. The Commission was set up with the following objectives:

- To investigate, examine and review matters relating to the safeguards provided for women in the Constitution.
- To review the implementation of women-specific and women-related legislation and suggest necessary amendments, if need be.
- To function as an agency to keep a watch towards facilitating redressal of grievances of women.
- The commission also has executive cum judicial function to look into the complaints and take suo moto notice of cases relating to women's rights.

9. National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, 2001

The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian constitution in its preamble, fundamental rights, fundamental duties and Directive principles. The Constitution not only grants equality to women but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favor of women. Within the framework of a democratic polity, our laws, development policies, plans and programs have aimed at women's advancement in different spheres. From the fifth five-year plan (1974-78) onwards there has been a marked shift in the approach to women's issues from welfare to development in recent years. National commission for women was established

by an Act of parliament in 1990 to safeguard the women rights and legal entities. 73rd 74th Amendments provided reservation of seats in the local bodies of panchayats and municipalities. Still women remain largely marginalized, poor and socially excluded. The goal of National Commission for Women (NCW) is to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women. Creating an environment to realize their full potential; enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in all spheres-socio, economic, political, cultural and civil, equal access to health care, employment, remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security and public office etc., strengthening legal system to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and violence against a girl child; building and strengthening partnerships with civil society, particularly women's organization. NCW translating the policy into a set of concrete actions fixed measurable goals to be achieved by 2010. National and State Councils will be formed to oversee the operationalisation of the policy on a regular basis promoting social awareness to gender issue and women's human rights; removal of all references derogatory to the dignity of women from all public documents and legal instruments.

10. Role of Voluntary Service Organizations

Towards improving the status and position of women, the role of voluntary agencies is significant in the fields of school education, health, family welfare and women's development and education. Many government programmes are operated largely through NGOs and important initiatives have emerged from the voluntary agencies themselves. Voluntary organisations have been in the forefront in activities like advocacy of women's issues, and organising self-help groups in the distribution of micro-credit. The Central Social Welfare Board, the apex agency at the national level, co-ordinates and promotes the activities of about 15,000 voluntary grassroots organisations. Other organisations at the village, block, district and State levels to operate in the field of Women and Child Development.

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