

**3.1** Indian economy is growing fast with rapid urbanization and an increasing youth population. To convert this youth bulge into a demographic dividend, it is highly necessary to support both the boys and girls equally to reach their full potential. This requires empowering the women and girls economically and socially. Economic and social empowerment puts women and girls in a stronger position and gives them the authority to make decisions that promote their own health and wellbeing, as well as that of their families. It is believed that social and economic empowerment is a key factor in improving sexual and reproductive health of women. It enhances their ability to have a voice in decision making processes.

**3.2** While equality between men and women is in itself an important development goal, women's economic participation is also a part of the growth and stability equation. Higher female labor force participation can boost growth by mitigating the impact of a shrinking workforce. Better opportunities for women can also contribute to broader economic development in developing economies, for instance through higher levels of school enrollment for girls.

**3.3** Violence against women and girls has been identified as the highest priority in the fight for gender equality. Harmful practices, such as early marriage remain a significant problem driving up the fertility rate and maternal mortality, & impacting the health and education of young women. Further, providing a safe and secure environment will go a long way in enabling women to move out of their houses freely and thus increase their economic participation.

**3.4** Recognizing the need for gender equality and admitting the gender disparity that exists in the various facets of the society, Government of India has been taking various measures to move towards attaining gender equality. 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 favour of women. To uphold the constitutional mandate, the State has enacted various legislative measures intended to ensure equal rights, to counter social discrimination and various forms of violence and atrocities and to provide support services specially to working women. Although women may be victims of any of the crimes such as 'Murder', 'Robbery', 'Cheating' etc, the crimes, which are directed specifically against women, are characterized as 'Crime against Women' and have exclusive sections in the Indian Penal Code. Some acts have special provisions to safeguard women and their interests like the Maternity Benefit Act, Equal Remuneration Act etc. Although all laws are not gender specific, the provisions of laws affecting women significantly are reviewed periodically and amendments carried out to keep pace with the emerging requirements. One most crucial such amendment is the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment Acts passed in 1992 by Parliament to reserve one-third of the total seats for women in all elected offices in local bodies whether in rural areas or in urban areas. India has also ratified various international conventions and human rights instruments committing to secure equal rights of women. Key among them is the ratification of the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1993.

**3.5** The legal provisions have helped ending many practices against women and improving the status of women. Government of India is committed to promoting gender equality in all sectors and at all levels of governance. Safety and security of women and children in the country is utmost priority for the Government. This commitment is prominently exhibited in the various policies and schemes initiated that directly or indirectly contribute towards ensuring social, economic and political empowerment of women.

**3.6** Educating the girls is the most important aspect of women's empowerment. An educated woman will be fully empowered to take care of not only her requirements but of the entire family. The National Education Policy (NEP), 2020 prioritizes gender equity and envisions ensuring equitable access to quality education to all students with a special emphasis on socially and economically disadvantaged groups. The Samagra Shiksha launched from 2018-19 has now been aligned with the recommendations of NEP, 2020 to ensure that all children have access to quality education with an equitable and inclusive classroom environment which should take care of their diverse background, multilingual needs, different academic abilities and make them active participants in the learning process.

**3.7** Bridging gender and social category gaps at all levels of school education and promoting vocationalisation of Education are some of the major objectives of the Samagra Shiksha. Further, Samagra Shiksha attempts to reach out to girls, and children belonging to SC, ST, Minority communities and transgender. In order to ensure greater participation of girls in education, Samagra Shiksha includes various interventions like opening of schools in the neighbourhood, provision of free textbooks, provision of two sets of uniform to all girls, SC, ST children and Below Poverty Line (BPL) children, provision of gender segregated toilets in all schools, stipend to CWSN girls from pre-primary to class XII, and self-defense training for girls.

**3.8** In order to enhance the employability of female workers, the Government is providing training to them through a network of Women Industrial Training Institutes, National Vocational Training Institutes and Regional Vocational Training Institutes. To ensure economic independence of women through skill development and vocational training, the Government has also introduced skill India Mission. The National Skill Development Policy focuses on inclusive skill development, with the objective of increased women participation for better economic productivity. Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Kendras lay emphasis on creating additional infrastructure both for training and apprenticeship for women; flexible training delivery mechanisms, flexible afternoon batches on local need-based training to accommodate women; and ensuring safe and gender sensitive training environment, employment of women trainers, equity in remuneration, and complaint redressal mechanism. There are schemes like Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana and Stand Up India, Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP), for helping the women to set up their own enterprise.

**3.9** Further, in order to encourage employment of women, a number of enabling provisions have been incorporated in the recently enacted Labour Codes viz. the Code on Wages, 2019, the industrial Relations Code, 2020, the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020 and the Code on Social Security, 2020 for creating

congenial work environment for women workers. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 (MGNREGA) mandates that at least one third of the jobs generated under the scheme (MGNREGS) should be given to women. Government has also made enabling provisions for allowing women's participation in non-conventional sectors such as fighter pilots in Indian Air Force, Commandos, Central Police Forces, admissions in Sainik Schools, etc.

**3.10** The Startup India initiative has been launched by Hon'ble Prime Minister on 16<sup>th</sup> January, 2016. It, inter alia, assists in strengthening the women entrepreneurship ecosystem, through policies and initiatives, and creation of enabling networks.

**3.11** The Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) has launched 'Mission Shakti', an umbrella scheme in mission mode which aims at strengthening interventions for women safety, security and empowerment. It seeks to realise the Government's commitment for "women-led development" by addressing issues affecting women on a life-cycle continuum basis and by making them equal partners in nation-building through convergence and citizen-ownership. It seeks to focus on proposing strategies for improving convergence across Ministries/Departments and at different levels of governance. It also seeks to promote greater participation and support of Panchayats and other local level governance bodies, apart from strengthening digital infrastructure support, last mile tracking and Jan Sahabhagita.

**3.12** Mission Shakti has two sub-schemes 'Sambal' and 'Samarthya'. While the "Sambal" sub-scheme is for safety and security of women, the "Samarthya" sub-scheme is for empowerment of women. "Sambal" sub-scheme includes the existing schemes of One Stop Centre (OSC) to provide integrated services like legal counselling and help, psycho-social counselling and support, providing information about help and facilities available for women etc., Women Helpline (WHL), Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) with modifications and a new component of Nari Adalat - women collective for providing women with an alternate grievance redressal mechanism for resolving cases of petty nature has been added. In the "Samarthya" sub scheme, existing schemes of Ujjwala, Swadhar Greh and Working Women Hostel have been included with modifications. In addition, the existing schemes of National Creche Scheme and Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) for compensating for loss of wages due to pregnancy and childbirth and inducing health seeking behaviour have been included in Samarthya. Under PMMVY, now benefit will be given for second child also if the child is girl child. Earlier the scheme covered only one child. A new component of Gap Funding for Economic Empowerment has also been added in the Samarthya Scheme.

**3.13** Besides the above initiatives of MWCD, Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has also taken a number of initiatives for safety of women and girls, which are given below:

- i. The Government has set up Nirbhaya Fund for projects for safety and security of women.
- ii. In order to facilitate States/UTs, MHA has launched an online analytic tool for police on 19th February 2019 called "Investigation Tracking System for Sexual Offences" to monitor and track time-bound investigation in sexual assault cases in accordance with Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 2018.

- iii. MHA has launched the “National Database on Sexual Offenders” (NDSO) on 20th September 2018 to facilitate investigation and tracking of sexual offenders across the country by law enforcement agencies. NDSO has data of over 5 lakh sexual offenders.
- iv. Emergency Response Support System, which provides a single emergency number (112) based computer aided dispatch of field resources to the location of distress has been operationalized in States/ UTs.
- v. MHA has launched a cyber-crime portal on 20th September 2018 for citizens to report obscene content. Further, Cyber Crime Forensic Labs have been set up in several States
- vi. Using technology to aid smart policing and safety management, Safe City Projects have been sanctioned in phase I in 8 cities (Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Lucknow and Mumbai).
- vii. In order to improve investigation, MHA has taken steps to strengthen DNA analysis units in Central and State Forensic Science Laboratories.
- viii. In order to coordinate various initiatives for women safety, MHA has set up a Women Safety Division.
- ix. Apart from above, MWCD in collaboration with MHA has envisaged engagement of Mahila Police Volunteers in States/UTs who will act as a link between police and community and facilitate women in distress.

**3.14** In addition to education, employment and safety & security related activities, the government has taken initiatives in the other aspects also that will facilitate in the empowerment of women. Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G) is one of the flagship Programmes of the Ministry of Rural Development which aims to achieve the objective "Housing for All" by providing 2.95 Crore pucca houses with basic amenities by convergence with other Schemes to all houseless households and households living in kutchha and dilapidated house in rural areas by 2024. Focusing on women empowerment in PMAY-G, allotment of house is made jointly in the name of husband and wife except in the case of a widow/unmarried/separated person. The scheme allows the State to also choose to allot it solely in the name of the woman. Owning the PMAY-G house partially or completely ensures their economic stability.

**3.15** As the part of poverty reduction strategy, Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY-I) was launched in 2000 as a Centrally sponsored Scheme to assist the States. PMGSY is not an individual/ community/gender specific scheme, however, has significant impact on living conditions of rural women in terms of providing the rural roads, enhancing the opportunities for girl child to have an access to the educational facilities, better access for women to health and marketing hubs. Roads built under PMGSY have contributed to bridging the gender gap in terms of improving the accessibility of basic services like health, education, etc. and opportunities for raising the standard of living of rural poor through better market access, farm and non-farm livelihood avenues for rural women. A progressive step has been taken under PMGSY by engaging women from the Panchayati Raj Institutions and representatives from Self Help Groups (SHGs) along with Junior Engineer, Panchayat Pradhan, local patwari in the transect walk to prepare Detailed Project Report (DPR). Women are also involved in planning of the rural road network.

**3.16** Saansad Adarsh Gram Yojna (SAGY) framework envisages development of Gram Panchayats through effective convergence and implementation of existing development schemes of Government under the administrative control of respective Ministries without allocation of any additional fund. Gender equality and ensuring respect for women are amongst the core values of SAGY. The activities suggested under Village Development Plan include a strong focus on the special needs of Persons with Disability (PWD), especially children and women for achieving human development. Towards social development, VDP activities for honoring village elders, local role models specially women, freedom fighters and martyrs may be organized. SAGY aims at instilling certain values, including re-affirming the gender equality and respect for women in the villages so that such villages become models for others. SAGY explores a holistic development of women in the society through emphasizing upon the human developments viz. 100% institutional delivery, improving nutritional status of the adolescent girls, pregnant women and lactating mothers; social development indicators viz. promoting activities for honoring local role models especially women, etc. The SAGY guidelines suggest conducting of Mahila Gram Sabha before every normal Gram Sabha.

**3.17** Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY) is a safe motherhood intervention under the National Health Mission (NHM). It is being implemented with the objective of reducing maternal and neonatal mortality by promoting institutional delivery among pregnant women. JSY integrates cash assistance with delivery and post-delivery care. The Scheme has identified Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs) as an effective link between the government and pregnant women.

**3.18** Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojna (PMUY) aims to safeguard the health of women by providing them with clean cooking fuel and also reduce burden on them from drudgery of collecting firewood.

**3.19 Gender Budgeting:** Gender Budgeting (GB) is concerned with gender responsive formulation of legislation, policies, plans, programs and schemes; resource allocation; implementation; monitoring review, audit and impact assessment of programs and schemes. The adoption of GB in India since 2005-2006 was a result of the recognition that budgetary allocations and outcomes have a differential impact on diverse genders. The manner in which Government plans and budgets for women and girls also have the potential to mitigate gender inequalities. Financing for gender equality is vital for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and ensuring that budgetary commitments translate into gender commitments. GB has thereby emerged as an important area of macroeconomic policy to incorporate gender perspective in public spending and meet differential gender needs.

**3.20** Over the years, Government has put in place various fiscal, regulatory and structural policies and programs to improve gender equality. Today, India is looked upon as a pioneer in the adoption and advancement of Gender Budgeting globally. GB, has emphasized that Gender Budgeting is not merely the earmarking of funds for

women and girls but creating a positive impact in the lives of women and girls, and diverse genders through transformative financing. A Gender Budget Statement (Statement 13) is published annually along with the Union Budget since 2005- 06. The Gender Budget Statement is a gender-specific accountability document produced by the Government of India with the Union Budget. It is a reporting mechanism for Ministries/Departments to review their programmes from a gender perspective and present information on allocations for women and girls. In 2021-22, 43 Ministries/Departments/Union Territories reported an amount of Rs. 1,53,326.28 Crore in the Gender Budget Statement, an increase of approximately 7% over 2020-21 (Budget Estimates). At the subnational level, 16 States and 6 Union Territories published Gender Budget Statements in 2021- 22.