

Development of Women and Children

Empowerment of Women

10.75 Women constitute about 48 per cent of the total population of the country as per the 2001 census, they suffer many disadvantages as compared to men in terms of literacy rates, labour participation rates and earnings. In order to address issues relating to social and economic advancement of women, the Department of Women and Child Development under the Ministry of Human Resource Development has been implementing various schemes, the details of which are given in Box 10.8. The 'National Policy for Empowerment of Women' was adopted in the country in 2001 with the ultimate objective of ensuring women their rightful place in society by empowering them 'as agents of socio-economic change and development'. 'Empowerment of Women', is, therefore, an important approach adopted in the Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-07) for development of women. To this effect a National Plan of Action for Empowerment of Women, with a view to translating the National Policy of Empowerment of Women in to action in a time bound manner, was adopted as a priority agenda for action during 2003-04 for the DWCD.

10.76 The major strategies of women empowerment include – social empowerment, economic empowerment and gender justice i.e. to eliminate all types of discrimination against women and the girl child. Social empowerment of women is designed to create an enabling environment by adopting various affirmative policies and programs for development of women, besides providing them easy and equal access to all the basic minimum services to enable them to realize their full potential. Education being an important tool for social empowerment of women, specific schemes to provide incentives to promote education, especially amongst girl children and reduce the school dropout rates is being implemented. Two important schemes viz. 'Saarva Shiksha Abhiyan' and 'Mahila Samakhya' are being implemented by Department of Education as a special effort to stretch the reach of education especially to the girl child. In addition the DWCD implements the schemes of

'Condensed courses for education and vocational training' and 'Distance Education Program for Women' supplementing the efforts of the Department of Education.

Development of Children

10.77 The Integrated Child Services (ICDS) scheme is the world's largest publicly funded programme for early childhood. It was first launched in 33 selected blocks in 1975, and continues to be the flagship scheme towards promoting the overall development of the young children (0-6 years) – especially the girl child, and expectant and nursing mothers all over the country through its holistic package of six basic services – health check up, immunization, referral services, supplementary nutrition, pre-school education and health and nutritional education through a single window delivery. Services under the scheme are presently being made available to about 378.16 lakh beneficiaries comprising about 315.25 lakh children (0-6 years) and 62.91 lakh pregnant and lactating mothers through a network of 6.41 lakh Anganwadi Centres. Under the Scheme, States are responsible for providing supplementary nutrition. As a part of the ICDS programme, Kishori Shakti Yojana was launched in 2000-01 for adolescent girls in the age group of 11-18 years. The scheme aims at breaking the inter-generational life cycle of nutritional and gender disadvantages and providing a supportive environment for self development by promoting awareness on health, hygiene, nutrition, home management, child care and training to improve/upgrade vocational skills. The scheme is currently being implemented in 2,000 ICDS projects.

10.78 A National Crèche Fund was set up by the Government of India in the year 1993-94 as a corpus fund with a view to meet the growing need for opening more crèches. Assistance under the scheme is being made available to registered voluntary organizations/ Mahila Mandals to convert existing Anganwadi Centres into Anganwadi-Cum-Crèche Centres out of the interest earned from the corpus fund. The scheme covers 4,286 general crèches and 599 Anganwadi-Cum-Crèche Centres benefiting 1.22 lakh children.

10.79 A Bill to constitute the National Commission for Children was framed and laid

in Lok Sabha in December, 2003. Similarly, the National Charter for Children highlighting the roles and responsibilities of both the Government and the community towards

children and duties of children towards their families, societies and country towards them notified in the Official Gazette of India on February 9, 2004.

Box 10.8: Initiatives for empowerment of women

- **Swayamsidha** - is an integrated project for the development and empowerment of women through Self Help Groups (SHGs) with emphasis on covering services, developing access to micro-credit and promoting micro-enterprises. The most important component of the programme is formulation, implementation and monitoring of block specific composite projects of four to five years' duration through Project Implementing Agencies (PIA), which may be any appropriate government or non-government agency, nominated by the State Governments. So far 52,016 SHGs have been formed under the project out of 650 blocks allotted so far.
- **Swa-Shakti Project** - earlier known as the Rural Women's Development and Empowerment Project, was sanctioned in October 1998 as a centrally sponsored scheme to be implemented in the states of Bihar, Chattisgarh, Gujarat, Haryana, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Uttaranchal and Uttar Pradesh for a duration of five years with an outlay of Rs.186 crore. An additional amount of Rs.5 crore has been provided in the project for facilitating setting up of revolving funds for giving interest-bearing loans to beneficiary groups, primarily during the formative stages. The project aims at enhancing women's access to resources for better quality of life through the use of drudgery and time reduction devices, health, literacy and imparting skills for confidence enhancement and income generating activities. So far 17,647 Self Help Groups have been formed under the project against the target of 16,000 SHGs. The project is supported jointly by the World Bank and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).
- **Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP)** - The programme seeks to provide updated skills and new knowledge to poor assetless women in eight traditional sectors of employment, namely, agriculture, animal husbandry, dairying, fisheries, handlooms, handicrafts, Khadi and village industry, and sericulture. The scheme is being implemented through public sector organizations, state corporations, cooperatives, federations and voluntary organizations, which have been in existence for a minimum period of three years. Eleven projects were sanctioned during 2003-04, which is estimated to benefit 16,350 women.
- **Swalamban** - The objective of this scheme is to provide training and skills to women to facilitate them to obtain employment or self-employment on a sustainable basis. Some of the trades where training is imparted include computer programming, medical transcription, electronic assembling, consumer electronics repair, radio and television repairs, garment making, handloom weaving, handicrafts, secretarial practice, community health work and embroidery. During 2003-04, 463 proposals were approved, benefiting 71,240 women.
- **Creches/Day Care Centres for the Children of Working and Ailing Mothers** - This scheme aims to provide day care services to children (0-5 years) of parents whose income does not exceed Rs.1,800 per month. The facilities provided to children under the scheme include sleeping and day care facilities, supplementary nutrition, immunization, medicine and recreation. The scheme is being implemented through the Central Social Welfare Board and two other national level voluntary organizations namely, the Indian Council for Child Welfare and the Bhartiya Adim Jati Sevek Sangh all over the country. About 33.11 lakh children were benefited under the scheme during 2003-04.
- **Hostels for Working Women** - The scheme of assistance for construction and expansion of hostel buildings for working women, with day care centres, is being implemented since 1972. Under this scheme financial assistance is provided to NGOs, cooperative bodies and other agencies engaged in women's social welfare, women's education, public sector undertakings, women development corporations, local bodies, universities and state governments for construction of buildings for working women hostels. The scheme envisages provisions for safe and affordable accommodation to working women (single working women, women working at places away from their hometowns, working but husband out of town etc.) women being trained for employment and girl students studying in post school professional courses. During 2003-04, thirteen new hostels were sanctioned under the scheme, benefiting 1,188 women.
- **Swadhar** - This scheme was launched in 2001-02 as a central sector scheme for providing holistic and integrated services to women in difficult circumstances such as destitute widows deserted by their families in religious places like Vrindavan and Kashi; women prisoners released from jail and without family support; women survivors of natural disasters who have been rendered homeless and are without social and economic support; trafficked women/girls rescued or run away from brothels and other places or victims of sexual crimes who are disowned by family or who do not want to go back to their respective families for various reasons. The package of services made available under the scheme include provision of food, clothing, shelter, health care counseling and legal support; social and economic rehabilitation through education, awareness generation, skill up-gradation and behavioral training. The scheme also supports a help line for women in distress. Presently 31 projects are being funded under the scheme.
- **Rashtrya Mahila Kosh (RMK)** - also known as the National Credit Fund for Women was set up as a registered society under the Societies Registration Act, 1860 on March 30, 1993 with a view to facilitate credit support or micro-finance to poor women to start income generating activities such as in dairy, agriculture, shop-keeping, vending and handicrafts. In 2003-04, an amount of Rs. 25 crore was sanctioned through RMK benefiting about 32,765 women.