

Moving from ‘Raksha Kavach’ approach to ‘Samagra Sashaktikaran’: From Women Development to Women-led Development in 6 years

To usher a ‘New India’ and the foundational ‘New Woman’ of this New India, the Current PM Modi led government has in the past 6 years focused to achieve mainstreaming gender perspectives in both politics and policy successfully. The issue of women’s empowerment caught the entire nation’s imagination, when the Prime Minister launched the ‘Beti Bachao Beti Padhao’ program at Panipat in Haryana in 2015, one of the worst affected districts in the State, with an abysmally low Sex Ratio at Birth (SRB).

Over the years, we have increasingly seen women grow in public life – working in offices, representing us on the international sports arena, in field of science, in bureaucracy, politics, international organizations and much more. This change is positive and it is happening at a pace faster than ever before and this echoes with the slogan of Beti Bachao, Beri Padhao. The highlight of the last 6 years has been that the Government has gone beyond the physicality to address women’s issues and taken a more holistic view of things. **It has been made very clear through Government’s interventions and schemes that the aim is to include women in India’s growth story as equal partners in development instead of being passive beneficiaries of it.**

To bring the point home, a number of schemes for women in the past 6 years are summarily presented along with the tangible impact they have created in the lives of women and in the society as a whole

Nurturing motherhood

“Maternal Mortality Rate has dropped from 167 in 2011-13 to 122 per one lakh in 2015-17. This is good news for India as nearly 2,000 maternal deaths have been averted per year, according to the bulletin. Further, India was validated for Maternal and Neonatal Tetanus Elimination (MNTE) in April 2015, much ahead of the global target date of December 2015. Institutional Deliveries have risen in the country to 78.9 per cent (NFHS-4, 2015-16) from 38.7 per cent (NFHS 3, 2005-06)”

Through a slew of schemes and programmes, the government has aimed at ensuring a ‘continuum of care’ to a mother and child pre, during and post-pregnancy stages. It has been a clear vision of this Government that every woman is entitled to quality antenatal, intra-natal and postnatal care services.

Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan (PMSMA) was launched in 2016 to provide quality ante-natal care (ANC) to all pregnant women on the 9th of every month. More than 17,000 facilities are providing these services across the country. The fact that a mother’s nutritional status affects the nutritional status of a child, in March 2018, the government launched **POSHAN Abhiyan** – PM’s Overarching Scheme for Holistic Nourishment. The programme through use of technology, a targeted approach and convergence strives to holistically address malnutrition. The *Abhiyaan* empowers the frontline functionaries i.e., Anganwadi workers and Lady Supervisors by providing them with smartphones. Ministry of Women and Child development is the nodal Ministry for anchoring overall implementation.

In order to extend protection to the unorganized sector as well, pregnant and lactating mothers are provided cash incentives under the **PM Matru Vandana Yojana**. As partial compensation for wage loss, these mothers are provided Rs. 6,000 as incentive, which enables them to take adequate rest before and after the delivery and exclusively breast feed their child. Scheme has already reached out to approx. 75 Lakh beneficiaries (by end of February 2019). Another new initiative has been LaQshya – Labour room Quality improvement Initiative’. Its focus is on improving quality of care in labour room and maternity Operation Theatre (OT) so that both mother and child have a positive birth experience.

Not only this, to harness IT in reaching the most vulnerable and most inaccessible, the Ministry runs a Mother and Child Tracking System (MCTS) / Reproductive Child Health (RCH) portal and Kilkari mobile services which tracks and facilitates timely delivery of antenatal, postnatal care services to women and immunization services to children by the front line workers. **Surakshit Matritva Aashwasan** (Suman) Initiative aims to assure, dignified and respectful delivery of quality healthcare services at no cost and zero tolerance for denial of services to any woman and newborn visiting a public health facility.

Ensuring Social Security

“Nearly 40% of the beneficiaries of Ujjwala Yojana belong to SC/ST categories.”

Road to development cannot be travelled without the empowerment of women who form almost 50 per cent per cent of the Indian population. A multidirectional organized approach to women empowerment is sure to take the country way beyond this path. Thus, again through a host of programmes, Government has ensured that for all welfare sectors having an important bearing on women’s empowerment, a gender perspective is integrated.

Ensuring women’s right to health and privacy, under the **Swaccha Vidyalaya** initiative, task of constructing female toilets in all the government schools across the country is completed. Under the **Swaccha Bharat Mission** sanitation coverage has increased from 38.7% in 2014 to more than 98% in 2019. Under the **Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana**, title of the house can be registered in the name of the lady of the house or co-jointly.

To empower women and protect their health, the **PM Ujjwala Yojana** has been introduced, which provides free LPG cylinders to women from BPL families to replace unclean cooking fuels. Target of the scheme to provide 8 Crore deposit free LPG connections to women from BPL households has been achieved, relieving these women from the tedious and hazardous process of cooking on firewood and giving them free time for other productive work. During the COVID-19 pandemic in India, Government has announced a ₹1.70 Lakh Crore relief package under Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana which includes free gas cylinders for April-June for all women covered under PM Ujjwala Yojana.

Encouraging Women Education and Employment

Apart from the scholarships provided specifically to girls (**PRAGATI Scholarships**), government has been taking important steps towards building employable skills among women through education, addressing issues that affect women’s participation in the labour force and improving their employment experience.

KIRAN (Knowledge Involvement in Research Advancement through Nurturing) is the women-exclusive scheme of DST with the mandate to bring gender parity in S&T through gender mainstreaming. Different programs and components of KIRAN like Women Scientist Scheme-A (WOS-A), Women Scientist Scheme-B (WOS-B) deal with various crucial issues (break in career primarily due to family responsibilities, self employment, part time career, relocation and so on) faced by women scientists in their career path. **National Creche Scheme** (an improvement on the previous Rajiv Gandhi National Creche Scheme) aims to provide day care facilities to children (age group of 6 months to 6 years) of working mothers.

Strengthening Economic Resilience

“Global Findex Survey, 2017 estimated that 77% of Indian women now owned a bank account against 43% and only 26% in 2014 and 2011, respectively.”

Recognizing the inter-linkage between economic independence and socio-economic empowerment, this government has ensured measures to encourage entrepreneurship among women, financially securing future of girl children, improving access to credit and promote skilling and upskilling.

In 2014, Government launched **Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojna** (PMJDY) under which so far 20.4 crore women have opened their accounts. It was the result of this scheme that the Government in Post Covid package announced direct cash transfers (Rs. 500/- monthly) to all account holder for three months (April-June). The country has seen a five-fold increase in the number of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) from 2011-14 to 2014-18. Close to 50% of the candidates enrolled and trained under **PM Kaushal Vikas Yojana** are women. The Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship and NITI Aayog recently redrafted the Guidelines of the 30-year-old **‘Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women’ (STEP)** (launched by MWCD to train women with no access to formal skill training facilities) to adapt to present-day needs.

Under the **PM Mudra Yojana**, approx. 70% beneficiaries are women. **TREAD programme** enables credit availability to interested women through nongovernmental

organizations (NGOs). The Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) has been implementing two special schemes for women namely, Mahila Udyam Nidhi which is an exclusive scheme for providing equity to women entrepreneurs and the Mahila Vikas Nidhi which offers developmental assistance for pursuit of income generating activities to women. **Adivasi Mahila Sashaktikaran Yojana** (AMSY) is a scheme for empowerment of tribal women where provides financial assistance upto 90 per cent to projects with an outlay of Rs 1 lakh at a concessional rate of interest of 4 percent. Nai Roshni on the other hand is aimed to assist economic empowerment for minority women

Complementing such schemes are pension scheme launched recently like **Atal Pension Yojana** helping women (particularly working in the unorganized sector) to become self-dependent and save for their old age without succumbing to whims of children or the husband and marketing initiatives such as Mahila e-haats that leverage technology for showcasing products made/manufactured/sold by women entrepreneurs.

Securing Future of Girl Child

“Over 1.4 crore accounts opened under Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana.”

By way of a series of landmark initiatives, the government has attempted to change people’s mindsets encouraging a culture where the birth of a daughter is a matter of pride and girl child’s education becomes a priority supported through scholarships while making her future financially secure through opening up of bank accounts in her name.

The Sex Ratio at Birth that stood at 871 in 2015 in Haryana has now surged to 923 in 2019 indicating the success of **BBBP**. The scheme is now panned out over 640 districts. **Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana** was launched in 2015 to encourage small affordable deposits in the name of girls that can be used for higher education and other purposes. To create a level-playing field for the meritorious girls in high school to pursue Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) in their higher education, **Vigyan Jyoti** Scheme has been envisaged.

A progressive and much relevant initiative has come from collaborative effort of Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) and Ministry of Human Resource Development

called the **Gender Champion Scheme**. The scheme aims to make young boys and girls gender sensitive and create positive social norms which value the rights of women and girls. Gender Champions are envisaged as responsible leaders who will facilitate an enabling environment within their schools/colleges/ academic institutions where girls are treated with dignity and respect.

Assuring Women Security & Safety

“More than 1,90,000 women across the country have accessed One Stop Centres.”

Recognizing the gravity of women safety today, the government has sought to introduce tough legislations to curb all forms of crimes against women along with specific schemes for a more comprehensive security paradigm.

Hostel for Working Women Scheme was brought in as an effort towards creating a safe working environment and providing affordable accommodation for working women away from their home-town. Looking at the increase of cybercrimes targetting women in particular, the Government has come up with **Cyber Crime Prevention Against Women & Children**. The main features of the scheme include: 1) Online cybercrime reporting platform, 2) One national level cyber forensic laboratory, 3) Training of Police officers, judges & prosecutors and 4) Cybercrime awareness activities.

MWCD's **Swadhar Greh Scheme** has been envisaged to cater to the primary need of shelter, food, clothing, medical treatment and care of the women in distress and who are without any social and economic support. **One Stop Centre** (OSC) scheme, popularly known as Sakhi Centres, is being implemented across the country since 1st April, 2015. It is funded through Nirbhaya Fund and aims to provide integrated support and assistance to women affected by violence under one roof by providing five essential facilities to the aggrieved women i.e. psycho-social counseling, legal Assistance, police facilitation, medical care alongwith five bedded temporary shelter under one roof. These are 24×7 centres and any woman in an adverse situation

or someone on her behalf can seek help from the Sakhi Centre by dialling Women's toll-free helpline 181.

Increasing Outreach & Awareness

The success of BBBP scheme can be attributed to a public communication strategy which was based on local level interventions. **National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW) Scheme** 2016-17, is a combined strategy for inter-sectoral convergence of programs for women, with the use of multiple communication tools in advocacy campaigns. Under the **Mahila Shakti Kendra Scheme**, 3 lakh student volunteers are fanning out across the country to directly reach women at village level with government schemes and services for their empowerment. It is realized that due to scattered information on various women centric schemes/legislations there is a lack of awareness among people regarding the same. NARI Portal has been an attempt to address this information asymmetry. It has been launched as a single window access to information and services on various women centric schemes/legislations.

Respecting women's agency

The Government has also been taking meaningful steps that give them agency over their bodies, their choices, their mobility and their lives.

Mission Parivar Vikas programme was launched in 2016 for increasing access to contraceptives and family planning services in 146 high fertility districts with key initiatives. As part of *Nayi Pehel*, family planning kit is provided by the ASHAs to the newlyweds.

Another important step taken by government to empower Muslim women has been to permit them now to go Hajj without Mehram (a male companion).

Pushing for Holistic Empowerment

Several new schemes although dealing with other sectors of development have been formulated keeping in mind the role of women in each of these sectors such as energy, agriculture, manufacturing accounting for impact of a scheme on men and women differently. These include - Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana where at least 30% of the budget allocations

need to be earmarked for women beneficiaries/ farmers, PMGDISHA, India BPO Promotion Scheme, Mission Indradhanush, Solar Charkha Mission, Rashtriya Vayoshri Yojana, Scheme for Capacity Building in Textile Sector

In addition, a number of existing schemes have been revised and improvised for strengthening the existing programme components and thus making the services more effective in achieving the envisaged objectives. These include the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), National Health Mission, Mid-Day Meals Scheme, National Food Security Mission, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment, Guarantee Scheme and the National Rural Livelihood Mission among other

Our innovative *schemes* and *programmes* are perfectly aligned to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. But without achieving women empowerment and gender equality, societies will not be able to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Hence, gender mainstreaming has formed the centre of Government's mission to achieve an all-inclusive growth. One can clearly see that women and the betis of India have been at the forefront of the Government's Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikaas — and now additionally, Sabka Vishwaas campaign. A New Woman of New India empowered through the given schematic support will be the 'change agent' critical to a sustained socio-economic growth.
