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## Role Of Government-Led Schemes In Empowering Women In India

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### Abstract

Women have an important role in our culture. Welfare programs initiated by the government have been instrumental in promoting women's empowerment in India by tackling fundamental disparities in education, health, job opportunities, and social security. This paper examines the impact of key initiatives like as Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, Mahila E-Haat, Mahila Shakti Kendra and Kanyashree Prakalpa on enhancing women's socio-economic status. Drawing on secondary data sources including government reports, census statistics, and scholarly studies, the study evaluates improvements in female literacy, financial inclusion, entrepreneurship, health outcomes, and participation in decision-making processes. The findings suggest that conditional cash transfers, skill development programs, and livelihood support schemes have strengthened women's access to resources and opportunities. However, challenges like as regional disparities, implementation gaps, and socio-cultural barriers continue to limit the transformative potential of these schemes. This paper concludes that sustained policy commitment and grassroots awareness are essential to achieve inclusive and long-term empowerment of women in India.

### Keywords

Women's Empowerment; Government Welfare Schemes; Gender Equality; Financial Inclusion; Skill Development; Public Policy; India

### Introduction

Government-led welfare schemes have emerged as powerful instruments in promoting women's empowerment in India by addressing deep-rooted socio-economic inequalities. In a society historically shaped by gender disparities in education, healthcare access, employment opportunities, property rights, and political representation, state intervention has been essential in creating enabling conditions for women's advancement. Recognizing that inclusive national development cannot be achieved without gender equity, the Government of India has introduced a range of targeted initiatives designed to enhance women's access to education, health services, financial resources, and livelihood opportunities.

Major programmes like as Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, Mahila E-Haat, and Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-NRLM reflect a strategic shift from traditional welfare-based assistance to empowerment-driven frameworks. These initiatives focus not merely on providing subsidies or benefits but on building women's capabilities and strengthening their economic independence. For instance, efforts to promote girls' education and improve child sex ratios address structural discrimination at its roots, while access to clean cooking fuel improves women's health and reduces unpaid domestic burdens. Similarly, digital marketing platforms and self-help group networks enhance entrepreneurship, financial inclusion, and collective bargaining power.

Through skill development, self-employment opportunities, access to microcredit, and social protection mechanisms, these programmes aim to expand women's agency within households and communities. By integrating economic empowerment with social support systems, government-led schemes contribute to enhancing women's participation in decision-making processes and public life. Consequently, such state-sponsored interventions have become central to advancing gender equality and fostering inclusive, sustainable development in contemporary India.

## 1. Educational Empowerment

Government initiatives such as Beti Bachao Beti Padhao aim to improve girls' enrolment, retention, and completion rates in schools. The scheme addresses gender bias, declining child sex ratio, and educational exclusion through awareness campaigns and financial incentives. Secondary data suggest improvements in girls' enrolment at the elementary and secondary levels in several states. Education enhances women's capabilities, decision-making power, and employment opportunities, forming the foundation of long-term empowerment (Ministry of Women and Child Development [MWCD], 2022; NITI Aayog, 2021).

At the state level, Kanyashree Prakalpa, implemented by the Government of West Bengal, provides conditional cash transfers to adolescent girls who remain enrolled in school and delay marriage until at least 18 years of age. Empirical findings indicate a significant reduction in early marriages and increased secondary school retention rates (Government of West Bengal, 2022).

## 2. Health and Nutritional Security

Health security is central to empowerment because physical well-being determines women's productivity and autonomy. The Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY), launched in 2016, provides subsidized Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) connections to women from economically disadvantaged households. By reducing reliance on traditional biomass fuels, the scheme addresses indoor air pollution—a major contributor to respiratory illnesses among rural women. Studies suggest that access to clean fuel reduces health risks and the time burden associated with firewood collection (World Bank, 2020).

Additionally, maternal and reproductive health initiatives under the National Health Mission have strengthened institutional delivery systems and antenatal care coverage, contributing to reductions in maternal mortality (Ministry of Health & Family Welfare [MoHFW], 2021).

Health-oriented schemes enhance bodily autonomy and dignity while indirectly increasing participation in economic and social activities. Improved health outcomes expand women's agency by enabling sustained engagement in income-generating and leadership roles.

## 3. Economic Empowerment through Employment

Economic independence significantly enhances women's bargaining power and social status. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), enacted in 2005, guarantees 100 days of wage employment annually to rural households and mandates equal wages for men and women. Female participation rates frequently exceed one-third of total person-days generated nationally (Ministry of Rural Development [MoRD], 2022).

Empirical studies indicate that MGNREGA participation increases women's control over income, strengthens food security, and enhances decision-making power within households (Khera & Nayak, 2019). Equal wage provisions challenge entrenched gender wage gaps prevalent in informal labour markets.

Although caregiving responsibilities and regional disparities may limit sustained participation, MGNREGA remains a transformative instrument for rural economic empowerment by institutionalizing wage equality and financial autonomy.

#### **4. Financial Inclusion**

The Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana has significantly increased women's access to formal banking services. Direct Benefit Transfers (DBT) into women's accounts enhance transparency and reduce dependency on intermediaries. Financial inclusion promotes savings habits and entrepreneurial ventures. However, challenges such as limited digital literacy and limited mobility can hinder effective use. Financial literacy programs and digital infrastructure are therefore essential complements. Overall, financial inclusion projects increase autonomy by giving women direct control over financial resources (Reserve Bank of India [RBI], 2021; Demirgüç-Kunt et al., 2018).

#### **5. Skill Development and Entrepreneurship**

Entrepreneurship enhances long-term economic mobility. The Mahila E-Haat platform enables women entrepreneurs to market products online, promoting digital and financial inclusion. Skill development initiatives such as STEP provide vocational training to enhance employability (Ministry of Women and Child Development. (2022).

Skill acquisition increases income diversification and reduces economic vulnerability. Entrepreneurship fosters confidence, leadership skills, and social recognition. However, limited access to credit and market linkages can restrict scalability (Sharma, S. (2020).

Sustained institutional support, mentorship, and digital training are necessary for maximizing impact. Skill development initiatives thus contribute significantly to economic empowerment and self-reliance.

#### **6. Political Participation**

Political participation is a critical dimension of women's empowerment, as it enables women to influence governance, policy priorities, and resource allocation. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments to the Constitution of India institutionalized gender quotas by reserving not less than one-third of seats for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions and Urban Local Bodies. In several states, this reservation has been extended to 50 percent. According to reports from the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, women now constitute a substantial proportion of elected representatives at the grassroots level.

Empirical research suggests that women leaders often prioritize issues such as drinking water, sanitation, health, and education—areas directly affecting community welfare (Chattopadhyay & Duflo, 2004). Furthermore, exposure to female leadership has been found to positively influence girls' educational aspirations and community attitudes toward women in public roles (Beaman et al., 2012).

While challenges such as proxy representation and patriarchal resistance persist in some regions, institutionalized political reservation has created opportunities for leadership development, enhanced public visibility, and strengthened women's voice in local governance. Political participation thus represents both symbolic and substantive empowerment, reinforcing gender-responsive governance structures.

## 7. Social Protection and Security

Women's empowerment cannot be sustained without protection from violence, discrimination, and social vulnerability. The One Stop Centre Scheme, implemented by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, provides integrated support services to women affected by violence. These services include medical assistance, legal aid, psychosocial counselling, and temporary shelter under a single institutional framework.

Such interventions strengthen women's safety, dignity, and access to justice. According to the Ministry of Women and Child Development (2021), the establishment of One Stop Centres across districts has improved reporting mechanisms and support accessibility for survivors. Complementary legal frameworks, including the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, reinforce institutional safeguards.

From a rights-based perspective, social protection mechanisms contribute to empowerment by ensuring that women can exercise freedoms without fear of coercion or abuse. UN Women (2019) emphasizes that legal awareness and institutional responsiveness are essential for translating policy into lived empowerment. Therefore, social security schemes represent foundational components of a gender-just development framework.

## 8. Reduction of Gender-Based Disparities

Conditional cash transfer schemes such as Kanyashree Prakalpa aim to delay early marriage and promote secondary education. Evidence from West Bengal indicates increased school retention and awareness about gender rights. Such programs address structural discrimination and promote equality (Banerjee et al., 2021; Government of West Bengal, 2022).

## 9. Enhancement of Decision-Making Power

Access to welfare benefits and economic resources improves women's intra-household bargaining power. Ownership of bank accounts, land titles, or employment earnings enhances autonomy in spending and family decisions. Empowerment is thus both economic and psychological in nature. Empowerment outcomes vary depending on socio-cultural norms and intersectional inequalities. Access to resources does not automatically translate into agency unless supported by normative change and institutional backing. Therefore, state-sponsored welfare schemes contribute to decision-making power when combined with awareness generation, legal literacy, and community engagement. In this sense, empowerment is both material and psychological, requiring sustained transformation in gender relations alongside economic inclusion (Sen, 1999; Kabeer, 2005).

## 10. Collective Agency through DAY-NRLM

The Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana–National Rural Livelihood Mission (DAY-NRLM) focuses on poverty alleviation through the promotion of women-led Self-Help Groups (SHGs). SHGs enable women to pool savings, access microcredit, and undertake collective enterprises. Collective action enhances bargaining power, social capital, and community participation.

Participation in SHGs has been associated with increased household income, improved decision-making authority, and greater political awareness. Collective forums also provide platforms to discuss social issues such as domestic violence and health awareness. By integrating economic and social objectives, DAY-NRLM fosters holistic empowerment.

However, sustainability depends on market linkages, training, and institutional support. Strengthening capacity-building initiatives can ensure long-term viability of SHG enterprises.

## Conclusion:

Government-led welfare schemes in India have played a transformative role in advancing women's empowerment by addressing long-standing structural inequalities in education, health, employment, financial access, and political participation. Initiatives such as Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, and Kanyashree Prakalpa demonstrate the multidimensional approach adopted by the state to enhance women's capabilities. These schemes have expanded access to schooling, improved maternal and household health, ensured wage employment, strengthened financial inclusion, and delayed early marriage in several regions.

However, empowerment is not merely about access to schemes but about sustained transformation in social norms and institutional practices. Regional disparities, implementation gaps, digital illiteracy, and patriarchal attitudes continue to limit the full realization of policy objectives. Therefore, while welfare programs have laid a strong foundation for socio-economic advancement, long-term empowerment requires better monitoring, grassroots awareness, gender-sensitive governance, and integration of economic support with social reform. A holistic and inclusive policy framework remains essential for achieving substantive gender equality in India.

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