The Asian and Pacific Centre for women and Development defines “Empowerment as a process that aims at creating the conditions for self-determination of a particular people or group.” Empowerment refers to enabling people to take charge of their own lives. For women, empowerment indicates the importance of increasing their power and taking control over decisions and issues that shape their lives. Literally to empower women is to give power to women. Delegation of power does not mean to feeling of superiority and dominance upon others. It is a sense of internal strength and confidence to face life. It facilitates for taking part in decision making and capacity building to contribute towards national development.

The Constitutional Guarantee:-

The Following articles safeguard the women.

Article 14 - Equality before law.
Article 15(1) - Prohibition of discrimination on the ground of religion, race, caste, sex and place of birth in the matter of public employment.
Article 16 - Equality of opportunity.
Article 39(d) - Equal pay for equal work.

Article 51(a) - Renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women.
Article 15(3) - The Constitution allows state to make special provision in favour of women and children.
Article 42 - Securing just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief.

National policy for Empowerment of women came into force from 2001 which emphasizes –

- Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full potentialities.
- The de jure and de facto enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedom by women on equal basis with men in all spheres-political, economic, social, cultural and civil.
- Equal access to participation and decision making of women in social, political and economic life.
- Equal access to women to health care, quality education at all levels, career and vocational guidance, employment and equal remuneration, occupational health
and safety, social security and public office etc.

- Strengthening legal systems aiming at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.
- Changing societal attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women.
- Mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process.
- Elimination of discrimination and all form of violence against women and girl child.
- Building and strengthening partnership with civil society, particularly women’s organisations.

Though the different departments has certain agenda for empowering women by developing their overall efficiency and economic condition, Education plays a pivotal role in capacity building of women. The department of Women Empowerment and Child Development implements the following programmes.

1. The Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) programme – This is a flagship programme of the department while providing ‘Anganawadi’ (Creche) Services and health and nutritional supplements to infants, ICDS also provides pre and post natal care for pregnant and lactating mothers.

2. Kishori Balika Yojana (Scheme for Adolescent girls)- It is a part of ICDS programme and a special scheme for adolescent girls that was initiated from 2001. The scheme is intended for adolescent girls in 11-18 age groups who belong to the BPL family. Training programmes in manifold dimensions are provided in this scheme. The areas include health and nutrition, family welfare, providing interpersonal skill and making them self-independent through vocational skills.

There are certain other programmes like old age pension, pension scheme for widows/homeless/disabled, Financial assistance to destitute widows, for remarriage of widows, grant to female students who have passed intermediate from BPL family to pursue her study.

Education is a powerful weapon for empowerment of women. It is an investment in human capital. Education develops awareness among the women regarding their potentialities for active participation in restructuring the society. Realizing the key role of education in empowering the women several schemes have been launched.

Under Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (Education for All) necessary steps have been initiated to reduce gender gaps.

(i) Early Child Care Education (ECCE) centres: These centres are playing a pivotal role in preschooling as it includes all children in the 3-6 age group. As the girl children usually look after the siblings they get deprived of primary education. But the ECCE centre facilitates the education of girl children. So that ultimately they get enrolled in primary education.

(ii) National Programme on Education for Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL): This programme is chalked out since 2003 to increase the enrolment rates of girls belonging to SC/ST category at elementary stage. It emphasises on enrolment, retention and quality education.

(iii) Kasturaba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV): This scheme is meant for girls belonging to the Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Other Backward Classes (OBCs), religious minorities and
below poverty line (BPL) households for bridging the gender gap. Those schools are opened to give chance to rural deprived girls to have their study upto or beyond class V.

(iv) Innovative scheme for the adolescent girls: This scheme intends to provide life skill education so that adolescent girls will be self confident.

(v) Mahila Samukhya (Education for women’s Equality)

The objectives of Mahila Samukhya are:

a) To create tolerance and mutual respect for women.

b) To ensure that education becomes accessible to the socially and economically marginalized women and girls.

c) To encourage and promote a gender based discourse in the society.

d) To enhance self-image and self-confidence of women and enable them to critically analyze their role as individual women and as members of the society so that they can begin to challenge that role collectively and initiate a process of social change.

e) To collectively participate in decision-making and seek equal rights and opportunities for a more egalitarian society.

f) To enhance participation of women and girls in formal and non-formal education programme. Education Department of Ministry of HRD launched Mahila Samakhyaa as a major programme for bringing about women’s development and empowerment in 1989 on a pilot basis in 6 states of India with funding from Netherlands Government.

National Literacy Mission plays a key role in providing literacy to all. This Mission creates awareness towards literacy, nutrition, environmental protection and skill formation. Adult Education programme was launched in the country on October 3, 1978. It covers the entire population in 15-35 age group by the end of 1983-84. In this programme special emphasis is laid on to equip women with necessary skills and education to improve their economic status and wellbeing in the society.

The National Girl’s Education Programme, 2004 aims at providing extra facilities and economic assistance to girls for education at primary level. This programme intends to remove gender gap by constructing model schools and provision of text books, stationery, uniform etc.

Mid-day-Meal programme has been started by the Central Government. It ensures nutritional food to the students of class I to VIII. This scheme aims to promote enrolment, retention and attendance of children in primary school. Due to this project enrolment and retention of girls has increased.

Siksha Karmi Project (SKP) has been implemented since 1987, with assistance from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). The fundamental objective of this project is universalisation and qualitative improvement of primary education in remote and socio-economically backward villages of Rajasthan, with primary focus on girls. Keeping in view the teacher absenteeism the project uses the novel approach of substituting teachers in dysfunctional school with local youth known as Siksha Karmis. They are provided with training and supervisory support.

Bihar Education Project (BEP) was launched in 1991, with a purpose of bringing about qualitative improvement in the elementary education system in Bihar state. This gives
importance on the education of the deprived sections of society such as SCs, STs, and women.

**Andhra Pradesh Primary Education Project (APPEP)**

The Government of Andhra Pradesh has adopted this scheme in the areas where there is very meager female literacy rate. It is a two directional activity of improving classroom transaction by training teachers and developing infrastructure of the school.

**Programmes undertaken in Odisha**

The Govt. of Odisha also started schemes like establishment of model public schools in block level, supply of bicycles to the students of class 10 free of cost, upgradation of primary schools to upper primary and high schools, supply of four pairs of uniforms free of cost, training to teachers through Samarthya Programme, appointment of Sikha Sahayakas etc. for the development of education. Self-defence programme for girls, supply of laptop to meritorious students, establishment of high schools, making the schools child friendly by “Ama Vidyalaya” Yojana, organization of personality development camps for girls, training of MTA members, organization of “Meenamela” are commendable steps of the Govt. of Odisha for empowerment of women. These schemes are very much helpful for motivating the girls in attending the schools. This helps in the path of women empowerment.

**The dimensions of women empowerment**

Dimensions of women empowerment include:

(i) Economic empowerment: Unless there is economic emancipation women empowerment is not possible. Though the women work hard in and outside the home they enjoy very negligible portion of the family income. Women's economic right is definitely a vital index for enhancement of their status.

(ii) Social empowerment: Social participation of women should be equal to men. They should be empowered to exercise assertiveness in collective decision making. They should be allowed to participate actively in socio-economic activities.

(iii) Physical empowerment: The women shoulder the productive and reproductive responsibilities and do many tedious activities in home. The male dominant society is not ready to recognize their contribution for a healthy home and prosperous society. Physical empowerment is dependent upon each of the other dimensions as all have contributory effect.

(iv) Psychological empowerment: Women have a negative view of their potentialities and importance in the society. Though they contribute a lot still then they are not psychologically ready to recognize it. It should be recognized by all sections of the society.

**Hurdles in the path of Empowerment:**

In spite of several commendable steps taken for women empowerment by both central and state government wide gap still persists among the literacy rate of male and female. Many factors are responsible for non-enrolment and high dropout rates of girls.

1. Poverty is attributed as main cause for which girls are deprived of education. The girls have to look after the siblings and do household works and even work outside to supplement their family income.

2. Due to lack of parental awareness girls are not getting chance for education. Parents prefer boys’ education to girls’ education.
3. Early marriage of girls is also a factor responsible for the high dropout rate of girls.
4. Lack of separate institutions for girls is also a vital cause of non-enrolment and dropout of girls. As ours is a conservative society parents in some cases are reluctant to send their girls to co-education institutions.
5. Insecurity for girls is a major concern which deters girls’ education.
6. Fixed school hour do not suit girls in rural areas, as they are wanted for domestic work or in the field.
7. Lack of sufficient number of lady teachers is also another obstacle in the path women education.
8. Lack of hostel facilities is another hindrance in the way of women education.
9. Gender based prejudices in India is the major hurdle in the path of women empowerment. In India a girl is disadvantaged as soon as she is born, she is discriminated in feeding, attention, clothing and care. The family is ready to spend more money on male children for their clothes, schooling, health care and nutrition than on female children.

To achieve the goal some corrective measures may be taken.
1. Community awareness for equality should be created at all levels. The old notion that place of women is in the kitchen should be changed. The young generation should feel that they are no way inferior to their male counterparts in academic, social, political and economic spheres.
2. The attitude of parents should be changed towards co-education.
3. Separate schools for girls should be provided where there is demand.
4. Fifty percent of the total strength of teachers should be lady teachers so that girl students will be attracted towards education.
5. Improvement of infrastructure of the school is another aspect of strengthening girls’ education.
6. Child Care Centres like Anganawadi / Balwadi and ECCE Centres should be opened so that the elder sisters will be relaxed from taking care of their younger brothers and sisters. It will facilitate them to attend the schools.
7. More number of residential schools should be established as per demand.
8. As poverty is the major concern for low literacy of girls, adequate incentives should be provided to girls.

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