

Empowerment of Women in the Twelfth Plan

Dr. Garima Malik

Abstract—Development is a process of expanding freedom for all people. While development means less poverty or better access to justice, it should also mean fewer gaps in well-being between males and females. There is an increasing recognition by the international development community that women's empowerment and gender equality are development objectives in their own right, as embodied in the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. Gender equality can have large impacts on productivity. For an economy to reach its full potential, women's skills and talents should be engaged in activities that make the best use of those abilities. When women's labor is underused or misallocated—because they face discrimination in markets or societal institutions that prevents them from completing their education, entering certain occupations, and earning the same incomes as men—there are economic losses. In India token schemes and programmes have been adopted at the central and state levels at different points of time with insignificant results. Problems affecting the women in the country are getting aggravated as time passes. This paper seeks to examine the dimensions of the issues confronting women in various fields of life right from cradle to pyre, certain steps taken by the government to ameliorate the grave issues affecting them and examine the approach adopted in the Twelfth Plan.

Key Words: Gender Equality, Economic Growth, Twelfth Plan, Discrimination

“The systematically inferior position of women inside and outside the household in many societies points to the necessity of treating gender as a force of its own in development analysis”
—Amartya Sen, Nobel Laureate in Economics

Introduction:

The past few decades have witnessed a steadily increasing awareness of the need to empower women and achieve gender equality through measures to increase social, economic and political equity, and broader access to fundamental human rights, improvements in nutrition, basic health and education. The concept of gender equality has been gaining importance as the subordinate status of women in relation to men has been seen in almost every facets of life.

The Platform of Action resulting from the 1995 Beijing World Conference on Women expanded the concept and called it as 'gender mainstreaming' i.e., the application of gender perspectives to all legal and social norms and standards, to all policy development, research, planning, advocacy, development, implementation and monitoring—as a mandate for all member states. The gender factor was no longer to be only a supplement to development but central to the practice of development. As a result of the Beijing conference and many years of work leading up to it,

more than 100 countries announced new initiatives to improve the status of women.

Similarly on the human development front, it was gradually realized that if the women who constituted almost half of the population remained passive, human development in its real sense could not be possible. Therefore in 1995 main emphasis on gender equality was given in the Human Development Report (UNDP, 1995). Gender inequality is both similar to and different from inequality based on other attributes such as race or ethnicity. Three differences—First, the welfare of women and men living in the same household is difficult to measure separately, a problem that is compounded by the paucity of data on outcomes in the household. Second, preferences, needs, and constraints can differ systematically between men and women, reflecting both biological factors and “learned” social behaviors. Third, gender cuts across distinctions of income and class. These characteristics raise the question whether gender equality should be measured as equality of outcomes or equality of opportunity.

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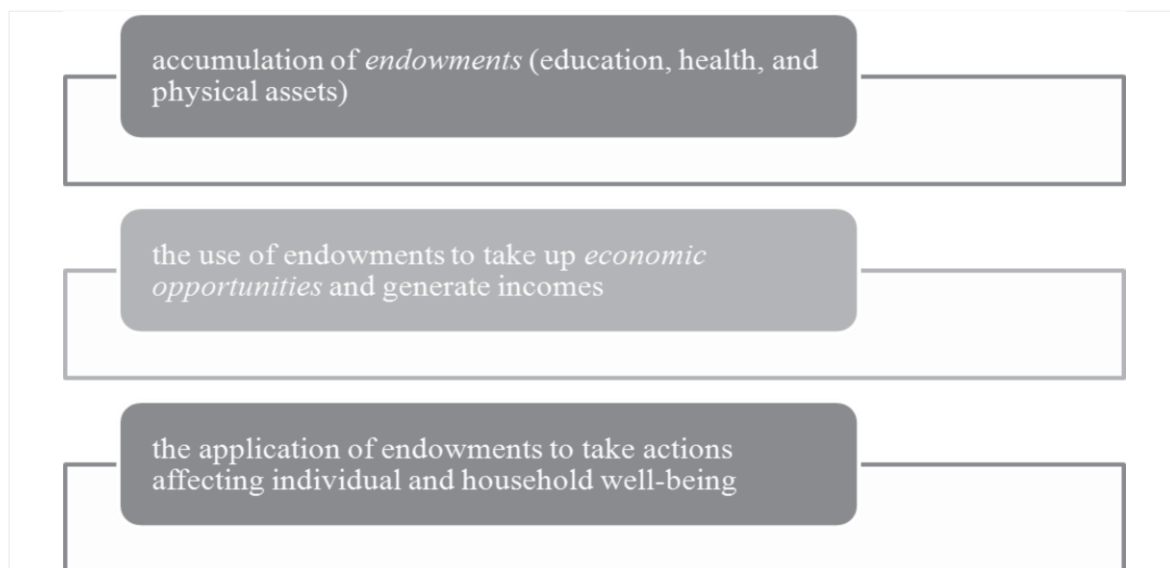


Figure : Three key dimensions of gender equality
Source: World Development Report 2012

Gender Equality and Economic Growth

Gender equality is a key factor in contributing to the economic growth of a nation. The United Nations Population Fund believe that economic growth and social equality should go hand in hand, arguing that “gender inequality holds back growth of individuals, development of countries, and the evolution of societies, to the disadvantage of men and women”. The discrimination against women remains a common occurrence in today's society and serves to hinder economic prosperity. The empowerment of women through such things as the promotion of women's rights and an increase in the access of women to resources and education proves to be key to the advancement of economic development.

The influential role of gender equality on economic growth is most directly illustrated in the participation of women in the labor force. When women are not involved in the workforce, only part of the able workforce is being utilized and, thus, economic resources are wasted. Gender equality allows for an increase in women in the working sector, thereby leading to an expansion of the labor force and an increase in economic productivity. The participation of women in the labor force allows for changing social relationships that bring about economic

progress. Entering the work force, women will be preoccupied with their jobs, and there will be less time to devote to caring for a family. Consequently, women will display positive birth trends in that they will restrict themselves from having too many children. Through their participation in the workforce, women display the demographic trends needed for economic growth to occur.

The relationship between gender equality and economic growth is an asymmetrical one. The evidence that gender equality, particularly in education and employment, contributes to economic growth is far more consistent and robust than the relationship that economic growth contributes to gender equality in terms of health, wellbeing and rights. From a growth perspective, therefore, the promotion of certain dimensions of gender equality may appear to offer a win-win solution but from a gender equity perspective, there is no guarantee that growth on its own will address critical dimensions of gender equality. Either growth strategies would need to be reformulated to be more inclusive in their impacts or redistributive measures would need to be put in place to ensure that men and women benefit more equally from growth.

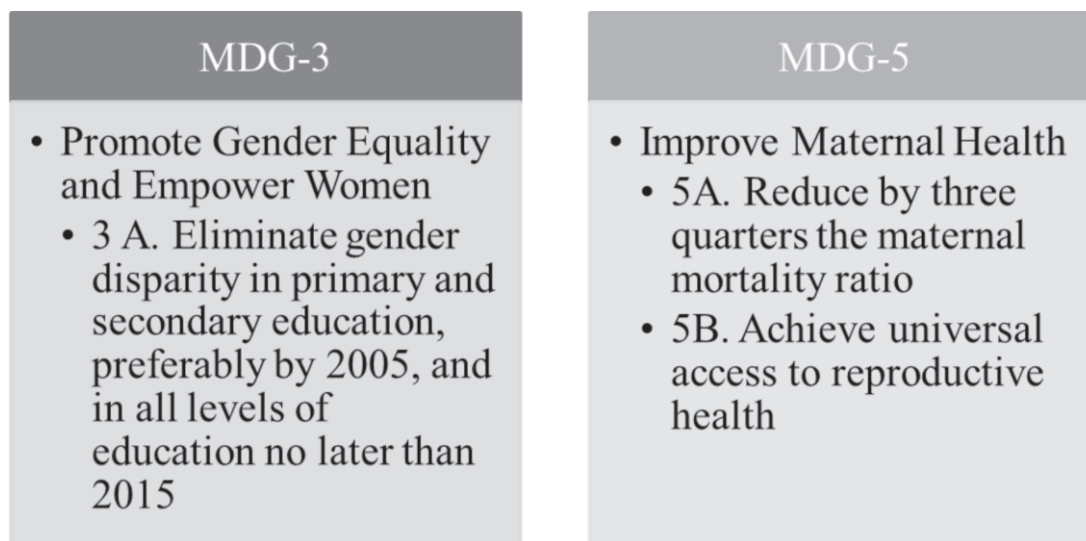


Figure 2: United Nations Millennium Development Goals
Source: United Nations Website

Despite many international agreements affirming their human rights, women are still much more likely than men to be poor and illiterate. They usually have less access than men to medical

care, property ownership, credit, training and employment. They are far less likely than men to be politically active and far more likely to be victims of domestic violence.



Figure 3 : Key Challenges in Gender Equality
Source: UNFPA Website

Gender Equality in India

Despite rapid economic growth, the explosion of microcredit programs and self-help groups, and laudable efforts to increase women's political participation, gender disparities have remained deep and persistent in India. The UN Gender Inequality Index has ranked India below several

sub-Saharan African countries. Gender disparities are even more pronounced in economic participation and women's business conditions in India. Despite India being the second fastest growing economy in the world, gender disparities have remained deep and persistent in India. The good news is that the

overall India average female business-ownership share (in manufacturing) has increased over time from 26% in 2000 to 37% in 2005. However, there is wide variation across states and industries in the prevalence of women as entrepreneurs. Among the major states of India, those with the highest share of new proprietary businesses in the unorganized manufacturing sector owned by women in 1994 are Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Kerala. Those with the lowest share of female entrepreneurs are Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan. Similar patterns hold across states when comparing overall business ownership rates by gender.

Much recent work emphasizes the role of women in development. India's economic growth and development depends upon successfully utilizing its workforce. Despite recent economic advances, India's gender balance for entrepreneurship remains among the lowest in the world. Improving this balance is an important step for India's development and its achievement of greater economic growth and gender equality. Gender inequality in India has narrowed over the past year, but economic opportunities and health facilities for women in the country are still among the poorest in south Asia, according to a new survey. The Global Gender Gap Report 2013, released by the World Economic Forum ranks India at 101 among 136 countries that were assessed for women empowerment on social, economic and political parameters. The report ranks countries by measuring the size of the gender inequality gap in four areas—economic participation and opportunity, health and survival, educational attainment and political empowerment. State-wise data analysis of gender differentiated information in the areas of women's survival, freedoms and visibility clearly indicates wide gaps in the implementation. While a lot has been achieved in some parameters, much needs to be done in others. Similarly, some States have done amazingly well in women's upliftment, but others lag behind.

A small State like Goa is projecting figures above the national average in terms of access to education – high enrolment and low dropout.

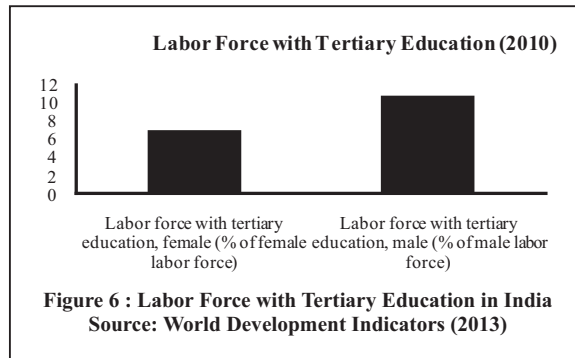
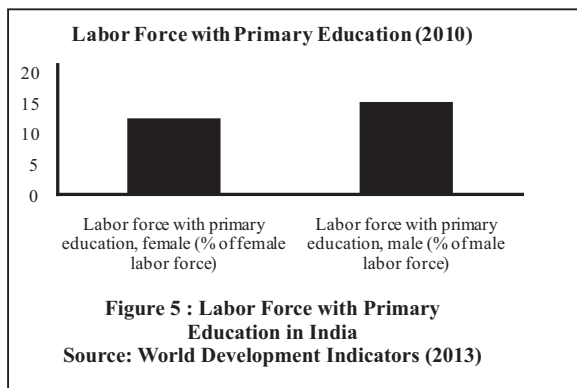
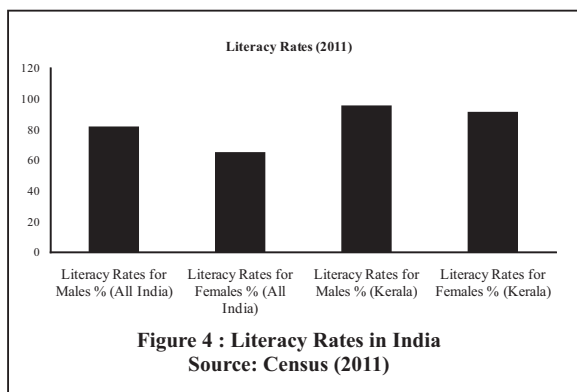
There is also relatively high percentage of women's access to salaried employment, low percentage of below body mass index among women, low infant mortality, and less crimes against women in both the private and public domain. While there has been a marginal increase in India's sex ratio from 933 in 2001 to 940 in 2011, significant variations exist among the States, with Kerala and Pondicherry recording a sex ratio in favour of women, while Delhi, Chandigarh and Haryana have an adverse ratio. Some States like Bihar, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh continue to record huge gender deficits in the areas of women's survival, their freedoms and their visibility.

Gender Empowerment in India

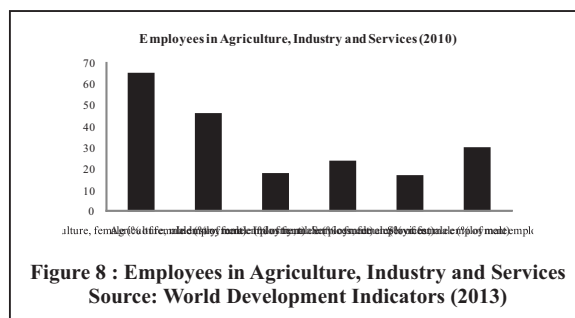
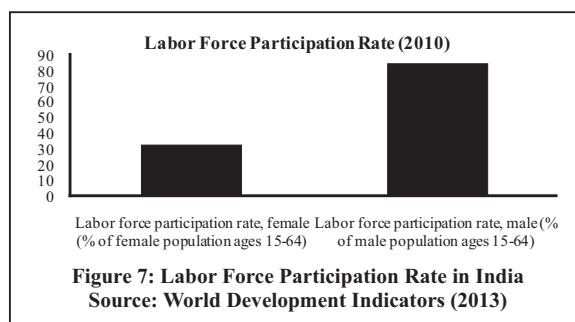
Empowerment of women is a process, a continuum of several interrelated and mutually reinforcing components. UNDP's Gender in Development Policy (GIDP) has interpreted empowerment in a comprehensive manner. The policy aims at, among other things, providing women with access to empowering facilities like education and training. But, equally important is the provision of good health because good health is an essential prerequisite not only for women's participation in economic activities but also for better control of their own lives.

Much has been talked and written about the Empowerment of Women in India in the recent past. According to the 2011 census, women account for 586.47 million in absolute numbers and represent 48.46 per cent of the total population of the country. While there has been an appreciable gain in the overall sex ratio of 7 points from 933 in 2001 to 940 in 2011, the decline in child sex ratio (0–6 years) by 13 points from 927 in 2001 to 914 in 2011 is a matter of grave concern. On the health front, implementation of the National Rural Health Mission has resulted in an improvement on many indicators pertaining to gender. The experience of Kerala in this regard is noteworthy and holds promise for others to follow the example. Kerala began to draw the attention of researchers from all over the world when the 'Kerala Model of development' became a part of the broad global debate about the ideal pattern of development in the 'third world'.

Fertility Rates have come down and have reached replacement levels in a number of states; Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) is improving, from 301 per 100,000 live births in 2003 it has come down to 212 in 2009; Infant Mortality Rate, though still high, has reduced to 47 per 1000 in 2011. Institutional deliveries have risen from 39 per cent in 2006 to 73 per cent in 2009. There are increasing concerns regarding the gap between male and female infant mortality rate—49 for girls as compared to 46 for boys. The under-five mortality rate for girls in India is very high at 64 per 1000 live births as compared to 55 per 1000 live births for boys. The decline in MMR has fallen behind and is less than the target of 100 in the Eleventh Plan. There has been an increase in literacy amongst women from 53.67 per cent (Census 2001) to 65.46 per cent (Census 2011). The challenge however remains in bridging the gender gap which stands at 16.68 per cent. The gender differential in education is declining, particularly at the primary level. Another major concern is the gender gap in the educational level of the labour force.



Seldom in the past has the country's labour market gone through structural changes faster than it has in recent years. Apart from a sharp decline in the proportion of workers employed in agriculture, the perceptible withdrawal of women from the workforce is the most striking feature of India's labour market. Though the declining dependence on agriculture as the main employer is welcome, the shrinking participation of women in the labour market is a matter of concern. It is essential to create an environment where more women opt to come out for work and contribute to economic development. At the same time, however, the trend of generating more jobs in the non-farm sector needs to be sustained in order to reduce agriculture's burden of supporting the bulk of the country's population.



The barriers to women's empowerment are manifested in various ways. Deep-rooted ideologies of gender bias and discrimination like the confinement of women to the private domestic realm, restrictions on their mobility, poor access to health services, nutrition, education and employment, and exclusion from the public and political sphere continue to daunt women across the country.

Gender-based Violence

Violence against women has been called "the most pervasive yet least recognized human rights abuse in the world." Accordingly, the Vienna Human Rights Conference and the Fourth World Conference on Women gave priority to this issue, which jeopardizes women's lives, bodies, psychological integrity and freedom. Violence may have profound effects – direct and indirect – on a woman's reproductive health, including:

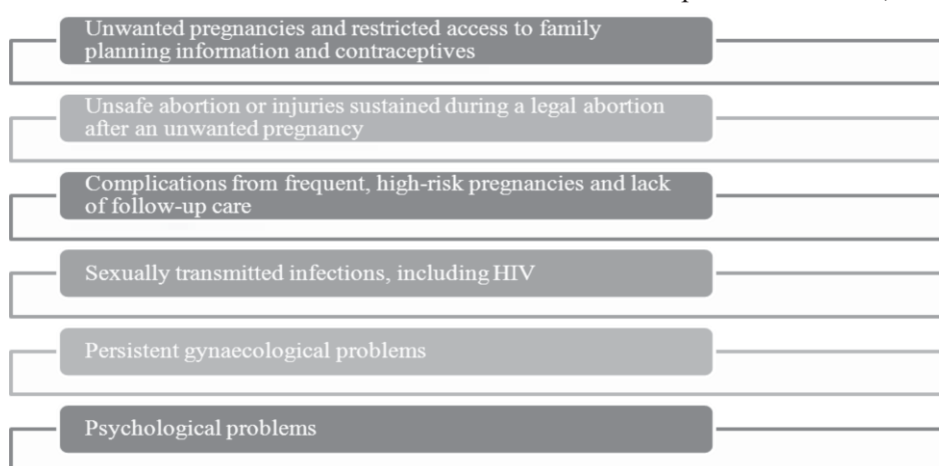


Figure 9 : Effects of Gender-based Violence on Women
Source: UNFPA Website

Gender-based violence also serves – by intention or effect – to perpetuate male power and control. It is sustained by a culture of silence and denial of the seriousness of the health consequences of abuse. In addition to the harm they exact on the individual level, these consequences also exact a social toll and place a heavy and unnecessary burden on health services.

Violence against women is inextricably linked to gender-based inequalities. When women and girls are expected to be generally subservient, their behaviour in relation to their health, including reproductive health, is negatively affected at all stages of the life cycle. Addressing violence against women, in both public and private sphere, is a major challenge. Data from National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) shows that the total number of crimes against women increased by 29.6 per cent between 2006 and 2010. The trend continues to move upward. What is equally disturbing is that conviction rates remained low; reflecting inter alia, that many of

these cases are not being well prosecuted and inadequate proof is tendered before the courts. The 2005–06 National Family Health Survey (NFHS-III) also reported that one-third of women aged 15 to 49 had experienced physical violence, and approximately one in 10 had been a victim of sexual violence.

Appraisal of the Twelfth Plan

The Twelfth Plan¹ endeavors to increase women's employability in the formal sector as well as their asset base. It will improve the conditions of self employed women. Focus will be on women's workforce participation particularly in secondary and tertiary sectors, ensuring decent work for them, reaching out to women in agriculture and manufacturing, financial inclusion, and extending land and property rights to women.

The Plan proposes strengthen the implementation of the Equal Remuneration Act and the Maternity Benefits Act. As a complement to the strategy for increasing women's

employment in the formal sector, it is imperative that the Protection of Women from Sexual Harassment at Work Place Bill is made into law. One of the major impediments affecting women's participation in the workforce, particularly in secondary and tertiary sectors, is the lack of skills. The Twelfth Plan envisages a major scaling up of skill development. This must be accompanied by special efforts to promote skill development of women from traditional skills to emerging skills, which help women break the gender stereotypes and move into employment requiring higher skill sets. Training of women as BPO employees, electronic technicians, electricians, plumbers, sales persons, auto drivers, taxi drivers, masons, and so on should be incorporated in the skill development programmes. Skill development would be seen as a vehicle to improve lives and not just livelihoods of women. The curriculum should therefore include inputs that help women to assert themselves individually and collectively.

The promotion of enterprises of home based workers, self employed workers and small producers is an essential component of the Twelfth Plan and is of particular relevance for women. The Twelfth Plan lays stress to identify such workers and support their enterprises through setting up of common facility centres to ensure all important services including technology and skill training, entrepreneurship training, market information, access to institutionalised credit, power and other infrastructure and related facilities are readily provided.

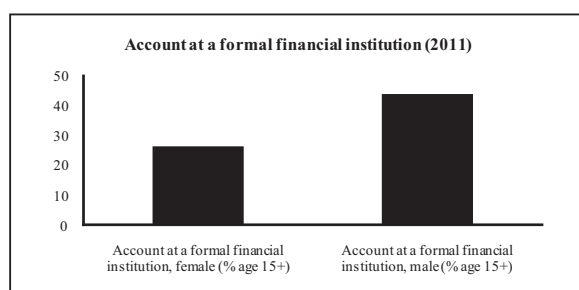


Figure 10 : Account at a formal financial institution in India
Source: World Development Indicators (2013)

In order to promote the participation of women in the manufacturing sector, the plan supports the promotion of marketable manufacturing skills in production activities with special emphasis on skill development of women belonging to marginalized sections. For important traditional industries like leather, handlooms, handicrafts and sericulture, existing publicly funded institutions will be activated to identify the industry's market potential and existing skills. Bottlenecks for modern market-oriented production will be located, and incremental technological improvements including use of computerized technologies for coordination through a gendered analysis of the industrial climate will be introduced. State policies will be encouraged to publicize the opportunities in these industries among potential women entrepreneurs and give assistance to them in their ventures. The Twelfth Plan must also encourage social action and propaganda to change attitudes towards gender stereotyping of skills and removal of prejudice against caste-based activities and worker communities.

Women in the unorganized sector require social security addressing issues of leave, wages, work conditions, pension, housing, childcare, health benefits, maternity benefits, safety and occupational health, and a complaints committee for sexual harassment. This can only be ensured by extending labour protection to these sectors in a manner that pays special attention to the needs of women workers.

In view of the consistently higher female Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) figures, along with the increasingly disturbing dynamics of the declining child sex ratio, a separate target for lowering female IMR is to be added under National Rural Health Mission (NRHM). An impact assessment of Janani Suraksha Yojana, Jansankhya Sthirata Kosh and equity implications of health insurance, user fees and other activities under the NRHM will also be undertaken. Under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan² (SSA), the number of women teachers, especially in rural schools and remote, inaccessible areas will be reportedly increased by providing

enabling work conditions for women teachers including transportation facilities and housing. A child tracking system would be adopted to achieve full inclusion and to address the issue of school drop-outs. Providing hostel facilities and scholarships for girls as well as including nontraditional vocational training as part of the overall education curriculum are the best instruments for engendering the education strategy.

Lack of sanitation, especially toilets, in rural areas is a major weakness in our system and one that impacts most adversely on women. The Twelfth Plan is stated to undertake a gender impact assessment of the Total Sanitation Campaign to assess whether it has reduced women's workload, provided security, improved hygiene and reproductive health of women, decreased school dropout rates for girls, and so on. The Plan is also expected ensure the provision of toilets with water in all schools and anganwadi centres and the active involvement of women in determining the location of sanitation facilities. The much discussed point raised by one of the leading politicians, "Sochalaya before Devalaya" should be translated into real projects in the form of mortar and bricks in every home, village, town and schools throughout the country.

Trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation is one of the worst forms of crimes against women and children as it exposes them to a life of humiliation and sexual abuse. Poverty, illiteracy, lack of livelihood options, natural/man made disasters and lack of social and family support, migration are among the factors which make women and children vulnerable to such trafficking. A study entitled 'Girls and Women in Prostitution in India' (2002–2004) by Gram Niyojan Kendra (GNK), sponsored by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, estimates that the primary means of entry into prostitution of about three fourths of the women and children is through trafficking and that there are about 2.8 million sex workers in the country of which 36 per cent are children. Cross-border trafficking from Bangladesh and Nepal to various cities in India is another area of concern. During the Twelfth Plan a number of initiatives

are expected to be undertaken for empowering women. To promote socio economic development existing schemes like Support to Training and Employment Program (STEP)³, Priyadarshini⁴, Swayamsiddha Phase II⁵, Ujjawala⁶, Swadhar Greh Scheme⁶ will be strengthened.

Conclusion

Gender equality is, first and foremost, a human right. Women are entitled to live in dignity and in freedom from want and from fear. Empowering women is also an indispensable tool for advancing development and reducing poverty. Empowered women contribute to the health and productivity of whole families and communities and to improved prospects for the next generation. The importance of gender equality is underscored by its inclusion as one of the eight Millennium Development Goals. Gender equality is acknowledged as being a key to achieving the other seven goals. No doubt the strategy, programmes and schemes outlined in the Twelfth Plan document are holistic but their actual and timely implementation, reaching the target section of the society, availability of resources both at the central and state levels; funds finally allocated and effectively utilized etc. become the real challenge at different levels.

Domestic action is central to reducing inequalities. Global action—by governments, people and organizations in developed and developing countries, and by international institutions—cannot substitute for equitable and efficient domestic policies and institutions. But it can enhance the scope for and impact of domestic policies. In other words, international action should focus on complementing country efforts along the four priority areas



Figure 11: Four priority areas for gender equality
Source: World Development Report 2012

A concerted effort by all the stakeholders particularly women NGOs, activists etc., constant vigil, effective monitoring, a purposeful governance system will go a long way to achieve the basic objective of empowering women in the country.

End Notes

- 1 Twelfth Five Year Plan, Planning Commission, Government of India
- 2 Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is Government of India's flagship programme for achievement of Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE)
- 3 This Scheme envisages providing of financial assistance to NGOs for imparting training to the poor & needy women for their skill up-gradation.
- 4 Priyadarshini is a women empowerment and livelihood programme of Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India
- 5 Swayamsiddha Phase II ensures holistic empowerment of women in a sustainable manner through Self Help Groups (SHGs)
- 6 Ujjawala is a comprehensive scheme for rescue, rehabilitation and re-integration of victims of trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India
- 7 In 2012, the Centre decided to merge two shelter based schemes - Swadhar and Short Stay Home - into the 'Swadhar Greh' scheme

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