# India's Progress towards Achieving the MDG's in Women's Empowerment and Inclusion

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**Abstract:**

*In 2000, 189 UN member states adopted the Millennium Declaration which distils the key goals and targets agreed at the international conferences and world summits during 1990. Drawing on the Declaration, the UN system drew up eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to provide a set of benchmarks to measure progress towards the eradication of global poverty. MDG 3, to promote gender equality and women's empowerment, includes one target on education and additional indicators on women's employment and political representation. Global agreement to include this goal was a very positive development and signalled recognition by member states that gender inequality not only decreases the likelihood of achieving the other goals, but also that advancing gender equality and women's empowerment depends on progress made on each of the other goals.*

*Indian policy initiatives recognized that gender equality and women's empowerment are both central to achieving sustainable development by means of combating poverty, hunger and disease. Gender Equality underscores the need to place women's empowerment at the center of development plans. This paper argues persuasively for policies and actions to guarantee reduce gender gaps in employment and wages, increase women's political participation and Gender parity in education. Basically this paper presents an assessment of India's progress towards achieving the MDGs in women's empowerment in the context of (MDG) GOAL 3.*

**Keywords:** *Gender equality, Indian policy initiatives, Millennium development goals, Women's empowerment*

## 1. Introduction

The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. The Constitution not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women.

In the historic year of 2000, 189 nations pledged in the form of eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to help people to overcome extreme poverty and multiple deprivations. MDGs are set to be achieved by 2015 and are most strategically designed, broadly supported, comprehensive and specific development goals the world has ever agreed upon. These eight time-bound goals provide concrete framework tailored by each country to suit specific development needs. Women's empowerment and inclusion are central to UNDP's strategy for achieving the Millennium Development Goals and bringing about transformational change. India as a partner of UNDP works to ensure that women have a real voice in governance institutions at all levels, that they have equal participation in public dialogue and influence the decisions that will determine the future of their families and communities. These strategies are integrated into nation's initiatives on education,

employment in the non-agricultural sector, poverty reduction and democratic governance to achieve sustainable human development.

## 2. Concept of Empowerment

Empowerment can be defined as a "multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. It is a process that fosters power (that is, the capacity to implement) in people, for use in their own lives, their communities, and in their society, by acting on issues that they define as important" (Page and Czuba, 1999).

The empowerment of women has been widely acknowledged as an important goal in national-international development. The World Bank's *Empowerment and poverty reduction: A sourcebook* defines empowerment in its broadest sense as the "expansion of freedom of choice and action" (Narayan 2002). Kabeer (2001) defines empowerment as "the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choice in a context where this ability was previously denied to them". For women in India, this suggests empowerment in several realms: personal, familial, economic and political.

Since the 1980's the Government of India has shown increasing concern for women's issues through a variety of legislation promoting the education and political participation of women (Collier, 1998). International organizations like the World Bank and United Nations have focused on women's issues especially the empowerment of poor women in rural areas. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have also taken on an increased role in the area of women's empowerment (Sadik, 1988).

Comparable components of empowerment are included in the eight indicators by Hashemi (1996): mobility, economic security, ability to make small purchases, ability to make larger purchases, involvement in major decisions, and relative freedom from domination by the family, political and legal awareness, and involvement in political campaigning and protests.

Actually women's empowerment is a process. We can structure four steps in this process. Firstly, identify the nature of the problem. This means that the prevailing gender gaps where women continue to be at a disadvantage are identified and recognized as important. In this process it is important to consult women themselves to better understand their needs and concerns. Secondly, on the basis of evidence- based analysis, key steps to create a safe and enabling environment through both targeted policies and gender mainstreaming. Thirdly, to contribute to sustainable development, women need to be agents of change and therefore building their skills and capacities is crucial. Finally, women at all levels of activity and decision- making need to be involved: women's full and equal participation is essential.

## 3. Statement of Problem

India's performance on women's empowerment and gender equality is reflected in many indicators. In many parts of the country, sex ratio has dropped to fewer than 850 females per 1000 males. India is ranked 132 out of 148 countries on Gender Inequality Index as per the 2013 Global Human Development Report. Women from disadvantaged groups such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and minorities in particular face discrimination, exploitation and limited employment opportunities. So, it's important to ensure that vulnerable women will be benefited from all governmental initiatives, if we really want to empower women.

## 4. Objectives of Study

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in India is committed to the promotion of gender equality and social, economic and political inclusion. The mandate is derived from the fact that inequality, based on wealth, region, ethnicity and gender is a fundamental concern for human development.

We will see how this Programme brings advancement, development and empowerment to women. Specifically, we will evaluate the objectives of this Programme which include:

- Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential.
- Equal access to participation and decision making of women in social, political and economic life of the nation.
- Equal access to women to quality education at all levels, employment, equal remuneration, social security.
- Mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process.

## 5. Data Collection and Methodology
The study will be based upon secondary data sources. The database required for the study would be:
- The statistics available from national surveys, census and administrative records.
- Relevant websites like UNDP, UNICEF, and United Nations Statistics Divisionand reports like Millennium Development Goals India Country Report 2011.

Quantitative and Qualitative Research Techniques will be used for my study. I will also use descriptive and analytical methods.

## 6. India's Progress towards Achieving *MDG* Targets
The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and targets come from the Millennium Declaration, signed by 189 countries, including 147 heads of State and Government, in September 2000. The eight Goals as under:
- Goal 1: Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger
- Goal 2: Achieve Universal Primary Education
- Goal 3: Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women
- Goal 4: Reduce Child Mortality
- Goal 5: Improve Maternal Health
- Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and TB
- Goal 7: Ensure Environmental Sustainability
- Goal 8: Develop Global Partnership for Development

Eighteen targets were set as quantitative benchmarks for attaining the goals. The United Nations Development Group (UNDG) in its 2nd  Guidance note (endorsed in 2003) on 'Country Reporting on the Millennium Development Goals' provided a framework of 53 indicators (48 basic + 5 alternative) which are categorized according to targets, for measuring the progress towards individual targets. India's MDG framework recognizes all the 53 indicators that UNDG's 2003 framework for monitoring of the 8 MDGs. However, India has found 35 of the indicators as relevant to India. Here I provide the details of Goal 3, its targets and indicators, which are our focus of study-

**Table: 1**
**India's MDG Framework: Goals, Targets and Indicators**

| Goal 3:    Promote Gender Equality And Empower Women |
| --- |
| Target 4:      Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education, no later than 2015. |
| Indicator 9:    Ratio of girls to boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education |
| Indicator 10:  Ratio of literate women to men, 15-24 years old |
| Indicator 11:   Share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector |
| Indicator 12:  Proportion of seats held by women in National Parliament. |

Source: UNDP: India, www.in.undp.org

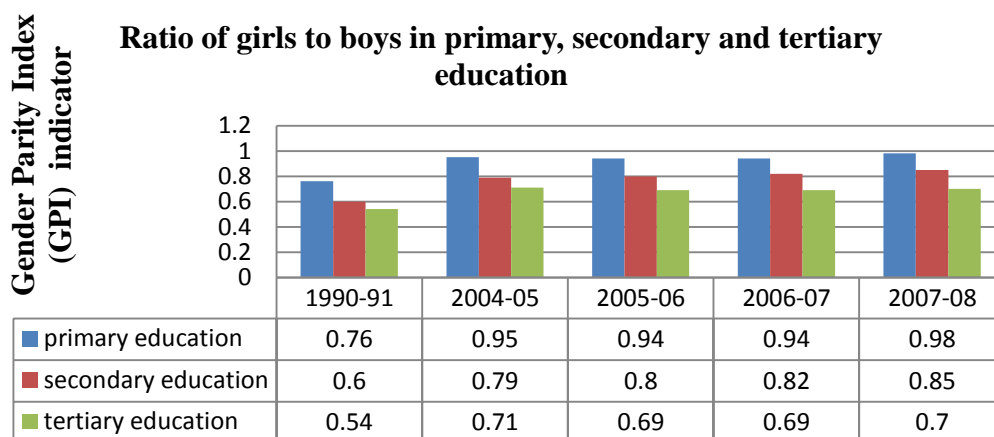Now, I will discuss our government's achievement through MDGs indicators.

## 6.1 Indicator 9
### 6.1.1 Ratio of girls to boys in Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Education
Education will lead to empowerment securing the means of creating a social environment in which one can make decisions for social and individual transformation. It develops intrinsic capacity, inner transformation of one's consciousness to overcome barriers, access resources and change traditional ideologies. Empowerment therefore is possible only with access to education as a fundamental right.

By the measure of Gender Parity Index (GPI) in enrolment at primary, secondary and tertiary levels, the female-male disparity in all the three grades of education has been steadily diminishing over the years.

A GPI of 1 indicates parity between the sexes or no gender disparity. A GPI that varies between 0 and 1 typically means a disparity in favour of males whereas a GPI greater than 1 indicates a disparity in favour of females. Target 4 is intended to achieve GPI of 1 by 2005 for primary enrolment and by 2015 for all levels. In primary education, the GPI ratio has gone up from 0.76 in 1990- 91 to 0.98 in 2007-08 showing 29% increase, in secondary education the increase is from 0.60 in 1990-91 to 0.85 in 2007-08 thereby showing 42% increase, and in higher education, it is increased from 0.54 in 1990-91 to 0.7 in 2007-08 registering an increase of 30%. The target for eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary enrolment by 2005 has not been achieved in India as per the available data for Gender parity Index for Enrolment, in the sense that though almost perfect parity was attained in the primary level of enrolment, it was not so in secondary level. However, by the cut – off line for achievement as internationally recognized, the target has been achieved for primary grade by 2007-08. The rates of increase in GPI signify India's on –the –track progress to achieving Gender parity in enrolment by 2015, even for Secondary grade.

### Table 2. Gender Parity Index –All India

**Ratio of girls to boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education**

Gender Parity Index (GPI) indicator

| | 1990-91 | 2004-05 | 2005-06 | 2006-07 | 2007-08 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| primary education | 0.76 | 0.95 | 0.94 | 0.94 | 0.98 |
| secondary education | 0.6 | 0.79 | 0.8 | 0.82 | 0.85 |
| tertiary education | 0.54 | 0.71 | 0.69 | 0.69 | 0.7 |

*Source: Millennium Development Goals India Country Report 2011*

## 6.2 Indicator 10
### 6.2.1 Ratio of literate women to men, 15-24 years old
The Female: Male literacy rate for 15-24 years increased to 0.80 in 2001 from 0.67 in 1991. NSS (2007-08) results show that, literates in the age group 15-24 years at all India level is 86% with 91% males and 80% females. Thus the ratio of literate women to men in the age group 15-24 years stands at 0.88 in 2007-08. The ratio of literate women to men in the age group 15-24 years tends to exceed 1 by 2015, implying attainment of gender parity in literacy by 2015.
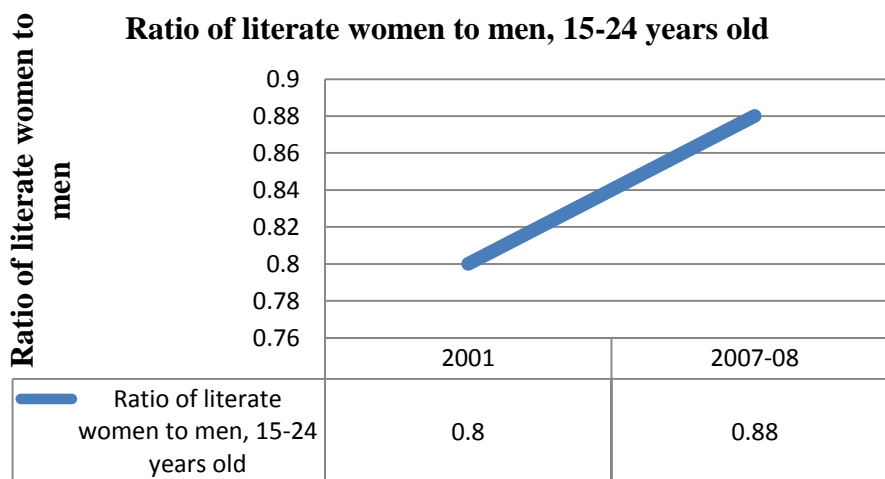
As per NSS 2007-08 results, the States of Mizoram and Kerala have attained gender parity in youth (15-24 years) literacy and the State of Goa has gender parity favoring females. Though all the States showed progress in the level of female: male youth literacy rate during the period 2001 to 2008 (as per Census 2001 & NSS (2007-08), the States of Orissa (0.86), Arunachal Pradesh (0.86), Uttar

Pradesh (0.84), Madhya Pradesh (0.84), Jharkhand (0.72), Bihar (0.71), Rajasthan (0.71) Dadra Nagar Haveli (0.64) reported below the national level estimate (0.88).

Free and compulsory education to all children up to the age fourteen is constitutional commitment in India at present. The Parliament of India has passed 23HRight to Education Act in 2004-05 through which education has become a fundamental right to all children of age group 6-14 year.

The fundamental right to get free and compulsory education by all children in the 6-14 years age is a major consideration for the Government to provide access to education for all the so long excluded children. Reaching out to the girl child is central to the efforts to universalize elementary education.

**Table 3.**



**Ratio of literate women to men, 15-24 years old**

| | 2001 | 2007-08 |
|---|---|---|
| Ratio of literate women to men, 15-24 years old | 0.8 | 0.88 |

*Source: Millennium Development Goals India Country Report 2011*

### 6.3 Indicator 11
### 6.3.1 Share of Women in Wage Employment in the Non- Agricultural Sector
The rate of change over time in India in respect of the share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector is rather slow – about two percentage points over a period of five years in the recent past. As per NSS 66th round on Employment and unemployment during 2009-10, the percentage share of females in wage employment in the non- agricultural sector, stood at 18.6%. The share of women in wage employment for Rural areas was 19.6% and for Urban 17.6% in 2009-10. The 61st round NSS results had estimated the percentage share of females in wage employment in the non- agricultural sector as 18.6 % with rural 17.9% and urban 19.2% during 2004-05. It is projected that at this rate of progression, the share of women in wage employment can at best reach a level of about 23.1% by 2015. Labour markets in industry and services sectors in India are heavily male dominated and 50:50 situations for men and women is too ideal to be true given the market dynamics and existing socio-cultural framework.

**Table 4**



**Share of women in wage employment in the non- agricultural sector**

| | rural | urban | total percentage share |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2004-05 | 17.9 | 19.2 | 18.5 |
| 2009-10 | 19.6 | 17.6 | 18.6 |

*Source: NSSO 61th & 66th round data on Employment and unemployment during 2004-05 & 2009-10*
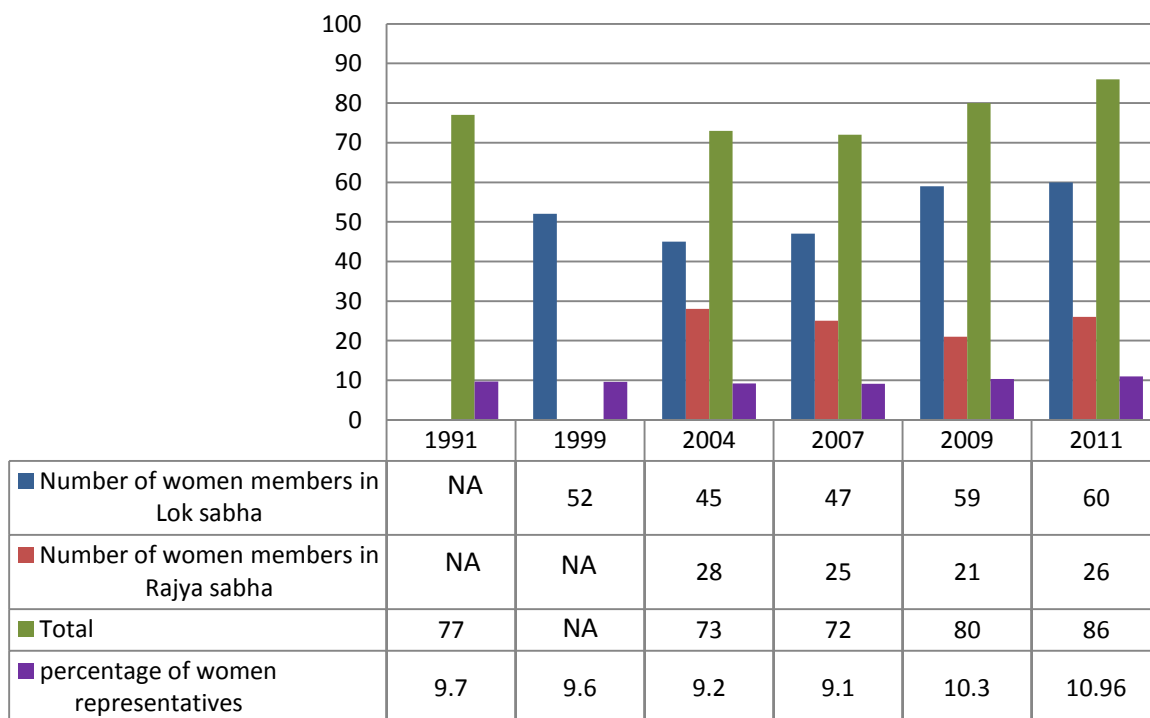
## 6.4 Indicator 12

### 6.4.1 Proportion of seats held by women in National Parliament

So far, India has witnessed 15 General elections to the Lok Sabha of Nation's Parliament. As on November 2011, India, the world's largest democracy, has only 60 women representatives out of 544 members in Lok Sabha, while there are 26 female MPs in the 241-member Rajya Sabha.

**Table 5**

**Proportion of seats held by Women in National Parliament (India)**



| | 1991 | 1999 | 2004 | 2007 | 2009 | 2011 |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Number of women members in Lok sabha | NA | 52 | 45 | 47 | 59 | 60 |
| Number of women members in Rajya sabha | NA | NA | 28 | 25 | 21 | 26 |
| Total | 77 | NA | 73 | 72 | 80 | 86 |
| percentage of women representatives | 9.7 | 9.6 | 9.2 | 9.1 | 10.3 | 10.96 |

*Source: Millennium Development Goals India Country Report 2011*

In India, The Women's Reservation Bill has been a political ball for nearly a decade and half. It has always triggered heated debates within Parliament and outside. The proposed legislation to reserve 33.3 percent seats in the Parliament and state legislatures for women was drafted first by the H D Deve Gowda-led United Front government. The Bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha on September 12, 1996. Although it has been introduced in Parliament several times, the Bill could not be passed because of lack of political consensus. As we know, 50% seats in panchayat elections have already been reserved for women. According to data released by Inter parliamentary union (IPU), India ranks 108 in the World for proportion of National Parliament seats held by Women. The data in the table below has been compiled by the Union on the basis of information provided by National Parliaments by 1st December 2013.
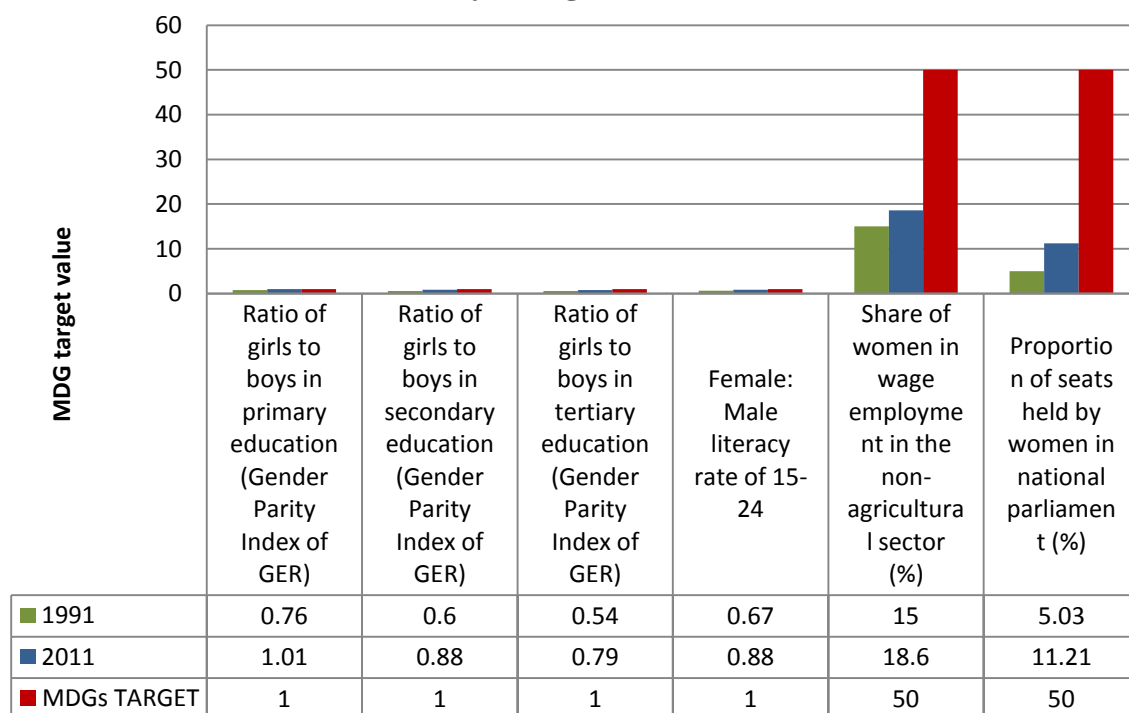
**Table 6.**

**Women in national parliaments of india's neighbouring countries (Lower or single House)**
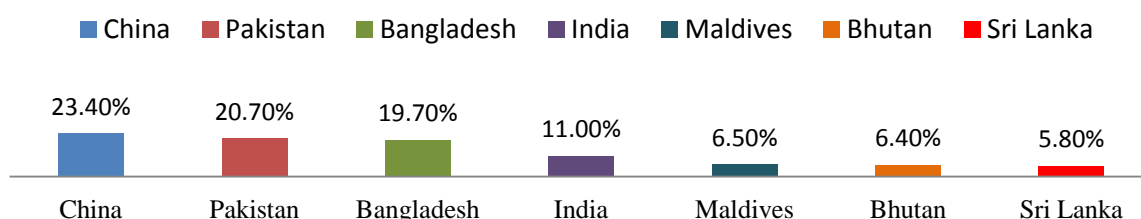


*Source: Inter parliamentary union (IPU), 1st Dec 2013*

Let's have a look of all indicators in brief:

**Table 7.**
**Summary - Progress of MDG indicators**



| | Ratio of girls to boys in primary education (Gender Parity Index of GER) | Ratio of girls to boys in secondary education (Gender Parity Index of GER) | Ratio of girls to boys in tertiary education (Gender Parity Index of GER) | Female: Male literacy rate of 15-24 | Share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector (%) | Proportion of seats held by women in national parliament (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1991 | 0.76 | 0.6 | 0.54 | 0.67 | 15 | 5.03 |
| 2011 | 1.01 | 0.88 | 0.79 | 0.88 | 18.6 | 11.21 |
| MDGs TARGET | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 50 | 50 |

*Source: Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India*

## 7. Government Initiatives to Achieve These Targets

In education sector, government has initiated various types of programmes. I am discussing here some of them-

### 7.1 Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan or 'Education for All' programme recognizes that ensuring girl's education requires changes not only in the education system but also in societal norms and attitudes. A two-pronged gender strategy has therefore been adopted, to make the education system responsive to the needs of the girls through targeted interventions which serve as a pull factor to enhance access and retention of girls in schools and on the other hand, to generate a community demand for girls' education through training and mobilization. The SSA works in a convergent mode with the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) programme to promote pre-school education by providing for training of Anganwadi workers, primary school teachers, and health workers for a convergent understanding of pre-school

### 7.2 National Programme for Education of Girls for Elementary Level (NPEGEL)

The NPEGEL, launched in September 2003, is an integral but distinct component of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. It provides additional provisions for enhancing the education of underprivileged/disadvantaged girls at elementary level through more intense community mobilization, the development of model schools in clusters, gender sensitisation of teachers, development of gender sensitive learning materials, early child care and education facilities and provision of need-based incentives like escorts, stationery, work books and uniforms etc. for girls. All Educationally Backward Blocks have been included under NPEGEL.

### 7.3 Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV)

Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) is a scheme launched in July 2004, for setting up residential schools at upper primary level for girls belonging predominantly to the SC, ST, OBC and minority communities.

The scheme provides for a minimum reservation of 75% of the seats for girls belonging to SC, ST, OBC or minority communities and priority for the remaining 25%, is accorded to girls from families below poverty line. Government has also targeted economic issue to empower women. Some important women based employment schemes are as below:

## 8. SWAYAMSIDHA (IWEP)
### 8.1 IWEP
This is an integrated scheme for women's empowerment in which Mahila Samriddhi Yojana (MSY) has been merged. This programme is based on the formation of women into Self-Help Groups (SHGs). It aims at the holistic empowerment of women through awareness generation, economic empowerment and convergence of various schemes.

Its vision is to develop empowered women who will-
- Demand their rights from family, community and government
- Have increased access to, and control over, material, social and political resources
- Have enhanced awareness and improved skills
- Be able to raise issues of common concern through mobilization and networking

### 8.2 Grant in Aid on Women Labour
The Ministry of Employment is running a Grant-in-aid Scheme for the welfare of women labour. Under this Scheme, Voluntary Organizations/NGOs are being provided funds by way of grants-in-aid to take up action-oriented projects for the benefit of women labour. Projects relating to awareness generation campaigns for women labour are funded under this Scheme. The focus of the Scheme is awareness generation among women labour, in the area of wages, like minimum wages, equal remuneration, etc. to disseminate information on various schemes of Central/State Government Agencies available for the benefit of women labour.

## 9. Need to Do More for Inclusion of Women
When we talk about women education, Rural and urban differences are important for the analysis of gender differences in school enrolment, because of significant differences in school facilities, available resources, demand on children's time for work, and drop-out patterns that affect girls and boys differently. It is also important to consider disaggregation by geographical areas and social or ethnic groups since gender differences may be more pronounced in some groups. Disaggregation should focus on identifying marginalized populations, particularly those living in remote areas or belonging to minorities.

In situations of limited resources, families make difficult choices about sending their children to school. They may perceive the value of education differently for boys and girls. Girls are more likely than boys to suffer from limited access to education, especially in rural areas. But where basic education is widely accepted and overall enrolment is high, girls tend to equal or outnumber boys at primary and secondary levels. The pattern is similar in higher education, but with larger differences between the two sexes.

Nevertheless, through government initiatives, we are getting good result in education sector. Many plans like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, National Programme Nutritional Support to Primary Education (Mid Day Meal), Rashtriya Madhyamic Shiksha Abhiyan, and Rashtriya Uchhtar Shiksha Abhiyan are running brilliantly and we have already got the MDG target in this sector.

In India, with the growing levels of development and related structural economic changes, production tends to move from the agricultural sector towards the non-agricultural sectors. This on turn would be expected to have a positive impact on women's autonomy, self-reliance within the household and enhance personal development and decision-making power.

Low shares, or declining shares of women in wage employment in India call for policies to increase employment opportunities for women, both in terms of access to jobs and the quality of such jobs.

In developing countries where non-agricultural wage employment represents only a small portion of total employment, this indicator is less effective in depicting the conditions of women. In India where most employment is in agricultural activities, additional indicators are needed to evaluate the situation of women in the labour market. Also it is important to consider the status in employment since women are more likely than men to work as unpaid family workers.

In developing regions and outside the agricultural sector, wage employment is a middle-class, urban phenomenon. Outside of urban areas, non-agricultural paid employment is limited and is more likely to go to men. Men more often hold regular and better remunerated jobs, whereas women are frequently in peripheral, insecure, less valued jobs as home workers, casual workers or part-time or temporary workers, all of which affect differences in income.

As economies develop, the share of women in non-agricultural wage employment becomes increasingly important. A higher share in paid employment can secure higher incomes for women, as well as economic security and well-being. Women's participation in parliaments is a key aspect of women's opportunities in political and public life, and is therefore linked to women's empowerment. A stronger presence of women in parliament allows new concerns to be highlighted on political agendas, and new priorities to be put into practice through the adoption and implementation of policies and laws. The inclusion of the perspectives and interests of women is a prerequisite for democracy and gender equality, and contributes to good governance. A representative parliament also allows the different experiences of men and women to affect the social, political and economic future of societies. Although India has supported and promoted women's participation in political decision-making structures for several decades, improvement in women's access to parliament is slow.

The involvement of women in setting political priorities delivers a stronger and more representative democracy and results in better outcomes for citizens. Women parliamentarians are likely the most ardent promoters and defenders of women and have redefined political priorities to include gender equality issues. But this role does not fall exclusively on women and there is a need to better understand how to forge a partnership between men and women and how men can further support gender equality issues.

## 10. Some Important Suggestions
We can achieve women empowerment and gender equality by educating girls, increasing women's labor force participation, improving women's access to credit, land and other resources, promoting women's political rights and participation, expanding reproductive health programs and family support policies.

Violence against women continues to undermine efforts to reach all goals. We must pay attention to this.

Poverty is a major barrier to secondary education, especially among older girls. Another thing to note is women are largely relegated to more vulnerable forms of employment. Targeting these problems can be a step to empower them.

## 11. Conclusion
Empowering women is a process that encompasses both the creation of an enabling environment for women which is free of discrimination, and strengthening women's ability to take control over their own lives and fully contribute to bringing about the needed changes in our societies. This process

needs to be taken forward through joint action and commitment by all: governments, the corporate sector and civil society.

Addressing all the major targets under MDGs, the progress toward achieving these goals appears to be rather slow in most of the areas, with the exception of education. With only about 1 more years to go toward the set time for achieving these goals, the only way to do so would be to further intensify our efforts in reaching out to the unreached populations and ensuring uniform distribution of resources for women empowerment.

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