

Inputs for Report of the UN Working Group on Discrimination against Women and Girls on “Women’s Human Rights in Changing World of Work” to the 44th Session of HRC

The situation in India is such that women still face discrimination at various stages of their lives in disparate social setups. Child Marriage, women trafficking (both cross border and inter-state), sexual abuse, discrimination at workplace, domestic violence, honour killing, etc. are few of such examples. Gender inequalities, and their social causes, impacts India’s Sex Ratio, women’s health over their lifetimes, their educational attainment and economic conditions. While Indian laws on rape, dowry and adultery have women’s safety at heart, these highly discriminatory practices are still taking place at an alarming rate, affecting the lives of many women in India today. According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2018 released by the World Economic Forum (WEF), India was ranked 108 on the Gender Gap index (GGI) among 149 countries polled.

Within the framework of a democratic polity, our laws, development policies, Plans and programmes have aimed at women’s advancement in different spheres. From the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-78) onwards has been a marked shift in the approach to women’s issues from welfare to development. In recent years, the empowerment of women has been recognized as the central issue in determining the status of women. The National Commission for Women was set up by an Act of Parliament in 1990 to safeguard the rights and legal entitlements of women. The 73rd and 74th Amendments (1993) to the Constitution of India have provided for reservation of seats in the local bodies of Panchayats and Municipalities for women, laying a strong foundation for their participation in decision making at the local levels.

India has ratified various international conventions and human rights instruments committing to secure equal rights of women. Key among them is the ratification of the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1993. However, there still exists a wide gap between the goals enunciated in the Constitution, legislation, policies, plans, programmes, and related mechanisms on the one hand and the situational reality of the status of women in India, on the other.

Government of India's initiatives on Gender Mainstreaming

One Stop Centre Scheme

One Stop Centres (OSCs) are intended to support women affected by violence, in private and public spaces, within the family, community and at the workplace. Women facing physical, sexual, emotional, psychological and economic abuse, irrespective of age, class, caste, education status, marital status, race and culture to be facilitated with support and redressal. The objectives of the scheme are two-fold; (i) to provide integrated support and assistance to women affected by violence, both in private and public spaces under one roof. (ii) to facilitate immediate, emergency and non-emergency access to a range of services including medical, legal, psychological and counseling support under one roof to fight against any forms of violence against women.

Ujjawala

This is a comprehensive scheme for prevention of trafficking and rescue, rehabilitation and re-Integration of victims of trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation. The scheme intends to prevent trafficking of women and children for commercial sexual exploitation through social mobilization and involvement of local communities, awareness generation programmes, generate public discourse through workshops/seminars and such events and any other innovative activity. To facilitate rescue of victims from the place of their exploitation and place them in safe custody and further aims to rehabilitate the victims both immediate and long-term to the victims by providing basic amenities/needs such as shelter, food, clothing, medical treatment including counselling, legal aid and guidance and vocational training.

Working Women's Hostel

The objective of the scheme is to promote availability of safe and conveniently located accommodation for working women, with day care facility for their children, wherever possible, in urban, semi urban, or even rural areas where employment opportunity for women exist. The working women's hostel projects being assisted under this scheme shall be made available to all working women without any distinction with respect to caste, religion, marital status etc., subject to norms prescribed under the scheme.

Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP)

The STEP Scheme aims to provide skills that give employability to women and to provide competencies and skill that enable women to become self-employed/entrepreneurs. The Scheme is intended to benefit women who are in the age group of 16 years and above across the country. The grant under the Scheme is given to an institution/ organisation including NGOs directly and not the States/ UT's.

Mahila Police Volunteers (MPVs)

To promote the objectives of women empowerment and increase focused community outreach, Government of India envisaged engagement/ nomination of Mahila Police Volunteers (MPVs) in all States and UTs who will act as a link between police and community and facilitate women in distress. MPVs are envisaged as empowered, responsible, socially aware women for fostering leadership in local settings to facilitate police outreach on gender concerns. They are an interface between the society and police.

Victim Compensation Scheme

The compensation part of the rehabilitation of victims of violence including rape is governed by provision of Section 357A of the Code of Criminal Procedure which states that every State Government in co-ordination with the Central Government shall prepare a scheme for providing funds for the purpose of compensation to the victim of crime. So far 24 states and 7 UTs have formulated the Victim Compensation Scheme. The key objectives of the Scheme is to support and supplement the existing Victim Compensation Schemes notified by States/UT Administrations and reduce disparity in quantum of compensation amount notified by different States/ UTs for victims of similar crimes. The scheme further intends to encourage States/UTs to effectively implement the Victim Compensation Schemes (VCS) notified by them under the provisions of section 357A of Cr.P.C. and continue financial support to victims of various crimes especially sexual offences including rape, acid attacks, crime against children, human trafficking etc

Other Government initiatives are in the field of education, health, food, land/housing etc., have enormously benefited the girls and women of the country. One of the few remarkable initiatives are; The National Policy for Women Empowerment, The National Rural Health Mission (NRHM), RashtriyaSwasthyaBima Yojana (RSBY), Janani- Shishu Suraksha Katyakram (JSSK), Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS), Mahatma Gandhi National Rural

Employment Guarantee scheme (MGNREGA), National Rural Livelihood mission (NRLM), Cash transfers Schemes- Ladli Lakshmi yojana or the Janani Suraksha Yojana, These examples prove that there is a foundational connection between economic growth and the expansion of education and human capital of women; leading towards their empowerment and access to agency.

Parliamentary Committee on the Empowerment of Women

The Parliamentary Committee on Empowerment of Women was constituted in 1997. It has 30 members - 20 from the Lok Sabha (Lower House) nominated by the Speaker and 10 from the Rajya Sabha (Upper House) nominated by the Chairperson of Rajya Sabha. The term of the members of the Committee does not exceed one year. The mandate of the Committee is to review and monitor the measures taken by the Union Government in the direction of securing for women equality, status and dignity in all matters. The functions of the Committee include, inter-alia, considering the reports submitted by the National Commission for Women (NCW) and to report on the measures taken by the Union Government for improving the status/condition of women.

NHRC's Initiative

The National Human Rights Commission of India has been involved in playing an imperative role in the safeguard of women rights in every sphere across the country for the purpose of achieving gender mainstreaming. The NHRC is particularly concerned about the rights of women; due to increase in the instances of sexual assault and crime against women in recent times.

Core Group on Trafficking, Women and Children

The National Human Rights Commission had constituted a Core Group on Trafficking, Women and Children in November 2016. The Members of the Core group include experts on the subject representing Central Government, Police, Research Institutes, NGOs and Civil Society Organizations. The Core Group drafted a Standard Operating Procedures (SoP) and Guidelines for Combating Trafficking of Persons in India. The SoP on Combating Trafficking of Persons in India was released by the Commission in December 2017.

One-day meeting on One Stop Centre

A One Day Meeting on 'One Stop Centers' was held in the Commission on Tuesday, 26 September 2017 in Manav Adhikar Bhawan. The meeting was chaired by Smt Jyotika Kalra, Member, NHRC. The objective of this meeting was to review the status of implementation of One Stop Centre Scheme, assess the existing ground situation, to have inputs from all the stakeholders and sharing of the best practices. In this meeting senior officials from the States of Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, NALSA, Senior Officials from Delhi Police, non-governmental and civil society organizations had participated.

Gender Sensitizing Training for Officers and Staff of National Human Rights Commission

The Asia Pacific Forum in collaboration with NHRC had organized a Gender Sensitizing Training for Officers and Staff of National Human Rights Commission-India (NHRCI). The objectives of the training were:

- i. Put into practice the publication 'Promoting and Protecting the Human Rights of Women and Girls: A Manual for National Human Rights Institutions'.
- ii. Provide skills and knowledge to support NHRCI to promote and protect women's and girls' human rights and address sex discrimination and gender inequality through the NHRI's functions.
- iii. Expand skills and competencies of NHRCI staff to integrate gender analysis within their work and to undertake specialized projects for promoting and protecting women's and girls' human rights.

The workshop reinforced the importance of mainstreaming of gender equality across all functions of the NHRCs work

One-Day Workshop on Sexual Harassment at Workplace

The commission had organized a one day workshop on "Sexual Harassment at Workplace" on 28 March 2018. The workshop was held under the chairmanship of Smt. Jyotika Kalra, Member, NHRC. The workshop has been attended by senior officials of National Commission for Women, Delhi Commission for Women, State representatives from Delhi, Punjab, Rajasthan, and Chandigarh along with the representatives of NGOs/Civil Society Organizations and academicians working in the area of sexual harassment. The objective of the meeting was to review and assess the implementation of Sexual harassment of women at work

place (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013. Further, the one day meeting also aimed to understand the ground reality from the stakeholders to form a holistic understanding of the issue.

Apart from this, NHRC has also commissioned research projects on the issues related to Women such as; Surrogacy, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Sexual Violence against Women to name a few. NHRC through its objective aims to strengthen the already existing schemes, plans and programmes along with awareness campaigns. NHRC in its initiatives has relentlessly ensured; gender equality, promotion of women's empowerment and combating discrimination and violence against women are integral for inclusive society and development of the country.