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## WOMEN DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA: A CASE STUDY OF SEWAPURI BLOCK (VARANASI DISTRICT)

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**Abstract:** *Development involves improvements in quality of life in every sphere. Women development is an important issue in developing countries in the discussion of socio-economic development. This is because of the prevailing gender inequality in the society that makes women stand as a weaker section in it. Since a woman is the pivot of the family, she stands and deserves first to reap the benefits of planned techno-socio-economic development. But before that she has to be the part of such development process. It is necessary to improve her status through empowerment, in social, economic, political, cultural, and moral aspects. The present study discusses the socioeconomic status of women in the study area through the computation of women development index. Strategies for improving women's status have been suggested because changes in socio cultural factors may stimulate the changes in the distribution of power, status, and control over resources between men and women. Usually, development programmes come up with such change strategies empowering the weaker section of the society including women. But such conscious effort towards equitable distribution of power status and control over resources between men and women is rarely materialized.*

**Key Words:** *Women development, women empowerment, women's status and women development strategies*

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## **INTRODUCTION:**

Development is an integral process to promote a better quality of life in socio-economic, political, cultural, and moral aspects. According to United Nations Development Programme (2009), it goes beyond improving living standards to embrace the expansion of people's opportunities, choices and capabilities to live in freedom and dignity. Amartya Sen (Jean and Sen, 1999) famously describes development as a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy. According to him, the concept of freedom is central to development for two reasons. First, Sen argues that development progress should be measured by the degree to which various human freedoms have been enhanced. These fundamental liberties include, for instance, the freedom to satisfy basic needs for food and shelter, the freedom to live safe from fear and violence, and the freedom to participate in the social, economic and political life of one's community. Second, Sen makes a compelling case that the free agency of people is the major engine of development; he sees individual freedom and overall social development as inextricably linked. In short, freedom is both the end goal of development and the chief means for achieving it (Jean and Sen, 2013).

Women development should be viewed as an important issue in socio-economic development and should be seen as an essential component in every dimension of development. It means enhancing the status of women through their empowerment. For understanding the concept of women development one needs to understand the concept of status as well as empowerment. Status is a complex, dynamic and relative concept, encompassing certain powers derived either from one's achievements and/or from ancestors. The power (empowerment) is manifested in prestige and privileges along with rights, roles and autonomy for independent action (Mahadevan et al., 1989). According to the Encyclopedia of Social Sciences( 1934:P.373) status denotes: (a) position in social system, (b) place with respect to the distribution of prestige within a social system, (c) high place with respect to the distribution of prestige within a social system. The status of women is a multi-dimensional and dynamic concept which is considered on a relative basis. It comprises several dimensions like one's own legacy and achievements including money, materials, merits, life styles, privileges, and the autonomy to take one's own decisions. The term status is used, first, as an access to resources such as education, gainful employment,



and health services and, second, the position (power, prestige, authority) that a woman has in various situations (Mahadevan, et al., 1989).

In developing societies, gender is an important source of inequality in every sphere (social, economic, cultural, religious and political). These socio-economic, cultural, religious and political factors create gender differences which in turn determine the status of women. A change in such factors may also stimulate the changes in the distribution of power, status, and control over resources between men and women. Usually, development programmes come up with such change strategies empowering the weaker section of the society including women. So empowerment of women is a conscious effort towards equitable distribution of power status and control over resources between men and women. Empowerment is a process towards increased power of women in social, economic and political realm (Rowlands, 1997). Batliwala (1994) views empowerment as the process by which the powerless gain control over the circumstances of their lives. It includes both control over resources (physical, human, intellectual, financial) and over ideology (beliefs values and attitudes).

Women development refers to the welfare of women in the socio-economic perspective as well as their empowerment. It encompasses improvement in social, economic, political, cultural and moral aspects of life. Such enhancement in their status leads to their empowerment to enable them to come out of the exploitative, oppressive, discriminatory and biased structure of society which is prevalent not only in India but also worldwide. In India, women development was not an issue in ancient times. Despite of the prevalence of patriarchic society, this age was characterized by liberal attitudes and practices pertaining to women and total equality between men and women was ensured. The high status that women enjoyed during the *Rig Vedic* period started deteriorating during the late *Vedic* period. Their development was further oppressed during the medieval period with spread of veil system to almost all classes of society. Many social and religious malpractices such as *Sati*, child marriage and exclusion of women from education and workplace became prevalent in the society which conferred to low social status of women in that period. However, social reforms to these malpractices were introduced during the British period. Though the impetus of such reforms was great, the impact on women's status was feeble. In Independent India, the Constitution laid the foundation for creating a social order and



equality in all aspects of life of the people of India. Since independence, several plans, programmes, policies, rules, regulations and acts were made, implemented and amended from time to time in order to enhance women's status in terms of access to education, health services, realization of their basic rights and freedom of choice, etc. However, in practice these programmes, policies and acts have not penetrated to all sections of the society. The problem lies within the society of gender differentiation which still carries the strict caste and community structure, putting women in the lowest strata of the society, making them most vulnerable to all forms of discrimination. The problem is more serious in rural areas within all religious groups and castes.

### **OBJECTIVES:**

- To study the socio-economic status of women respondents.
- To analyze and compare the socio-economic status of women respondents in sample villages.

### **DATA BASE AND METHODOLOGY:**

The present study is based on secondary sources of data collected from Primary Census Abstract (2001) and primary data collected from the women respondents through questionnaires. Information collected from the questionnaires pertains to health status including BMI, literacy, employment, domestic violence and autonomy or decision making power of 600 female respondents. According to the objectives of the study, Women Development Index has been computed. Among the various factors that influence status of women, education, earning, autonomy or decision making power, BMI and domestic violence have been taken to compute WDI. Each factor has been given scores or weightage. The highest weight has been given to the level of each factor which influences the status of women the most. In education, the highest grade completed by women respondents has been taken. The level of education ranges from illiterate to post graduation. Therefore, the respondent who is illiterate is given a score of 0 followed by 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 to the successive grades which has been completed by the respondent. Under economic factor, whether respondents have their own earning or not have been taken. Those, who are earning, are given the score of 2 and those who are not earning are given the score of 1. For health status, Body Mass Index (BMI) has been considered. The respondents who have normal BMI have been given the highest score of 4 and those who are underweight are



given the lowest score of 1. Obese and overweight respondents have been given the scores of 2 and 3 respectively. Under social factors, autonomy and domestic violence are very important parameters influencing women's status. Four levels of autonomy have been taken. The most important one from the perspective of the present study is autonomy for visiting health centre. Second is for visiting markets, followed by meeting friends and visiting parents which decides their level of social freedom. They have been given scores starting from 4 to 1, respectively. The respondents having autonomy for all the four items or does not have to take permission from anybody to go to health centre or buy medicines; visit market, friends and parents have been given a score of 10 ( $1+2+3+4 = 10$ ). Under domestic violence, respondents facing any kind of violence ranging from ignoring to slapping, have been given a score of 1 and those who do not face any kind of violence are given a score of 2. The scores in each category for each respondent were summed up to get the total score of the respondent. The highest the score, better is the index indicating better socio-economic status of women. The highest score for each parameter are 5, 2, 4, 10 and 2. Therefore, maximum total score would be 23 ( $5+2+4+10+2 = 23$ ). Now for each respondent, it is important to find out the index corresponding to the total score, i.e., 23, in percentage. For example, if a respondent had a total score of 10 then her WDI would be  $(10/23)*100 = 43.48\%$ . Likewise, WDI have been computed for 600 respondents. The average value of WDI of 30 respondents in each village gave the WDI for that village.

### **A CASE STUDY OF SEWAPURI BLOCK:**

Sewapuri block is located between  $25^{\circ} 12' 32''\text{N} - 25^{\circ} 25'\text{N}$  and  $82^{\circ} 40'\text{E} - 82^{\circ} 50' 17''\text{E}$  in the south eastern part of the Varanasi District in Eastern Uttar Pradesh. It has a total area of 169.12 Sq. Km with 12 *Nyay Panchayats*, 82 *Gram Sabhas* and 188 villages having population of 2,04,731 persons (Census, 2001). The growth rate of population of the study area is 2.93 percent per annum. Sewapuri block is entirely rural in character. It has an agrarian economy with people having traditional mindset. The study area is dominated by the people belonging to Other Backward Castes (OBCs), scheduled castes (SCs) as well as Muslim population who are generally very poor. Poverty along with the traditional mindset of the people have largely affected people's attitude, awareness and participation in development process of the people of the block as well as that of women and children in particular.



**Literacy:** In Sewapuri block, 55.33% of the total respondents are literates. About 48.79% of the total literate respondents are educated up to primary level. Secondary, senior secondary, graduation and post graduation level of education accounts for 28.01%, 21.38%, 0.30% and 1.50%, respectively

**Employment:** In the study area, only 36.66% of the total respondents are working in different sectors. Out of the total working respondents, 38.18% are agricultural labourers, 17.27% work as wage labour, 15% work in small cottage industry, and 10.45% are engaged in crafting and weaving. About 17.09% of the respondents are in government and private services and remaining 5 % are engaged in other occupation.

**Health status:** India is one of the few countries in the world where women and men have nearly the same life expectancy at birth. The fact that the typical female advantage in life expectancy is not seen in India, suggests there are systematic problems with women's health. Indian women have high mortality rates, particularly during childhood and in their reproductive years. The respondents were also asked about the health problem they have if any. About 75.83% of the total women respondents had some kind of health problems. It was found that only 6.52% suffered from different communicable diseases. Among them, 41.37% were suffering from Tuberculosis (T.B.), 31.03% from malaria, 17.24% from typhoid and 10.34% from other diseases. 93.48% of the total respondents were suffering from non communicable diseases, mainly food nutrient deficiencies as anaemia (68.83%), osteoporosis & arthritis (29.83%), angular stomatitis and eczema (5.16%) bitot spot (3.8 %) and goitre (0.5%). It has been found that in Sewapuri block, among the six hundred women respondents, 235 are underweight and only 133 have normal Body Mass Index. 77.82% of the respondents are under weight (39.16%), over weight (16.66%) and obese (22%). Only 22.16% of the total respondents have normal Body Mass Index.

**Domestic violence:** Over the past decade, there has been a growing recognition that domestic violence is a significant public health concern in developing countries. Women and children are often in great danger in the place where they should be safest within their families. In the study area 65.83% of women respondents face domestic violence. The respondents were asked whether they were ignored, abused, slapped and pushed by their husband or any other family member in the past six months. The respondents reporting any one form of violence was taken as facing domestic violence. Out of the total respondents



who faced one or more than one form of violence, 83.93% were ignored for some reason, 92.78% were abused, 97.04% were slapped and 80.32% were pushed.

**Autonomy:** In the present study the determinants of women's autonomy in four areas have been taken, i.e., visiting health centre, for visiting markets, meeting friends and visiting parents which decides their level of social freedom. It has been observed that women whose husbands were educated were more likely to have greater autonomy in each of these four areas. Further analyses demonstrated that women with greater freedom of movement obtained higher levels of child care and were more likely to use safe institutional delivery system. The influence of women's autonomy on the use of health care appears to be as important as other known determinants such as education. But the problem in the study area was that in total, only 27% of the respondents were observed to have full autonomy in all of these determinants.

#### **WOMEN DEVELOPMENT INDEX IN SAMPLE VILLAGES:**

From the sample study, it has been found that 45% of the sample villages have WDI of more than 46%. Moderate WDI have been found in only 10% of the sample villages. Low and very low WDI have been found in 20% and 10% of the sample villages, respectively (Table 1).

**Table 1: Composite Index of Women Development in Sewapuri Block**

WDI	Sample villages
<40	11,12
40-42	8,14,17,18
42-44	1,3
44-46	4,9
>46	2,5,7,10,13,15,16,19,20

Note: The location and names of the sample villages are given in Fig.1.

#### **WOMEN DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES:**

Family Welfare Programmes aim at improving maternal and child health and achieving other desired demographic goals. Women are the prime targets of programmes because they are the ones that bear children and are typically the primary caregivers in the households. Socio-economic development and empowerment of women in society and in their families are very critical in promoting changes in reproductive attitudes and behavior, especially in patriarchal societies. Notably, the National Population Policy 2000, specifically identified the



low status of women in India as an important barrier to the achievement of population and maternal and child welfare goals (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, 2000).

**1. Social Empowerment:** Education is the most important tool for social empowerment for women. Education is understood to have a positive link with a woman's health and a negative correlation with fertility. At the same time, woman's education level has also impact on her socio-economic status. Education is one of the most significant requirements for girls and women because it is an entry point to the other opportunities. The educational achievements of women can have ripple effects not only within the family but for many generations to come. Educated women recognize the importance of health care and know how to take care of themselves and their families. Education helps women to know their rights and attains confidence to claim them. Therefore, women in the study area must be educated. *Saksharta Chowki* is a very useful example which was seen in *Rameshwar* village and can act as a useful platform for social empowerment of women in all the villages. In Sewapuri block, female literacy is very low. Female dropouts from school are also high.

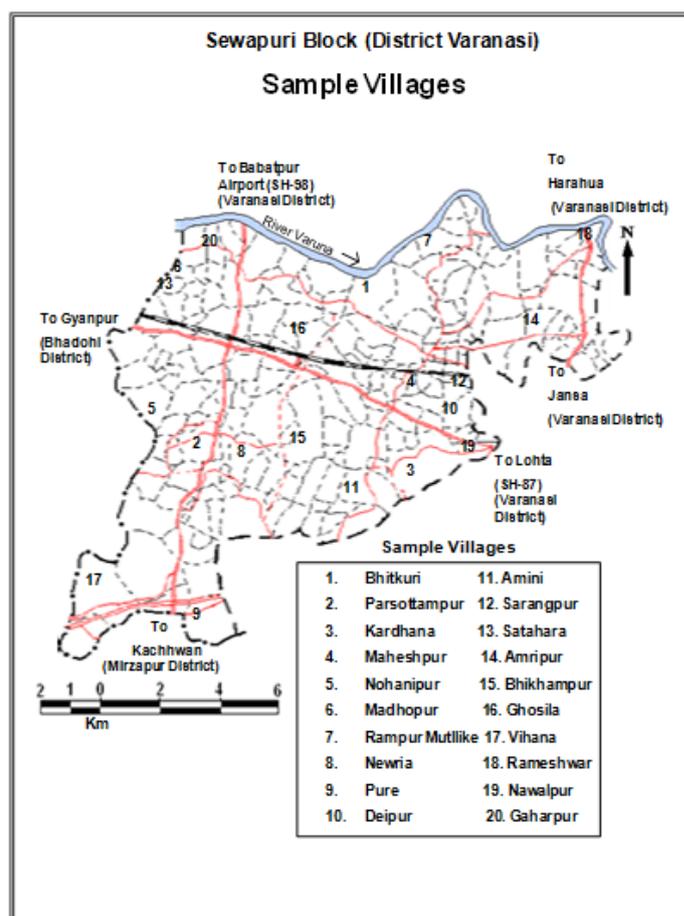


Fig. 1

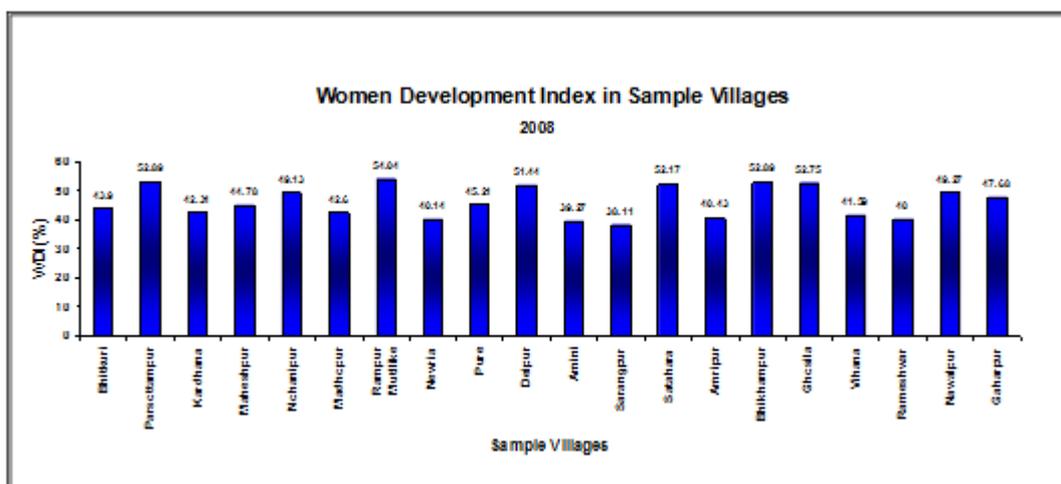


Fig. 2 Source: Personal Field Survey (600 Female Respondents) (2008)

Therefore, there is a need to make illiterate women and girls literate and to create awareness and change in attitude towards female education. Awareness must be created among men and women about the adverse effects of malpractices of child marriages, sex selective abortions, purdah system and dowry. Educating men and women both about the benefits of female literacy so that their girl child is not deprived of at least preliminary education is needed. Educating the married couples about providing equal education, food and nutrition to their children irrespective of sex is needed, e.g., adult education for women. Educating men and women about the benefits of equal participation in household work as well as equal remuneration for equal work outside home is required. Creating a change in attitude of both men and women towards female work participation and making her economically independent is required. Making women aware about their reproductive and sexual rights is needed. Creating awareness about the benefits of small family size is another significant strategy. Adolescent girls must also be included in this. Health education including awareness about food, nutrition, hygiene and sanitation must be done. Benefits of immunization, ANC, PNC, institutional delivery and trained personnel assisted deliveries must be emphasized. Creating self help groups that involve women in training of first aid practices, child care, hygiene, care during pregnancy and post pregnancy and sex education is needed. The equal sharing of family responsibilities by men and women should be promoted through appropriate laws. The policies aimed at changing the stereotypes regarding sex division of work between the sexes, and thereby promote the concept of sharing, especially in tending children and old-age people and in house keeping should be



adopted. The effective far-reaching and continuous awareness raising campaigns through mass media aiming to change men's attitudes towards women should be carried out.

**2. Economic empowerment:** In Sewapuri Block, Women's economic empowerment is essential for raising their status in society and family. Among the strategies for economic empowerment of women, provision of dairies for income generation for women is vital in the agricultural sector. Special training can be given to them for this purpose. With the Self Help Groups, they can market milk and milk products made locally by them and generate income. Women can also be involved in floriculture and horticulture through similar societies. Women's cooperative nurseries can be formed and women can be employed in such cooperatives. Small nurseries of *ayurvedic* medicinal plants can be established by women in different villages in small spaces available near to their houses and can be run by a group of females. Training in stitching, knitting, bead making, carpet making, handicrafts, tie and die, garment making, fabric painting, embroidery etc. can be given to groups of women in different villages. Each woman can thus generate income through training another group of girls and married women in her village. Credit facility should be provided to rural women for setting up small scale industries of pickles, snacks, spices and condiments, products of worship, etc. Awareness must be created among men and women regarding property rights and equal remuneration for equal work. The government should provide credit facility to women for betterment of their economic conditions. It should adjust employment policies to facilitate the introduction of flexible working hours that would facilitate sharing family responsibilities. Women should be provided with equal access resources to expand their income-generation. The government must support and strengthen micro-enterprises; new, small, private, joint-stock or co-operative businesses that create jobs for women in rural areas. The strategies that promote the interests of women working in private hire, engaged in street trade or individual work; female collective farm workers and female entrepreneurs must be adopted. The women should also been given equal access to efficient services offering training, re-training, job search and placement, that are not limited to jobs traditionally held by rural women. The economic policies should be adopted that would promote employment and income generation among women working in formal and non-formal sectors. The provision of marketing and financial



assistance to develop and strengthen rural enterprises and establishments staffed mainly by women is required.

**3. Political empowerment:** Women are endowed with several responsibilities concerned to the household and family circle, now with the development in society, the issue of decision making in all the vista of life including political has also become significant. Women's participation in democracy was felt very late after Independence. To provide enhanced representation to rural women in political world, specific provision were incorporated in the constitution of India through the 73rd amendment act in 1992. A significant provision of this Act is the reservation of 1/3rd seats for women in all position in the local rural parliament. The 73rd amendment was a landmark for women empowerment. Through this amendment, participation of women was encouraged at the village politics. This provision not only addressed the strategic needs of women but also provided them a platform to participate in the development activities in local government. It could effectively voice women's pent up feelings, requirement and perspective in the development processes. But the reality has been quiet different. With no exception, it was observed during field survey, that the role of women elected representatives was confined to their household works and their husbands or other male members were exercising their duties. It must be avoided and there should be a supervision of this malpractice. Low literacy level of women hinders their active participation in the panchayat activities. It also makes them more dependent on men for paper work. Even if they are not educated, lack of awareness about the rural governance and the systems and procedures to understand their roles and responsibilities with regard to *Panchayati Raj* (local self governance) make the situation worse. Women elected representative who are more active and aware perform brilliantly in their political offices whereas women who are less aware do not perform that well and end up becoming dummy elected candidate. It must be avoided. Each and every woman should be made aware of her voting rights and importance of their voting rights must be realized to them. It must be ensured that there is no sex discrimination in selecting representatives of *Gram Sabhas*. The women are so involved in their families that even educated women find it hard to have any political activity besides their socio-economic activities. In fact, they don't even practice their voting rights and also forget about their personal opinions. Even if they are not pressurized by their spouse or any other male members, they hardly get time for theses



activities. Women should have access to free or inexpensive legal services, including legal literacy training.

**4. Rural Development and Women's Participation:** Development starts with people and progresses through them. In the context of Rural Development, it is women as pivot of the families which play the most significant role. Rural women continue to remain obscure and invisible in the process of development, although they comprise the majority of the population in rural areas. They make major contributions to the house keeping and maintaining health of their families. Their active support is crucial to the utilization of development objectives. There can be no societal transformation without their involvement, support, and leadership. But, Women are the most marginalized group in this rural area. Their low literacy also affects their attitude towards their development. They are isolated, confined and marginalized in the rural development because of the lack of their active participation in the development process. There is complete lack of structured development strategy to create needed opportunities for self reliance of these women. The need is to create the employment opportunities especially through Self Help Groups (SHGs). There are many development policies and projects formulated but they overlook rural women. So it is required to ensure and involve them in the development process by creating awareness among them. Here the role of mass media is vital. Educational level is an important tool, and is needed to stimulate, create, achieve and enhance active participation of rural women in development. The rate of women's participation in development initiatives is strongly influenced by their educational levels. The higher a woman is educated, the greater the likelihood she would be included in the working population. A lack of education is enhanced by inequalities and disparities in all the development activities consequently increasing more poverty. The involvement of Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) for the rural development is a must for the study area.

**6. Rural Women: Health, Education and Employment:** The women ensure good health and education to the whole family and also support the main working persons of the family in all the respects, still their contribution is not accounted any where. There should be provision for better protection of their health, starting from good nutrition in early childhood to the better care for the pregnant, old-age, and sick women. More attention should be paid to women's health and reduce infant and child mortality. The health strategies should focus on



prevention of diseases. There are many women working in the hazardous bead making industry with no security provisions, even girl child below 14 years of age can also be found there, but no government provision has solved their problem. The supply of medicines and equipment to rural outpatient clinics and hospitals should be ensured. Health facilities do not match the needs of all people because only a few can afford the current price of medicines. Some patients, particularly from low income families, have to buy medicines in the market at low prices with no guarantee of quality. Serious attention is to be paid here. The latest means of birth control should be promoted and their proper distribution is to be ensured.

The educational facilities must be improved not in quantity but in quality. Equal opportunities should be provided in all types of employment to the women they should be given freedom of choice in the decision-making. The issue of women's health has grown into a serious problem. Healthy mothers produce healthy children and healthy generations. It would be difficult to deny the global connection between women's health and the health of the nation, and the entire society. Women's status in society and economy depends on rules defined by the society. It can be expected that the social interventions will decrease to a much smaller scale in the future. But it is also on the women to in defend their interests. They must be more active in their search for solutions to social, economic and political problems. Only then can we expect for their development. Enormous problems have arisen in the employment of rural women. Their male counterparts of the households earn small amounts and require serious attention by the government, non-governmental organizations and society as a whole. Even then, they are not provided with the employment opportunities. The main reason is the lack of such opportunities; therefore the strategies as discussed for economic empowerment above can be adopted. The women must be involved in planning and decision-making of rural development. The strategies must be developed to promote job creation and economic growth in the study area. The support programmes and projects developed by non-governmental organizations that promote production entrepreneurship among rural women should also be encouraged. The wage gap between men and women should be eliminated by adjusting existing laws and the wage scales should be reviewed in occupations mainly taken up by women such as teaching, nursing, pre-school education etc. There should be a supervisory body to study the development



scenario of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) and National Rural Health Mission (NRHM). The former ensures economic development while the latter ensures good health for all. These two schemes have to be implemented very honestly. A thorough database should be kept at the block level for any inventory and ensuring better planning for the development.

**7. Rural women and Rural Environment:** Women play an essential role in the management of natural resources, including soil, water, forests and energy...and often have a profound traditional and contemporary knowledge of the natural world around them' (World Bank, 1991). The exclusion of women from environmental conservation projects would thus be a recipe for future failure of the humanity. Two significant schemes of Social Forestry (SF) and Integrated Water Resource Management (WRM) need more attention here. The former is required to be done under guidance of scientists, so that the villagers can get their fuel, fodder and food at sustainable level, while the latter provides the basic necessity without which health life is impossible. There is no such practice going on in the block under institutional supervision. It is required to train rural women in this regard so that they can ensure good sustainable living environment for their village. They should also be involve in rural sanitation programmes ensuring proper drainage system, failing to do so may cause dangerous diseases like Malaria. In water and sanitation activities, women's participation on water committees or in maintaining facilities is required. Integrated water resources management (WRM) is currently high on the development agenda. It is the subject of a recent World Bank Policy Paper (1993). Given the likely influence of the Bank's new WRM policy - around 13 percent of Bank funds are invested in water projects - it is crucial to ensure that gender issues have not been overlooked. The new WRM approach stresses the economic value of water as a scarce resource. Conservation and pricing are the main mechanisms proposed to limit waste and inefficient use. There is also a shift towards decentralized management and delivery of services, to reduce costs and increase the participation of water users. Women should also be involved right from formulating to implementation of such development programmes and projects for conserving the living environment of the study area. To summarize, socio-economic and political empowerment of women is needed for their overall development. They are the pivot of family, they should



get due respect and status in the main stream otherwise the development of any area in general and Sewapuri Block in the rural setting in particular will be affected negatively.

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