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Title: The Minister of Women and Child Development laid a statement on "Women Empowerment".

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Hon. Minister Shrimati Krishna Tirath will make a statement now.

...(Interruptions)

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: You please lay the statement on the Table of the House.

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF WOMEN AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT (SHRIMATI KRISHNA TIRATH): Sir, Today we are celebrating the 'International Women's Day with the theme Equal Rights, Equal Opportunities: Progress for All'. As per 2001 census, women constitute 48% of the total population. Women as important human resource were recognized by the Constitution of India which not only accorded equality to women but also empowered the state to adopt measures of positive discrimination in their favour. Drawing upon the Constitution, the Govt, of India has engaged in committed and continuous endeavours towards ensuring all-round well being, development and empowerment of women. One of the six basic principles of the governance laid down in the National Common Minimum Programme (NCMP) is to empower women politically, educationally, economically and legally. Upgradation of Department of Women and Child Development to a Ministry under the independent charge of Minister of State for Women and Child Development w.c.f. 30.1.2006 is an important milestone in that direction. In this nodal capacity, the Ministry has been trying for holistic empowerment of women by reviewing the laws to removal of gender bias, bringing new legal measures aiming on gender justice and implementation of programmes to achieve social and economic empowerment of women.

overty is one of the most stubborn of human afflictions and amongst the poor, the women are the worst sufferers. The Ministry of Women & Child Development until recently, i.e., 31.3.2008 was running the 'Swayam Siddha Programme' which aimed at holistic empowerment of women through the medium of Self Help Groups (SHGs). Under the Scheme, 69,774 SHGs were formed with 10.02 lakh beneficiaries in 650 blocks. On the basis of the result of the evaluation of the programme and the lessons learnt in its implementation, the Ministry proposes to expand the coverage of the Scheme.

As the majority of the women work force is employed in informal sector, there was a felt need for a scheme which would ensure income generation, welfare, support services, training, upgradation of skills etc. As a measure to ensure wellbeing women in the informal sector with emphasis on improving employment opportunities for women, a Scheme "Support to Training and Employment Programme (STEP)" was launched in VII Plan which is being implemented successfully.

Women in 1993, as an apex funding organisation exclusively for *the* socio-economic development of women. So far the RMK has disbursed Rs.236.50 crore to 66,867 SHGs benefiting 6,68,650 women. Impact studies conducted on RMK beneficiaries have revealed major improvement in the standard of living. It has also been reported that now more girl children are being sent to schools and that the drop-out rates have been reduced. There is improvement in literacy among women beneficiaries. The beneficiaries have been found to have improved in confidence in running enterprises, confidence in going alone for work, a pattern of shifting from farm labour to live-stock maintenance, piece rate work, greater control over income and family decision making. There is also reduction in domestic violence. It therefore, shows that the micro-finance programme of RMK for the socio-economic upliftment of poor women through the SHGs is the most successful one in India. Considering rapid growth in Credit-linked women SHGs, the RMK is being strengthened by-enhancing its authorised capital.

The Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) besides implementing a number of programmes for development and empowerment of women, implements Awareness Generation Programme (AGP) which is aimed at generating awareness amongst women community at large on Rights, Status and Problems of women in particular and other social concerns. The programme enables women to organise themselves and strengthen their participation in socio-economic and political process.

The Government is committed to launch a National Mission on Socio-economic Empowerment of women under which various women-centric and women related programmes of the Government will be implemented in a holistic manner. The

focus would be on empowerment of women with a view to empower them socially, economically, and educationally. The Mission would be endeavouring to achieve empowerment of women on all these fronts by securing convergence of schemes/programmes of different Ministries/Departments The Government also proposes to appoint a High Level Committee to study socio-economic status of women and. findings of the committee would guide the Government about the interventions required for holistic empowerment of Indian women.

With these efforts, we are confident that there will be perceivable improvement in the socio-economic status of Indian women and gender discrimination will be a thing of past in the Indian society.

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