

Development of Women and Children

10.25 Women and children, who represent 67.7 per cent of the country's total population, constitute the most important target groups in the present day context of developmental planning. It is urgently felt that women be empowered economically and socially to become a strong and vigorous force in the development of the country. To empower the women, efforts are being made i) to finalise the draft National Policy for Empowerment of Women ii) to legislate reservation of not less than 1/3 seats for women in the Lok Sabha and in the State Legislative Assemblies so as to ensure adequate representation of women in decision making iii) to adopt an integrated approach towards empowering women through effective convergence of existing services, financial and human resources, and infrastructure in both women-specific and women-related sectors; iv) to adopt a special strategy of Women's Component Plan to ensure funds flow to women from other relevant sectors; and v) to organize women into self-help groups. A task Force on Women and Children has been constituted to review the existing legislation and the Government schemes for improving the asset base of women to improve their social status.

10.26 The Women's Component Plan (WCP) introduced as a major strategy for the first time during the Ninth Five-Year Plan (1997-2002) was reviewed in August, 2000. It took note of funds having been made available by a number of Ministries/Departments such as Health and Family Welfare, H.R.D., Labour, Agriculture, Rural Development, Social Justice and Empowerment, Tribal Affairs, etc. to benefit women. Some states such as Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka and Kerala had also earmarked funds under WCP.

10.27 The Indira Mahila Yojana (IMY) has been recast to include the component of training for capacity building and income generation activities through a tie up with Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK) for credit services. By the end of Ninth Five Year Plan, IMY will be extended to a total 650 blocks as against the existing 238 blocks.

10.28 The Rural Women's Development and Empowerment Project (RWDEP) renamed as Swa-Shakti is yet another government

intervention put to test in Tamil Nadu and found to be successful in empowering women through awareness, participation and income generation. The same is being replicated in the States of Bihar, Haryana, Gujarat, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh with the assistance from IDA and IFAD. The Women's Development Corporations and the NGOs in these States are actively associated in implementation of the programme.

10.29 Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK) was created in 1993 to meet the micro credit needs of poor and asset-less women in the informal sector. From its inception a total credit of Rs. 77.36 crore was sanctioned to benefit 350,000 women. RMK has been maintaining a remarkable recovery rate of 90 per cent to 95 per cent. It has expanded its institutional base at the grass-roots level through Self-Help Groups for expanding its credit services. In this process, it also started developing linkages with the existing women's Groups of IMY and DWCRA. RMK would need enhanced financial support from the government for expansion of these activities.

10.30 For children, the most notable programme is the Integrated Child Development Service Programme (ICDS). Health, nutrition and pre-school education are the basic parameters of this programme. Around 26.5 million pre-school children below 6 years and 5.6 million expectant and nursing mothers are being benefited under this programme. The programme is being expanded to cover another 851 Blocks from the existing 4200 Blocks by the end of the Ninth Plan. Of these, the World Bank funds 461 Projects.

10.31 Balika Samridhi Yojana (BSY) is another national level programme launched in 1997 to improve the status of the Girl Child belonging to the Below Poverty Line (BPL) Groups. Based on the recommendations of the Group of Ministers, BSY was re-cast in 1999 to extend – i) a post delivery grant of Rs.500/-, and ii) annual scholarships ranging from Rs.300/- to Rs.1000/- between class I-X. These amounts, at the option of the guardian of the girl child, can also be deposited either in the Post Office or in the Bank in an interest bearing account in the name of the girl child and is to be paid to the girl child in lump-sum on attaining the age of 18 years.