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## UNIT 4 WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY

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### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

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Empowerment of women is essential for the development of the family, society and the nation. Empowerment means giving power to women so that they can take control of their own lives. This is required because women are in a more disadvantageous position as compared to men in different spheres such as economic, socio-cultural and political spheres. Women's empowerment is seen as an important process in reaching gender equality. According to the UN Population Fund, an empowered woman has a sense of self-worth. She can determine her own choices, and has access to opportunities and resources providing her with an array of options she can pursue. She has control over her own life, both within and outside the home and she has the ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, both nationally and internationally. Economic empowerment of women will sustain the family income and raise the per capita income and quality of life of the family. Social empowerment will enable them to take care of the health and education of their children and that of the society. The political empowerment will enable them to share in the decision making process at the grassroots level. This unit deals with women empowerment and sustainability.

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- Explain the meaning and components of women empowerment
- Explain how to empower women?
- Describe women empowerment and sustainability.
- Discuss national policy on empowerment of women.

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### 4.2 WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT: MEANING AND CONCEPTS

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Women empowerment is a buzz word in recent years aimed at promoting the participation of women in all spheres of development. Before

defining women empowerment, it is important to define empowerment. Empowerment is defined as a “multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. It is a process that fosters power 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). In the same way, women’s empowerment refers to women’s ability to make strategic life choices where that ability had been previously denied them (Malhotra et al., 2009). Women empowerment is a process by which women gain power and control over their own lives and to take part in decision making and make choices. One of the definitions of women empowerment is “Women’s empowerment is, basically, giving power to women in a space of society where they didn’t have it. It is a process of making them part of the decision process in a certain area where they didn’t have it.” Sustainable Development Goal 5, “to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls,”.

Women’s empowerment has five components:

- (i) women’s sense of self-worth
- (ii) Their right to have and to determine choices
- (iii) Their right to have access to opportunities and resources:
- (iv) Their right to have power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home:
- (v) Their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally.

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### **4.3 HOW TO EMPOWER WOMEN?**

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It is important that women are needed to be effectively empowered for the sustainable development of the family, society and nation. Women’s equal participation in various spheres of public life is sine qua non for the removal of gender disparities. Some of the measures to be taken for empowerment of women are:

1. Establishing mechanisms for women’s equal participation and equitable representation at all levels.
2. Women must be given freedom to express their concerns and needs in various forums both in social and political.
3. There is a need for promotion of women’s potential through education and skill development.
4. Women economic empowerment through work force participation and employment for the reduction of household poverty and inequality.
5. The health status of women needs to be improved and they must be empowered to make decisions about their reproductive health and family size.
6. Eliminating all practices that discriminate against women and assisting women to establish and realize their rights.
7. Adopting appropriate measures to improve women’s ability to earn income beyond traditional occupations,

- achieve economic self-reliance, and ensure women's equal access to the labour market and social security systems;
- (e) Eliminating violence against women and atrocities on women.
8. The social empowerment of women can be promoted through the formulation of women groups at the grassroots level. The SHG is one of the illustrious examples.
  9. Eliminating discriminatory practices by employers against women. Moreover, protective discrimination measures like reservation of seats for women in the local self government institution is an illustrious example in India.
  10. Preparing gender sensitive laws, regulations and other appropriate measures.
  11. Preparing gender budgeting for women's empowerment.
  12. Changing societal attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women.
  13. Building and strengthening partnerships with civil society, particularly women's organizations.

In this section, you studied about the women's empowerment - meaning and concepts and how to empower women. Now, answer the question given in check your progress1.

#### Check Your Progress 1

- Note:**a) Write your answer in about 50 words.  
b) Check your answer with possible answers given at the end of the unit

1. What is women empowerment?

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2. Explain various components of women empowerment.

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## 4.4 WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY

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The 17 SDGs as declared by the United Nations and in a few goals women would play a very important role. These are as follows:

1. **No Poverty:** Women would play an important role in the reduction of household poverty. The increased workforce participation of women would raise their income and be helpful to raise the per capita family income. Enhanced income of the poverty stricken household would reduce household poverty. The UN Women has rightly envisaged that the end of poverty can only be achieved with the end of gender-based discrimination. All over the world, gender inequality makes and

keeps women poor, depriving them of basic rights and opportunities for well-being.

2. **Zero Hunger:** Women empowerment and hunger are interrelated. It is not a flight of fancy but truly, women prepare up to 90 per cent of meals in households around the world. However, in many impoverished households during difficult situations they are the first to eat less and sacrifice food for other household members. In poor households, women can be less likely to get the nutrients they need. It creates nutritional anemia among the women in general and among pregnant and lactating women in particular. The UN women has rightly envisaged that ending hunger means that all women can consume enough food with adequate nutrients.
3. **Good Health and Well Being:** It is well said that a healthy mother is essential for a healthy family. Women are custodian of the health of children and elderly in the family. Women's right to health care in general and reproductive health care in particular is essential for the better health care of women. Women take care of the wellbeing of the family members. In other words, the well-being of the family depends on the wellbeing of women. The UN women has urged that fulfilling the right to health requires health systems to become fully responsive to women and girls, offering higher quality, more comprehensive and readily accessible services.
4. **Quality Education:** Education is one of the vital instruments for the empowerment of women. It is well said that if you educate a man you are educating an individual and if you educate a woman then you are educating a family, society and nation. Education can bring women away from darkness and will be able to make them knowledgeable to transform the society. Imparting quality education to women is a duty of the nation states. The UN Women intends to promote education among women, a core prerequisite for gender equality and women's rights. This could be done through the revision of school curricula and policies to counteract gender discrimination, improving access to information technologies, and training for teachers, students and parents.
5. **Gender Equality:** Gender equality in all spheres such as economic, social, political, etc. is required for the sustainable development of the society. They are needed to participate in the process of social networking at the grassroots level. Their political participation in bureaucracy will promote their decision making power. Their economic empowerment by promoting workforce participation with the motto of equal pay for equal work for both men and women is sine qua non to empower women.
6. **Clean Water and Sanitation:** Access to clean water and sanitation by women would reduce girl child anemia and morbidity. It will also improve the health status of women. Water borne diseases are widespread among women which is one of the vital factors for the deteriorating condition of women's health. Women and adult girls waste a lot of time in collecting water. The measures to improve easy

access to safe drinking water will enable women to have more time to earn an income, girls getting more likely to attend school, and family health and hygiene getting improved.

7. **Affordable and Clean Energy:** Women's access to affordable and clean energy would reduce morbidities like asthma and tuberculosis among the women in general and rural women in particular. It will also be helpful to save a lot of time for women who in rural areas spend a lot of time collecting firewood for cooking. It is said that women are the primary energy manager. The UN Women has noted that women are more likely than men to conserve energy—using up to 22 per cent less.
8. **Decent Work and Economic Growth:** Women are needed to be provided with decent work for the sustainability of their family income. According to ILO, decent work involves opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men. The decent work emphasizes on gender equity at the work place. The UN women's emphasis includes advocating for legislation on equal pay for equal work, better access to employment opportunities, safety from sexual harassment in the workplace, and other critical rights.
9. **Reduced Inequalities:** Women are discriminated and are less empowered in social, economic and political spheres. The gender stereotyped has prevented women from equal participation in all spheres of development. The inequalities against women needed to be reduced and women must be brought to the mainstream of development. The UN women has emphasized on eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices or promoting appropriate legislations, policies and actions for the promotion of gender equality.
10. **Responsible Consumption and Production:** Women, because of gender stereotypes are lacking in the right to land and entrepreneurship. Less number of women have the right to land which influences productivity. Moreover, women are also shy to consume less and in the last and mostly involved in serving all the family members. Thus both from the point of view of consumption and production, women are in a disadvantageous position. The UN women has emphasized that women in consumption and production must have equal access to means such as land and technology that can boost their standard of living.
11. **Climate Change:** Women are more vulnerable to the impact of climate change in their life. Women play a vital role in the management of natural resources. It is noted that women constitute 65 percent of the agricultural workforce and are responsible for 75 percent of water-related chores. The 4th Session of the UN Environment Assembly in Nairobi in March 2019, attended by all 193 UN Member states,



emphasized on the greater engagement of women in climate action planning and monitoring of their impact. A resolution adopted at this Assembly not only acknowledged the disproportionate burden of climate change on women and girls but also emphasized the “power of their knowledge and collective action”, the need to encourage women’s participation and leadership in environmental-decision making--from the local to the international levels--and “to support training and capacity building efforts on gender mainstreaming and to ensure meaningful participation in global processes”.

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## 4.5 POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES FOR EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN INDIA

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Some of the important policy initiatives taken by the government of India are discussed below:

### 1. **Women Rights Related Provisions in the Indian Constitution:** The Fundamental rights and directive principles of state policy have emphasized on women rights. Those are discussed below:

The Fundamental Rights dealing with the women rights are as follows:

- (i) Article 14 ensures to women the right to equality.
- (ii) Article 15(1) specifically prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex.
- (iii) Article 15(3) empowers the State to take affirmative actions in favour of women.

Article 16 provides for equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office.

The Directive Principles of State Policy giving emphasis to women rights are as follows:

- (i) Article 39 (a) provides that the state direct its policy towards securing for men and women equally the right to an adequate means of livelihood.
- (ii) Article 39 (d) mandates equal pay for equal work for both men and women.
- (iii) Article 42 provides that the state make provision for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief.

### 2. **National Plan and Women Empowerment:** The Sixth Plan (1980-85) acknowledged women’s development as a distinct economic issue. While the Seventh Plan (1985-90) tried to bring women into the center of national development emphasizing on equity and empowerment of women, the Women’s Component Plan was outlined this time by designing a system to recognize and monitor schemes that benefited women directly (Das and Mishra 2006: 25). The Eighth Plan (1992- 97) stressed on the shift from development to empowerment. In the sectors of education, health and employment there was a focus on women. The Ninth Plan (1997-2002) focused on attaining empowerment of women by measures for converging of the ongoing services in both women-specific and women related

sectors. The Centre and the States followed the approach of Women's Component Plan (WCP) to ensure that at least 30 percent of funds/benefits from all development sectors reach women (Chattopadhyay 2006: 30; Jain 2007). The Tenth Plan (2002-2007) consists of definite strategies, policies and programmes for empowering women as agents of social change. The National Policy on Empowerment of Women 2001 shaped the Tenth Plan. This plan has a sector-related three-fold strategy- social empowerment, economic empowerment and gender justice (Chattopadhyay 2006: 30; Jain 2007: 75).

3. **The National Perspective Plan for Women 1988-2000:** emphasized on the economic development and integration of women into the mainstream economy. It also stressed on equity and social justice for all women. The plan suggested measures required in the fields of agriculture, employment and training, education, health and family welfare so that gender inequality would be reduced and women could reach a level comparable to men by 2000. It also stressed on the role of Media and Communication which can play an important role in changing attitudes of the society towards women. It emphasized on the role of voluntary action and civil society organizations to improve the status of women, particularly in rural areas.
4. **The National Policy for Empowerment of Women 2001:** The goal of this Policy is to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women. A few important objectives delineated in the policy are: (i) Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential; (ii) Equal access to participation and decision making of women in social, political and economic life of the nation; (iii) Equal access to women to health care, quality education at all levels, career and vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security and public office etc.; (iv) Changing societal attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women; (v) Mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process; and (vi) Elimination of discrimination of all forms of violence against women and the girl child.
5. **Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas(DWCRA):** The DWCRA programme was launched in 1982. The objective of the programme was to provide self employment opportunities to women below poverty line families in rural areas.
6. **Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP):** This Programme was launched in 1987 to provide updated skills and new knowledge to poor and asset-less women in the traditional sectors such as agriculture, animal husbandry, dairying, fisheries, handlooms, handicrafts, khadi and village industries, sericulture, social forestry and wasteland development for enhancing their productivity and income generation. This would enhance and broaden their employment opportunities.

7. **Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Programme:** The MCH programme was launched in 1996. The aim of this programme was to promote health care for mothers and children. The services provided under this programme are immunization of mother and children, institutional delivery, information and communication in maternal and child health care, and family planning.
8. **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA):** The MGNREGA was launched in the year 2005. The aim of MGNREGA was to provide minimum 100 days minimum guaranteed wage employment to one unemployed adult member of each rural household. Under this programme 33 percent reservation has been made for women.

In this section, you studied about women empowerment and sustainability and policies and programmes for empowerment of women in India. Now, answer the question given in check your progress 2.

### Check Your Progress 2

- a) Write your answer in about 50 words.
- b) Check your answer with possible answers given at the end of the unit
  1. Explain how women empowerment is related to poverty reduction.  
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  2. Discuss various constitutional measures undertaken for the empowerment of women in India.  
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## 4.6 LET US SUM UP

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Empowerment of women is essential for the wellbeing of the family and development of the society and nation. The sustainable development of the family in terms of reduction of poverty, inequality, and improvement of education and health care for women empowerment is vital. The governments of both developed and developing countries have introduced several measures to improve the status of women in the society. The UN women has emphasized on the empowerment of women. The government of India has introduced many constitutional measures and launched policies and programmes for the empowerment of women. This unit deals in women empowerment and sustainability.

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## 4.7 REFERENCES AND SELECTED READINGS

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empowerment

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## 4.8 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS- POSSIBLE ANSWERS

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### Check Your Progress 1

1. What is women empowerment?

**Answer:** Women empowerment is a process by which women gain power and control over their own lives and to take part in decision making and make choices. One of the definitions of women empowerment is “Women’s empowerment is, basically, giving power to women in the space of society where they didn’t have it. It is a process of making them part of the decision making process in a certain area where they didn’t have it.”

2. Explain various components of women empowerment.

**Answer:** Women’s empowerment has five components:

- (i) Women’s sense of self-worth
- (ii) Their right to have and to determine choices
- (iii) Their right to have access to opportunities and resources:
- (iv) Their right to have power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home:
- (v) Their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally.

## Check Your Progress 2

1. Explain how women empowerment is related to poverty reduction.

**Answer:** Women would play an important role in the reduction of household poverty. The increased workforce participation of women would raise their income and be helpful to raise the per capita family income. Enhanced income of the poverty stricken household would reduce household poverty.

2. Discuss various constitutional measures undertaken for the empowerment of women in India.

**Answer:** The Fundamental rights and directive principles of state policy have emphasized women's rights. These are discussed below:

The Fundamental Rights dealing with the women rights are as follows:

- (i) Article 14 ensures to women the right to equality.
- (ii) Article 15(1) specifically prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex.

The Directive Principles of State Policy giving emphasis to women rights are as follows:

- (i) Article 39 (a) provides that the state direct its policy towards securing for men and women equally the right to an adequate means of livelihood.
- (i) Article 39 (d) mandates equal pay for equal work for both men and women.

