



**INDIA**  
**भारत**

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STATEMENT  
BY  
SMT NEELA GANGADHARAN  
SECRETARY TO GOVERNMENT OF INDIA  
MINISTRY OF WOMEN AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND  
LEADER OF INDIAN DELEGATION  
ON  
EMPOWERMENT OF RURAL WOMEN  
AT  
THE 56<sup>TH</sup> SESSION OF  
COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

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Madam Chair & Distinguished Delegates,

I would like to convey our warmest felicitations to the Chairperson and other members of the Bureau on their election and to assure of our full cooperation in the work of this Commission.

Madam Chair,

2. India signed the UN Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women in 1980. We are meticulously pursuing the Millennium Development Goals and implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. Our efforts and empowerment of rural women is multipronged and driven through a combination of legislative measures, policies and programmes implemented through a variety of agencies belonging to Government and civil society.

3. Let me put in context the situation of rural women in my country. As per our latest census conducted in 2011, an estimated 405 million women lived in rural areas, constituting 69 percent of total women population of the country. Contribution of rural women to our GDP growth and their central role in poverty reduction has been a key guiding factor in framing our policies. A staggering 81% of rural women workers are engaged in agriculture as labourers and cultivators.

Madam Chair,

4. To address the urban rural divide in income and opportunities, Government's focus is on expansion of income opportunities in the farm sector and a progressive absorption of rural women into non-farm activity to reduce feminization of rural poverty. Expansion of non-farm income opportunities in rural areas is primarily related to farm activity. Therefore, higher investment in agriculture works for the benefit of rural women. Economic development and growth have also opened up opportunities for women to explore non traditional skill centred vocations in rural areas.

5. Emphasising the importance of women's economic empowerment, the National Agriculture Policy has incorporated gender issues in the agriculture development agenda. The policy accords a high priority to the recognition and mainstreaming of women's role in agriculture. A National Gender Resource Centre in Agriculture has been set up to promote gender concerns. A scheme of Promotion and Strengthening of Agricultural Mechanization for Women aims at reducing drudgery of women farmers.

6. India has a vibrant women's Self Help Group movement. The approach of the Government has been to encourage organization of SHGs and to channelise resources to these groups. There are around 6 million SHGs of which 80% are women's groups, covering over 97 million beneficiaries. Women's Self Help Groups are an important vehicle for economic empowerment.

7. To facilitate women's access to financial resources and services, public sector banks have been advised to earmark 5% of their net bank credit for lending to

women. About 24 million poor households have gained access to formal banking system through Self Help Groups-bank linkage programme and 90% of these groups are women only groups. A National Credit Fund for Women set up in 1993 also meets the credit needs of asset-less and poor women especially in the rural areas and unorganised sectors.

Madam Chair,

8. Wage employment is the focus of our flagship scheme, launched under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act in 2005. This is a gender sensitive nationwide employment scheme. So far, almost 50% of employment provided under the scheme has gone in favour of rural women. The scheme is sensitive to working conditions of women workers. It has created "green jobs"- as nearly 70% of works relate to water and land conservation, drought proofing etc., which are predominantly executed by women.

9. Another important initiative is the National Rural Livelihood Mission under which about 60% of beneficiaries are women.

10. Recognising that ownership of assets is essential for sustaining economic empowerment of women, the flagship scheme of Indira Awas Yojana provides houses in the name of the female member of the household.

Madam Chair,

11. Food security for citizens of the country has been engaging the attention of the Government of India. Government have introduced the National Food Security Bill in the Parliament in December 2011. It seeks to confer a legal right to cheaper food grains to 63.5 per cent of the country's population. The Bill has a unique feature on women empowerment mandating that only a woman can be treated as head of household for the purpose of issue of food entitlement document to get benefits of cheaper food grains.

12. Our focus has been on inclusive growth and access to opportunities. Skill development and skill up-gradation of rural and marginalized women are priorities for us. A National Skill Development Council with our Prime Minister as the Chair has been set up. Skills training in emerging sectors and entrepreneurship development programmes are being run not only for rural women but also for adolescent girls.

Madam Chair,

13. I would now, like to talk about some of the measures for political empowerment of rural women. The concept of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution. Our Constitution has been amended to bring in one-third reservation for women in the 3rd level of democratic institutions (*Panchayats* in rural areas and local bodies in urban areas). More than one million elected rural women leaders at grass-roots levels of governance of our country bear testimony to a large-scale mobilization, perhaps, unprecedented in the world. Several State Governments

have amended their respective laws providing 50% reservation in Panchayats for rural women.

14. Towards improving access to entitlements and effective service delivery the historic Right to Information Act was passed in 2005. This also had an empowering effect on rural women by improving grassroots governance and service delivery.

Madam Chair,

15. India is witnessing high rate of growth of urbanization and concomitant challenges in the rural-urban continuum. Migration and related issues of vulnerability of the poor migrants in the urban setting especially of women are recognised. Trafficking is an issue which is addressed through a three-pronged strategy, covering prevention, rescue and rehabilitation through legislative measures and programmes. Several measures have been taken to address violence against women. This includes enactment of a special law. To provide women a safe and secure environment at work place the Government have introduced in the Parliament, the 'Protection of Women against Sexual Harassment at Workplace Bill-2010' covering both organized and unorganized sectors of rural and urban areas.

Madam Chair,

16. Education is a fundamental tool for empowerment. Government have strengthened various programmes female literacy and education. Between 1999-2000 and 2007-08, female literacy rates in rural areas have increased from about 34% to about 50%. In 2010, Government have enacted the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act making education a fundamental right.

17. Another area in which Government has overcome many challenges is in the Health Sector. The flagship National Rural Health Mission has a synergistic approach by relating health to determinants of good health that significantly impact women. Large investments in health sector have lead to drop in IMR, MMR and TFR. India has been declared Polio free by WHO. The number of newly detected HIV positive cases has dropped by over 50% in the last decade.

18. Nutrition is a challenge before us. Our Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme represents one of the world's largest and unique programmes for early childhood care development covering pregnant and lactating women also. Provision of supplementary nutrition is a major focus. Convergence with national rural health mission and total sanitation campaign is an ongoing effort for achieving nutrition security.

Madam Chair,

19. Government of India have, as a Policy, adopted Gender Budgeting as a tool for mainstreaming gender. Through this, Government aim to ensure the translation of Government's policy on gender equity into budgetary allocations. We have also recently launched the National Mission for Empowerment of Women which will work

towards the convergence of policies and programmes with a focus on rural and marginalized women.

20. The National Commission for Women, a statutory body established under an Act of the Parliament has the mandate to safeguard women's legal and constitutional rights.

21. Holistic empowerment of rural women is sought to be achieved taking into account convergence of their social, economic and political identities. With increasing right based approach in policies and programmes implemented by Government and with democratic decentralization deepening further we are confident that meeting the goals of holistic empowerment of rural women will accelerate substantially.

Madam Chair,

22. India stands ready to work with the international community for the empowerment of rural women for inclusive and sustainable growth and for engaging young women and men, girls and boys, to advance gender equality and women's empowerment both within and outside UN.