

Government Schemes and Women's Empowerment in Andhra Pradesh: An Assessment

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ABSTRACT

Women's empowerment is a fundamental prerequisite for inclusive development and democratic governance. Over the past few decades, the Government of Andhra Pradesh has implemented several welfare and development schemes aimed at enhancing the socio-economic, educational, political, and health status of women. These initiatives seek to improve women's access to financial resources, education, healthcare, entrepreneurship, and decision-making opportunities. This paper critically assesses the effectiveness of major government schemes in promoting women's empowerment in Andhra Pradesh. The study relies on secondary data collected from government reports, policy documents, census data, National Family Health Survey (NFHS), and published research. The findings indicate that while government interventions have significantly improved financial inclusion, maternal health, education, and participation in Self-Help Groups (SHGs), persistent challenges such as gender discrimination, wage inequality, low workforce participation, and limited political leadership continue to hinder comprehensive empowerment. The study concludes by suggesting policy reforms for strengthening women's empowerment through better implementation, digital inclusion, skill development, and institutional support.

Keywords: Women Empowerment, Government Schemes, Andhra Pradesh, Self-Help Groups, Gender Equality, Welfare Policies.

INTRODUCTION

Women's empowerment has emerged as one of the foremost objectives of sustainable development, social justice, and democratic governance across the globe. It refers to the process of enhancing women's ability to make informed choices, exercise their rights, access opportunities, and participate equally in economic, social, political, and cultural spheres. Empowerment encompasses multiple dimensions, including education, health, economic independence, political participation, legal awareness, and decision-making authority. Recognizing its significance, the United Nations incorporated Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (Sustainable Development Goal 5) as a key component of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, emphasizing that the empowerment of women and girls is essential for achieving inclusive and sustainable development.

In India, women have historically faced structural inequalities arising from patriarchal social norms, gender discrimination, unequal access to education and healthcare, limited employment opportunities, wage disparities, and restricted ownership of productive assets. Although the Constitution of India guarantees equality before the law through Articles 14, 15, and 16 and directs the State to promote gender justice under the Directive Principles of State Policy, achieving substantive equality remains a major developmental challenge. To address these disparities, both the Central Government and State Governments have introduced a wide range of welfare programmes and policy initiatives aimed at improving the socio-economic status of women and ensuring their active participation in national development.

The Government of India has launched several flagship schemes to promote women's empowerment across different sectors. Programmes such as Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) seek to improve the child sex ratio and encourage girls' education, while the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) provides maternity benefits to improve maternal and child health. The Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) has significantly enhanced women's health and dignity by providing clean cooking fuel to poor households. Similarly, the Sukanya Samridhi Yojana (SSY) promotes financial security and educational opportunities for the girl child through long-term savings, and the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) strengthens women's Self-Help Groups by enhancing financial inclusion, livelihood opportunities, and entrepreneurship. Other initiatives, including the One Stop Centre Scheme, Mahila Shakti Kendra, Mission Shakti, Stand-Up India, and MUDRA Yojana, have further contributed to women's safety, skill development, enterprise creation, and access to institutional finance.

Complementing these national initiatives, Andhra Pradesh has emerged as one of the leading states in implementing women-centric welfare and development programmes. The state has adopted a comprehensive approach that combines social protection, financial inclusion, education, healthcare, entrepreneurship, and community participation. The success of the Self-Help Group (SHG) movement under the Society for Elimination of Rural

Poverty (SERP) has empowered millions of rural women by promoting savings, credit access, and livelihood opportunities. In addition, flagship state schemes such as YSR Cheyutha, YSR Aasara, Amma Vodi, YSR Sampoorna Poshana, YSR Kalyanamasthu, Shaadi Tohfa, and various skill development and women safety initiatives have strengthened women's economic independence, educational attainment, nutritional security, and social welfare. These schemes have also enhanced women's participation in local governance and community development through financial assistance and capacity-building measures.

Government welfare schemes have become vital instruments for reducing gender inequalities and promoting inclusive development. Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) mechanisms, digital governance, and community-based institutions have improved transparency and expanded access to welfare benefits. Despite these achievements, significant challenges remain, including low female labour force participation, gender wage gaps, limited ownership of productive assets, digital exclusion, inadequate market access, and persistent socio-cultural barriers that constrain women's full empowerment. Therefore, assessing the effectiveness of these schemes is essential to understand their contribution to women's socio-economic transformation and to identify areas requiring policy intervention.

Against this backdrop, the present study critically examines the major women-centric schemes implemented by both the Government of India and the Government of Andhra Pradesh and evaluates their contribution to women's empowerment in the state. The study assesses their impact on economic independence, education, health, financial inclusion, entrepreneurship, and political participation while identifying implementation challenges and suggesting policy measures to strengthen gender-responsive governance. The findings are expected to contribute to the ongoing discourse on women's empowerment and provide valuable insights for policymakers, researchers, and development practitioners seeking to promote inclusive and equitable development in Andhra Pradesh.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study aims to:

- Examine major government schemes for women's empowerment in Andhra Pradesh.
- Assess their socio-economic impact on women beneficiaries.
- Evaluate improvements in education, health, livelihood, and financial inclusion.
- Identify implementation challenges.
- Suggest policy measures for enhancing women's empowerment.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design to assess the role of government schemes in promoting women's empowerment in Andhra Pradesh. The research is based exclusively on secondary data, making it suitable for examining the implementation, outcomes, and policy implications of women-centric welfare programmes. Secondary data were collected from authentic and reliable sources, including reports published by the Government of Andhra Pradesh, the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India, the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), the Census of India, NABARD, and the Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty (SERP), Andhra Pradesh. Additional information was obtained from government policy documents, annual reports, books, peer-reviewed journals, and published research studies. The collected data were systematically reviewed, classified, and analyzed using qualitative methods supported by relevant statistical information. The analysis focuses on evaluating the impact of government schemes on the economic, educational, health, social, and political dimensions of women's empowerment in Andhra Pradesh.

Concept of Women's Empowerment

Women's empowerment is a multidimensional process that enables women to gain control over their lives by expanding their capabilities, opportunities, and access to resources. It involves enhancing women's ability to make strategic life choices, exercise their rights, and participate equally in social, economic, political, and cultural spheres. Empowerment is not merely the provision of welfare or financial assistance; rather, it is a transformative process that challenges existing gender inequalities and enables women to become active agents of change in their families, communities, and society.

The concept of women's empowerment gained global prominence through international initiatives such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1979), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 5, which seeks to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. According to the United Nations, women's empowerment refers to expanding women's ability to participate fully in economic, political, and social life by ensuring equal access to education, healthcare, employment, leadership opportunities, and decision-making processes. It also emphasizes eliminating discrimination and violence against women while promoting equal rights and opportunities.

Women's empowerment encompasses several interrelated dimensions. Educational empowerment ensures that women have equal access to quality education, literacy, vocational training, and digital skills, enabling them to improve their knowledge and employment prospects. Economic empowerment focuses on providing women with opportunities for productive employment, entrepreneurship, financial literacy, equal wages, access to credit, property

ownership, and control over financial resources. Health empowerment ensures access to quality healthcare services, maternal care, nutrition, reproductive health, and sanitation, thereby improving women's overall well-being and life expectancy.

Another important dimension is political empowerment, which involves increasing women's participation in democratic institutions, electoral politics, local governance, and decision-making bodies. Constitutional provisions such as reservations for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions have significantly enhanced women's political representation in India. Social empowerment seeks to eliminate discrimination based on gender, caste, religion, and socio-economic status while promoting dignity, safety, legal awareness, and freedom from violence. It also encourages women's active participation in community organizations and civil society institutions.

Women's empowerment is closely linked to access to financial resources, property ownership, and decision-making authority within households and public institutions. Empowered women are better equipped to make decisions regarding education, healthcare, family welfare, livelihood, and investment, thereby contributing to improved household well-being and national development. Studies have consistently shown that empowering women leads to higher economic productivity, reduced poverty, improved child health and education, and stronger democratic governance.

In the context of Andhra Pradesh, women's empowerment has been strengthened through a combination of government welfare schemes, Self-Help Group (SHG) movements, financial inclusion initiatives, educational support programmes, and health interventions. These measures have enhanced women's participation in economic activities and community development. However, achieving comprehensive empowerment requires addressing persistent challenges such as gender discrimination, wage inequality, limited workforce participation, unequal ownership of productive assets, and socio-cultural barriers. Therefore, women's empowerment should be viewed as a continuous and holistic process that combines legal protection, social transformation, economic opportunities, and institutional support to achieve genuine gender equality and inclusive development.

Government Schemes for Women's Empowerment in Andhra Pradesh

Women's empowerment in Andhra Pradesh has been significantly influenced by a combination of welfare and development initiatives implemented by both the Government of India and the Government of Andhra Pradesh. These schemes aim to improve women's socio-economic conditions by enhancing access to education, healthcare, financial assistance, entrepreneurship, social security, skill development, and political participation. By adopting a gender-responsive approach, both governments have sought to reduce inequalities, promote financial independence, and create an enabling environment for women to participate actively in the development process.

At the national level, the Government of India has introduced several flagship programmes that directly contribute to women's empowerment. The Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) programme was launched to address the declining child sex ratio, promote the education of girls, and challenge gender-based discrimination. The scheme has created awareness about the importance of educating the girl child and ensuring equal opportunities for girls in society. The Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) provides financial assistance to pregnant and lactating women, encouraging institutional healthcare and improving maternal and child nutrition. Similarly, the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) has transformed the lives of millions of women by providing free LPG connections to economically weaker households, thereby reducing indoor air pollution, improving health outcomes, and saving time previously spent collecting firewood.

Financial inclusion has also become a major pillar of women's empowerment through schemes such as the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY), which has enabled millions of women to open bank accounts and access formal financial services. The National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) has strengthened women-led Self-Help Groups (SHGs) by providing financial assistance, skill development, and livelihood opportunities. Entrepreneurial initiatives such as Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana (PMMY) and Stand-Up India encourage women to establish micro and small enterprises by facilitating collateral-free loans and institutional credit. In addition, the Sukanya Samridhi Yojana (SSY) promotes long-term savings for the education and marriage of girl children, while the One Stop Centre Scheme, Mission Shakti, and Mahila Shakti Kendra provide integrated support services, legal assistance, counselling, and safety mechanisms for women facing violence and discrimination.

Complementing these national programmes, the Government of Andhra Pradesh has implemented several innovative women-centric welfare schemes that have made the state a model for gender-focused governance. One of the most significant initiatives is YSR Cheyutha, which provides financial assistance to women belonging to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Backward Classes, and minority communities, enabling them to undertake income-generating activities and establish small businesses. The YSR Aasara scheme relieves the financial burden of women Self-Help Groups by reimbursing outstanding loans, thereby improving their creditworthiness and encouraging economic activities. These programmes have strengthened women's financial independence and expanded opportunities for entrepreneurship.

The state has also achieved remarkable success through the Self-Help Group (SHG) movement implemented under the Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty (SERP). Andhra Pradesh is recognized as a pioneer in promoting community-based organizations that encourage savings, credit mobilization, entrepreneurship, and social participation among rural women. SHGs have empowered millions of women by improving access to institutional

finance, promoting collective decision-making, and enhancing leadership capacities. Many women have established micro-enterprises in agriculture, dairy, handicrafts, food processing, and retail businesses, contributing significantly to household incomes and rural economic development.

Education and human capital development have received considerable attention through the Amma Vodi scheme, which provides financial assistance to mothers to encourage school attendance and reduce dropout rates, particularly among girls. The programme has strengthened parental involvement in education and improved enrolment in government schools. Health and nutrition have been addressed through initiatives such as YSR Sampoorna Poshana, which provides nutritious food to pregnant women, lactating mothers, and children through Anganwadi centres, thereby improving maternal and child health outcomes. Social security programmes such as YSR Kalyanamasthu and Shaadi Tohfa provide financial support for the marriages of women from economically weaker sections, reducing financial stress on vulnerable families.

Women's safety and legal protection have also been prioritized through the establishment of Disha Police Stations, the Disha App, and fast-track courts, which aim to ensure timely justice and enhance women's confidence in the criminal justice system. In addition, skill development programmes implemented through the Andhra Pradesh State Skill Development Corporation (APSSDC) and various line departments provide vocational training, digital literacy, entrepreneurship development, and employment-oriented skills that improve women's employability in both rural and urban areas.

Together, these Central and State Government initiatives have substantially contributed to improving women's access to education, healthcare, financial services, livelihood opportunities, and social security in Andhra Pradesh. The convergence of welfare programmes, digital governance, Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT), community institutions, and capacity-building initiatives has strengthened women's participation in economic and social development. Nevertheless, challenges such as low female labour force participation, gender wage disparities, unequal ownership of productive assets, digital exclusion, and persistent socio-cultural barriers continue to affect the pace of empowerment. Therefore, sustained policy support, effective implementation, regular monitoring, and greater convergence among government departments are essential to ensure that these schemes translate into long-term and inclusive empowerment for women across Andhra Pradesh.

Achievements of Government Schemes

The implementation of women-centric welfare and development schemes by the Government of India and the Government of Andhra Pradesh has significantly contributed to improving the socio-economic status of women in the state. These initiatives have addressed multiple dimensions of empowerment, including financial inclusion, education, healthcare, entrepreneurship, political participation, and social security. By adopting an integrated approach that combines welfare assistance with capacity building and institutional support, government schemes have enabled women to become active participants in economic growth and community development.

One of the most notable achievements has been the expansion of financial inclusion among women. Schemes such as the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY), YSR Cheyutha, YSR Aasara, and the Self-Help Group (SHG) movement have encouraged women to open bank accounts, access formal banking services, and participate in digital financial transactions. The widespread adoption of Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) has ensured that financial assistance is transferred directly to beneficiaries, reducing leakages, increasing transparency, and strengthening women's control over household finances. Access to banking services has also improved women's financial literacy and encouraged regular savings.

Government programmes have also played a significant role in the expansion of women's entrepreneurship. Financial assistance, subsidized loans, skill development programmes, and institutional credit have enabled many women to establish micro and small enterprises in sectors such as agriculture, dairy farming, tailoring, food processing, handicrafts, retail trade, and service industries. The Self-Help Group movement, supported by the Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty (SERP) and the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM), has created opportunities for women to undertake income-generating activities collectively, thereby enhancing household incomes and promoting rural economic development.

Another major achievement is the improvement in maternal and child health. Schemes such as the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY), YSR Sampoorna Poshana, Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), and other health initiatives have improved access to antenatal care, institutional deliveries, immunization, nutritional support, and healthcare services. These interventions have contributed to better maternal health, reduced nutritional deficiencies among women and children, and improved child development indicators. Increased awareness regarding reproductive health and nutrition has further strengthened family well-being.

Government interventions have also produced positive educational outcomes, particularly for girls. Programmes such as Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP), Amma Vodi, scholarships, and free educational support have increased school enrolment, reduced dropout rates, and encouraged parents to continue the education of girl children. Improved educational attainment has enhanced women's knowledge, confidence, employability, and participation in social and economic activities. The growing emphasis on digital education and skill development has further prepared young women for emerging employment opportunities.

The strengthening of the Self-Help Group (SHG) movement represents one of Andhra Pradesh's most significant

achievements in women's empowerment. Millions of rural women have been organized into SHGs, enabling them to mobilize savings, access affordable credit, participate in collective decision-making, and undertake entrepreneurial activities. SHGs have evolved beyond financial institutions into community organizations that promote leadership, social awareness, health education, and local development initiatives. They have significantly enhanced women's bargaining power within households and communities.

Another important outcome has been greater access to institutional credit. Through bank linkage programmes, microfinance initiatives, and government-supported credit schemes, women have gained easier access to loans for agriculture, business development, self-employment, and livelihood diversification. Institutional credit has reduced dependence on informal moneylenders and enabled women to invest in productive economic activities, thereby improving their financial security and long-term economic resilience.

Government schemes have also contributed to increased participation of women in local governance and public decision-making. Constitutional reservations in Panchayati Raj Institutions, coupled with leadership development programmes and community mobilization efforts, have encouraged women to contest elections and participate in local governance. Many elected women representatives have actively contributed to improving public services, sanitation, education, drinking water, health, and rural infrastructure. Although challenges such as proxy representation persist, women's visibility and influence in grassroots governance have increased considerably.

The schemes have also generated greater social awareness regarding gender equality, women's rights, legal protection, education, health, financial literacy, and social welfare. Awareness campaigns conducted through Anganwadi Centres, Self-Help Groups, community organizations, educational institutions, and government departments have encouraged women to access welfare programmes, report violence, participate in community activities, and exercise their legal and democratic rights. This has contributed to greater self-confidence and social participation among women.

Another significant achievement is the reduction of multidimensional poverty among women and vulnerable households. The convergence of income support, livelihood promotion, nutrition programmes, healthcare services, educational assistance, housing schemes, and social security initiatives has improved overall living standards. Women beneficiaries have experienced better food security, improved access to healthcare, enhanced educational opportunities for their children, and greater economic stability. These improvements have strengthened household resilience and contributed to inclusive rural development.

Government initiatives have significantly promoted digital financial inclusion. The integration of Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT), Aadhaar-based authentication, mobile banking, digital payment platforms, and online service delivery has made welfare distribution more transparent, efficient, and accessible. Many women who were previously excluded from formal financial systems are now able to receive benefits directly into their bank accounts, make digital transactions, and access financial services independently. Digital empowerment has also increased women's confidence in using technology and participating in the digital economy.

The combined efforts of the Central and Andhra Pradesh Governments have substantially advanced women's empowerment through comprehensive welfare programmes, institutional support, financial inclusion, and community participation. These achievements have laid a strong foundation for gender-inclusive development and have contributed significantly to improving the quality of life, dignity, and socio-economic status of women across Andhra Pradesh.

Major Challenges

Despite the considerable progress achieved through various women-centric schemes implemented by the Central and Andhra Pradesh Governments, several challenges continue to hinder the realization of comprehensive women's empowerment. One of the most persistent issues is gender wage inequality, as women often receive lower wages than men for similar work, particularly in the informal and agricultural sectors. Additionally, female labour force participation remains relatively low due to limited employment opportunities, domestic responsibilities, and prevailing socio-cultural norms.

Another major challenge is the limited ownership of productive assets, including land, housing, and business enterprises. The lack of asset ownership reduces women's economic security and bargaining power within households. Consequently, many women continue to experience financial dependency on male family members despite receiving government assistance. Social factors such as patriarchal attitudes, gender stereotypes, child marriage, and discrimination further restrict women's mobility, education, and participation in decision-making processes.

The growing importance of technology has also highlighted the issue of digital exclusion, particularly among rural women who often have limited access to smartphones, internet connectivity, and digital literacy. This digital divide affects their ability to access online government services, financial platforms, and employment opportunities. Furthermore, inadequate market access remains a significant barrier for women entrepreneurs, who frequently face difficulties in marketing their products, accessing supply chains, and competing in larger markets.

Institutional challenges also persist. Weak monitoring and evaluation mechanisms reduce the effectiveness of several welfare programmes, while delays in implementation and inadequate coordination among departments can limit the intended benefits. Regional disparities between urban and rural areas, as well as among different districts, result in

unequal access to government schemes and public services. Finally, lack of awareness among beneficiaries regarding eligibility criteria, application procedures, and available welfare programmes prevents many deserving women from fully utilizing government initiatives. Addressing these challenges through policy reforms, capacity building, digital inclusion, and stronger institutional support is essential for achieving sustainable and inclusive women's empowerment in Andhra Pradesh.

Policy Recommendations

To strengthen women's empowerment in Andhra Pradesh, a comprehensive and integrated policy approach is essential. The government should prioritize strengthening monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure the effective implementation of women-centric welfare schemes. Regular impact assessments, social audits, and data-driven policy reviews can enhance transparency, accountability, and service delivery.

The state should expand digital literacy programmes, particularly in rural and tribal areas, to enable women to access digital financial services, e-governance platforms, online education, and employment opportunities. Promoting digital inclusion will reduce the existing digital divide and improve women's participation in the digital economy.

Greater emphasis should be placed on entrepreneurship development by establishing incubation centres, providing business mentoring, facilitating access to affordable credit, and supporting start-ups led by women. Simultaneously, improving market access through e-commerce platforms, producer companies, trade fairs, and value-chain integration can help women entrepreneurs achieve sustainable incomes and business growth.

The government should also strengthen skill development programmes by aligning vocational training with emerging sectors such as information technology, artificial intelligence, renewable energy, healthcare, food processing, and digital services. Enhancing the capacity of women's cooperatives and producer organizations can further improve collective bargaining, production efficiency, and market competitiveness.

Effective gender budgeting should be institutionalized across all government departments to ensure that public expenditure adequately addresses women's developmental needs. Programmes aimed at financial literacy and investment awareness should be expanded to encourage savings, insurance coverage, pension participation, and responsible financial management.

To promote inclusive governance, leadership training and capacity-building programmes should be regularly organized for elected women representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions and Urban Local Bodies, enabling them to perform their responsibilities more effectively. Finally, stronger convergence among various welfare departments, local governments, financial institutions, and civil society organizations is necessary to avoid duplication, improve coordination, and maximize the impact of government interventions. Such a holistic and gender-responsive policy framework will contribute to sustainable, inclusive, and equitable women's empowerment in Andhra Pradesh.

Here's a concise academic conclusion suitable for a research article.

CONCLUSION

Women's empowerment is a vital component of inclusive development, social justice, and sustainable economic growth. The findings of this study indicate that both the Government of India and the Government of Andhra Pradesh have introduced a wide range of welfare and development schemes that have substantially improved the socio-economic status of women. Programmes such as Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, National Rural Livelihoods Mission, YSR Cheyutha, YSR Aasara, Amma Vodi, and the Self-Help Group (SHG) movement have enhanced women's access to education, healthcare, financial inclusion, entrepreneurship, social security, and livelihood opportunities. These initiatives have contributed to increased financial independence, improved maternal and child health, greater educational attainment, and enhanced participation of women in local governance and community development. Despite these achievements, several challenges continue to impede the realization of comprehensive women's empowerment. Gender wage disparities, low female labour force participation, unequal ownership of productive assets, digital exclusion, inadequate market access, and persistent socio-cultural barriers continue to affect women's ability to fully benefit from government interventions. These challenges highlight the need for more effective implementation, regular monitoring, and stronger institutional coordination.

The study concludes that welfare schemes alone are insufficient to achieve sustainable empowerment unless they are complemented by quality education, skill development, employment generation, leadership opportunities, digital inclusion, and legal awareness. Future policies should focus on strengthening women's economic participation, promoting entrepreneurship, expanding digital and financial literacy, and ensuring equitable access to resources and public services. A holistic, gender-responsive, and participatory governance framework, supported by coordinated efforts of government agencies, financial institutions, civil society organizations, and local communities, will be essential for achieving genuine women's empowerment and inclusive development in Andhra Pradesh.

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