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WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND INCLUSIVE SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: A LEGAL PERSPECTIVE

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I. ABSTRACT

Women empowerment entails the provision of social advancement systems, economic growth systems, and the creation of inclusive gender equality systems. Part of women's empowerment is providing women with the resources and rights to make decisions and participate in their communities. Education is essential to the process of empowerment, providing women the tools to uplift their status, both economically and socially. Moreover, the obtained competency, along with the legal, financial, and health access resources, allows women to have full control over their lives. Through economic empowerment, women are able to overcome the obstacles and redefine the traditional understanding of gender roles. Women are currently provided with greater networking possibilities and economic participation due to economic and remote education, as well as digital advancements. The involvement of women in the digital economy has presented them with a world of opportunity. Although the digital economy offers numerous benefits, women continue to experience gender discrimination, social restrictions, unequal pay, and lack of women leaders. The above issues are dealt with by legal, policy and global frameworks. Gender equality, and later women empowerment, requires inclusive policy frameworks, advocacy, and community-based initiatives, supported by the government, civil society, and the private sector. The societal change, policy frameworks, advocacy, and education should be sustained to guarantee feministic freedom. By empowering women, the society is able to grow and enhance healthcare, economies and childcare. Real empowerment is complex.

II. KEYWORDS

Legal Provisions, Women Empowerment, Gender equality, Economic development, Education.

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III. INTRODUCTION

Women have been systematically discriminated against and marginalized over centuries, which has led to limited access to resources, opportunities, and positions in the decision-making process. This is one of the reasons why international action and policymaking are fueled by the need to negotiate the equality of men and women and to empower women. One of the many international agencies that are concerned with the development of women is the United Nations, which says that gender equality is non-negotiable and essential to the creation of a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world. The empowerment of women is a complex phenomenon that entails power and control in every aspect of life and demands women to make decisions and to be equally involved in the economic, political, and social life of a nation. This entails the removal of all the barriers that can hinder the development of women and the delivery of equal opportunities to everyone. This paper examines the concept of women empowerment, its importance, the challenges and the strategies to achieve it.

A. Research Objectives

The aims of this study are:

1. To investigate the idea of women empowerment.
2. To identify the most important aspects and factors that lead to the empowerment of women.
3. To assess the issues women, face in society and in their [lives/workplaces/families].

B. Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the principal constitutional, statutory, and policy mechanisms for protecting and promoting women's rights in India?
2. What social, economic, political, and legal factors most significantly contribute to the empowerment of women?
3. How effective have judicial interventions and governmental initiatives been in addressing gender-based discrimination and workplace inequality?

4. What measures can further strengthen women's empowerment and inclusive social development in India?

C. Literature Review

Various dimensions of women empowerment have been discussed³ by several scholars, organizations and international bodies. Many studies indicate⁴ that empowerment is not only about opportunities but also about creating an environment where women feel free to participate without any reservations or concerns. Education is always mentioned⁵ as the key element in the empowerment of women.⁶ Educated women are more economically independent than those who are not and can resist oppression. Of paramount importance is the fact that most literature is dedicated to economic empowerment and financial independence.

In this regard, equal remuneration, training, and provision of resources for the creation of businesses are all critical. Various research has indicated that women are discriminated against in terms of promotions, leadership positions, and high-profile decisions in work environments. In some studies, it is observed that women are often not involved in the discussion or are ignored in the environment where men are predominant. Under such circumstances, good mentorship and supportive workmates is essential. Two examples of international partnerships that state that gender equity should also be aligned with leadership and decision-making roles at the organizational structures of the governments are the Women Empowerment Principles and UN Women.⁷

In short, there is extensive literature that demonstrates that legal advocacy, workplace restructuring, social mobilization, and governmental initiatives are some of the many elements that are required to empower women.

³ United Nations, Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/gender-equality> (last visited May 5, 2026)

⁴ World Bank, Women's Empowerment: Overview, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/gender> (last visited May 5, 2026)

⁵ Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* 87–92 (Oxford Univ. Press 1999).

⁶ Naila Kabeer, Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment, 30 *Dev. & Change* 435, 437–40 (1999).

⁷ Catalyst, Women in the Workplace, <https://www.catalyst.org/research/women-in-the-workplace/> (last visited May 5, 2026)

D. Research Methodology

The research methodology used in this study is doctrinal research methodology (secondary research). The research utilizes secondary sources, including books, journals, articles, government publications, academic papers, and official websites of organizations such as UN Women and government portals. The study is descriptive and takes an analytical approach to examine how the empowerment of women can be improved by education, employment opportunities, legal systems, and social change. There were no field surveys or interviews. The research is based on existing literature to draw conclusions and suggest the required changes.

According to the World Bank (2023), empowerment is a process that enables individuals who were previously unable to make important life decisions to do so.

1. **Economic Empowerment:** This entails providing women with access to resources, job opportunities, and the power to make economic decisions. It includes equitable wages, landownership, and economic self-sufficiency.
2. **Social Empowerment:** This implies that women must have equal opportunities in education, healthcare, and the right to make their own choices regarding their lives. Education is crucial in providing women with the knowledge and skills they need to achieve personal and professional growth.
3. **Political Empowerment:** This involves promoting and empowering women to engage in political issues and decision-making processes. It ensures that the views of women are incorporated in governance and policymaking.
4. **Legal Empowerment:** This is the process of enacting and implementing laws to safeguard the rights of women and to enhance gender equality. Besides dealing with discrimination and gender-based violence, these laws grant equal rights in marriage, divorce, and inheritance.

IV. ELEMENTS OF WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

1. **Economic Empowerment:** Financial Independence is Empowering women to make their own money by working or starting their own businesses.

- **Equal Pay:** On the frontline in the fight to achieve equal pay and equal work.⁸
 - **Microfinance and Self-Help Groups:** These offer credit and financial services, which encourage the formation of small businesses and the development of individuals.⁹
2. **Social Empowerment:** Education is Providing access to quality education to build confidence and improve decision-making skills.
 - **Family and Community Support:** Advocating family and community support to empower women.¹⁰
 3. **Political Empowerment:** Political Participation is Improving the political representation of women by reservation or Affirmative action.
 4. **Leadership Positions:** Promoting women to assume leadership positions in different areas.¹¹

V. STRATEGIES FOR EMPOWERMENT

1. Education and Skill Development

- **Access to Education:** Ensuring that girls and women have access to quality education.
- **Skill Training:** Vocational training to increase employability.¹²

2. Digital Technology

- **Digital Literacy:** Equipping women with the skills to use technology for accessing information, career prospects, and financial services.

⁸ Vikrant Sharma & Preeti Sharma, Impact of Self- Help Groups on Women Empowerment in Telangana, Semantic Scholar (2024), <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/IMPACT-OF-SELF-HELP-GROUPS-ON-WOMEN-EMPOWERMENT/57318b0baa66ebae12618745a925ba76cfa6cc8e> (last visited May 1,2026,).

⁹ Totakura Grace, Muhammad Abdus Salam, Trisha Saha & Tonmoy Dey Women Empowerment Through Micro Finance(A case Study Of NGO in Parkas District Of Andhra Pradesh), Semantic scholar, [https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/WOMEN-EMPOWERMENT-THROUGH-MICRO-FINANCE-\(A-CASE-OF-Grace-Salam/8a9634caa8328b30834ead0007a14a21c1e39d69/figure/2](https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/WOMEN-EMPOWERMENT-THROUGH-MICRO-FINANCE-(A-CASE-OF-Grace-Salam/8a9634caa8328b30834ead0007a14a21c1e39d69/figure/2) (last Visited May 2, 2026)

¹⁰ Id

¹¹ Essay On Women Empowerment, Vedanta <https://www.vedantu.com/english/essay-on-women-empowerment> (last Visited May 3, 2026).

¹² Ibid

- **Digital Platforms:** The use of web platforms to develop professional and business opportunities.¹³

3. Community-Based Programs

- **Self-Help Groups:** The grouping of women into groups to support each other and to empower themselves economically.
- **Partnerships and Collaborations:** Forming partnerships between communities, NGOs and government organizations to support women initiatives.¹⁴

4. Policy and Legal Frameworks

- **Legislative Support:** Promoting legislation that protects the rights of women and promotes equality.
- **Law Implementation:** To ensure that the rights of women are upheld, it is necessary to ensure that the law is implemented effectively.¹⁵

VI. WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND PRINCIPLES (WEPS) IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE

On November 19, 2019, the Ministry of Women and Child Development partnered with Face book to promote digital literacy and internet safety for women and children in India. This program, which was initiated as part of the Global Literacy Program, is called We Think Digital. The women and children constitute a very important part of the Indian society.

Moreover, they are usually regarded as the most vulnerable groups. Article 15(3) of the Indian law provides safeguarding of women and children, and it reads as follows:

The provisions of this article shall not prevent the government making special provisions to women and children. Empowerment of women means providing them with the tools, resources, and support they need to work towards their full potential

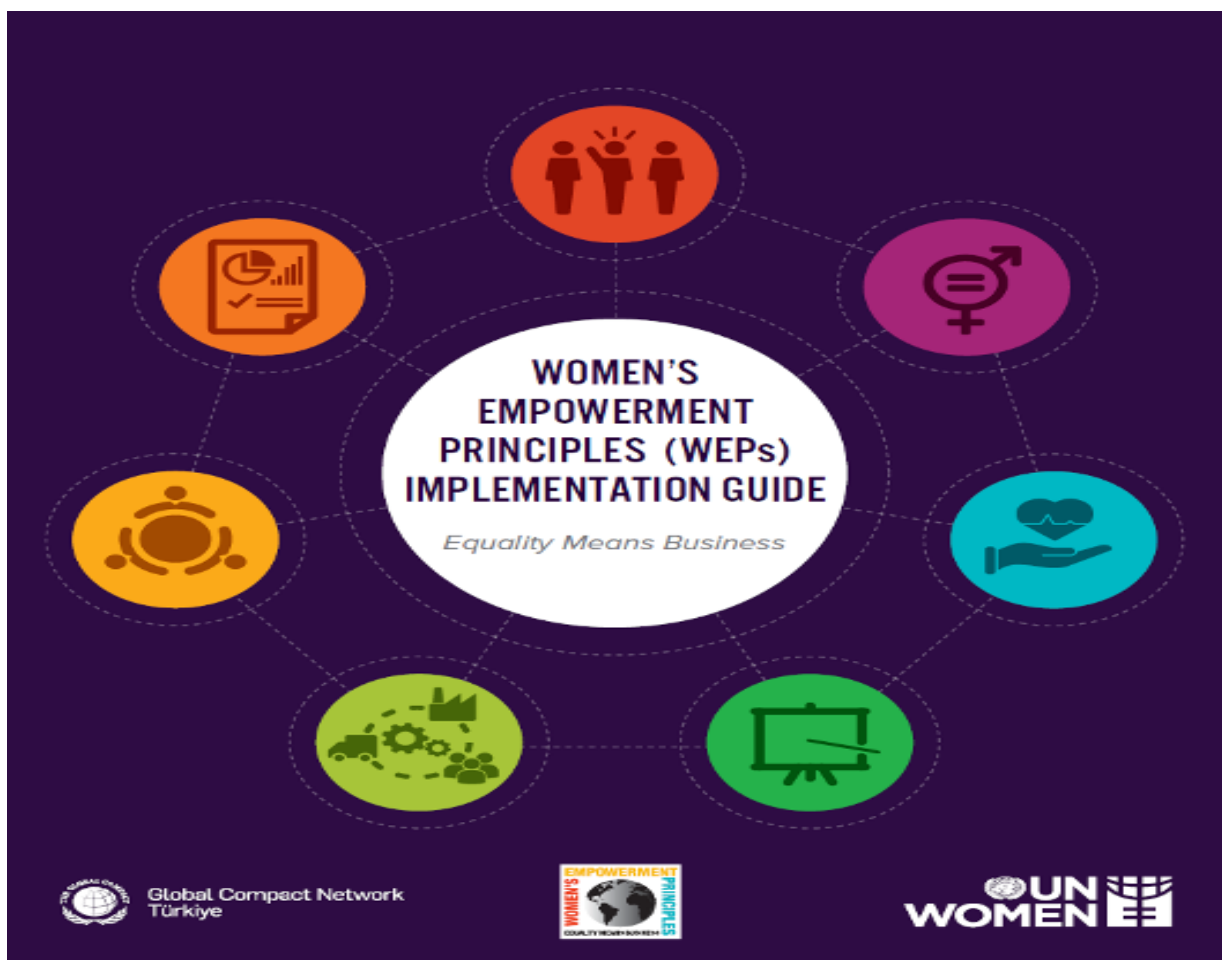
¹³ Semantic Scholar, Allen Inst. FOR Artificial Intelligence, <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Women-Empowerment-through-Digital-Technology-Mishra/174b0f10affc5b5b82e8c90085f101b050a1b89a> (last visited May 4, 2026)

¹⁴ Supra note 3

¹⁵ Farhen Firdouse, Impact of Self- Help Groups on Women Empowerment in Telangana, Semantic Scholar, <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/IMPACT-OF-SELF-HELP-GROUPS-ON-WOMEN-EMPOWERMENT/57318b0baa66ebae12618745a925ba76cfa6cc8e> (last Visited May 5 .2026)

and accomplish their goals. By empowering women socially, economically, politically, and legally, women are able to make informed decisions about their lives and overall well-being, thereby contributing to themselves and society in general.

A major way to empower women is to enhance their access to various resources and opportunities, such as Education, Employment, and Healthcare, right of ownership. In addition to these increments, violence and discrimination against women should also be minimized. In January 2022, South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa signed into law three major pieces of legislation. These laws offer more protection to victims of gender-based violence and make sure that the perpetrators can no longer use the loopholes in the law to evade punishment. According to the President, we as people, institutions and leaders in the society have to do our bit to bring an end to such crimes against children and women.¹⁶



¹⁶ President Ramaphosa said.

UN Women is the United Nations organization that focuses on gender equality and women empowerment.¹⁷ UN Women was formed as a global champion of women and girls to speed up the process of addressing their needs globally. The organization helps UN Member States to establish global standards on how to achieve gender equality and works with governments and civil society to design the laws, policies, programs, and services required to implement these standards. It advocates equal participation of women in all aspects of life with a focus on five priority areas, namely, women leadership and political participation; ending violence against women; engaging women in peace and security processes; advancing economic empowerment; and mainstreaming gender equality in national development planning and budgeting.

The United Nations Global Compact is a policy framework and operational system of businesses that are dedicated to sustainability and ethical practices, which was launched in 2000. Being a multi-stakeholder leadership platform, it seeks to harmonize business operations and strategies with ten universally accepted principles in the fields of human rights, labour, the environment, and anti-corruption. It also aims to mobilize action towards greater UN goals. It is the largest voluntary corporate responsibility initiative in the world with over 9,000 signatories in over 160 countries. As a worldwide gender equality champion, UN Women contributes decades of experience to this joint initiative with the UN Global Compact.

The WEPs are the outcome of the combined efforts of UN Women and UN Global Compact, with other organizations contributing to it. UN Women and the UN Global Compact promote the Women's Empowerment Principles with the expectation that applying them as a committed "gender lens" will inspire and reinforce the efforts of individuals and institutions in a bid to make women visible at all levels of economic life.

¹⁷ Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) Implementation Guide, UN Women, <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2017/01/weps-implementation-guide> (last visited 7 may, 2026)

VII. SEXUAL HARASSMENT OF WOMEN AT WORKPLACE (PREVENTION, PROHIBITION AND REDRESSAL) ACT, 2013 (POSH ACT)

The POSH Act, 2013 was enacted to provide statutory force to the Vishaka Guidelines and constitutes the principal legislation governing workplace sexual harassment in India. Section 2(n) defines sexual harassment to include unwelcome physical contact, demands or requests for sexual favours, sexually coloured remarks, showing pornography, and any other unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature. Section 4 mandates the constitution of an Internal Complaints Committee in every organization employing ten or more persons, while Section 6 provides for the establishment of Local Complaints Committees at the district level to address complaints from the unorganised sector and from workplaces where no Internal Committee exists. The Act imposes duties on employers to prevent harassment, conduct awareness programmes, and ensure timely redressal. Although the Act has significantly strengthened legal protection for women, its implementation remains uneven, particularly in the informal and unorganised sectors where awareness, reporting, and institutional compliance continue to pose challenges.

A. Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 (PWDVA)

The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 is a landmark civil legislation enacted to provide immediate and effective remedies to women facing abuse within domestic relationships. Section 3 adopts a broad definition of domestic violence, encompassing physical, sexual, verbal, emotional, and economic abuse. The Act empowers Magistrates to issue protection orders under Section 18, residence orders under Section 19, monetary relief under Section 20, custody orders under Section 21, and compensation orders under Section 22.

The statute is significant because it recognises a woman's right to reside in the shared household and provides accessible civil remedies independent of criminal prosecution. In *S.R. Batra v. Taruna Batra*, the Supreme Court interpreted the concept of a shared household, highlighting the importance of residence rights under the Act. The PWDVA has substantially strengthened the legal framework for protecting

women from domestic abuse and remains an essential instrument for advancing women's dignity, security, and empowerment in India.

VIII. GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES AND SCHEMES

A. Several government schemes aim to empower women

Scheme	Launch Year	Objective
Beti Bachao Beti Padhao	2015	To Promote education and prevent female foeticide. ¹⁸
One-Stop Centre Scheme	2015	To Provide support services for women in distress.
UJJAWALA	2007	To combat trafficking and provide rescue, rehabilitation, and reintegration services for women and children who are victims of commercial sexual exploitation. <i>(Revised operational guidelines and enhanced budgetary norms came into effect from 1 April 2016.).</i>
Mahila Shakti Kendra	2017	To ensure the safety, security, and empowerment of rural Women.
Mission Shakti	2021 (<i>operational from 2022–23</i>)	To ensure the safety, security, and empowerment of women through a life-cycle continuum approach implemented under

¹⁸ Annapoorna List of Women Empowerment Schemes in India 2026, Clear Tax, <https://cleartax.in/s/women-empowerment-schemes-in-india> (Last visited May 6, 2026)

		two sub-schemes – Sambal (for safety and security) and Samarthya (for women's empowerment).
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B. Ways to Empower Women in the Workplace

1. **Give women a physical place at the decision-making table:** According to a recent study by Deloitte, out of a board of 100 members, only 15 are women. This means that there are less than 2 female members in regular meetings of 10 or less members. There must be some instances where more women might be included in scheduled meetings, especially when their experience might be balanced with the very purpose of the meeting.¹⁹
2. **Women should be empowered to speak out:** It is not just a matter of inviting women to the table. Women are normally overlooked during meetings. When women are invited in, there must be an environment that will provoke women to give their opinions in such forums. In case no one will volunteer, pose a certain question to one of the women. The modern virtual office poses enormous challenges to mothers who are at the same time balancing their child-rearing duties and attending video conferences. Most women, according to 45 percent of female business executives, have a hard time being heard during video calls. In addition, the cultural aspect of interrupting women is particularly enhanced in virtual meetings, where video technology can intervene with the process of detecting non-verbal cues that inform you when to interrupt.
3. **Establish clear standards and give constructive criticism:** Feedback is an effective instrument that can help women become more assertive in the workplace. People can help women in the workplace to enhance their skills by identifying the best practices and proposing better ways. The

¹⁹ Ten Ways to Empower Women in the Workplace, Career Group Companies, <https://www.careergroupcompanies.com/blog/empower-women-in-the-workplace/> (last visited May 7, 2026)

competitive pressure that is relentless and has to be used to break the glass ceiling also leads to poor interpersonal relationships among women in the workplace.

4. **Give mentorship to other women:** According to the Harvard Business Review, women who have a small group of female friends are more likely to secure executive positions that are accompanied with more power and higher pay. Discussion with a mentor may encourage women to express their career goals. Thus, this makes them assert themselves in favour of development and state their opinions during meetings.
5. **Back less experienced women for new opportunities:** Being a senior employee in your organization, it is your duty to mentor the younger employees. You are significant in encouraging women to be exposed to acquire more experience. Be a leader in the best interest of others by being on the frontline to encourage the inclusion of less experienced women in new programs and in cooperative teams. Where it is possible, speak up for these women when they are requesting pay rises or promotions.
6. **Set female participation objectives:** In setting yearly goals and measures of achievement, the place of women should be taken into consideration. As an illustration, there ought to be standards of the percentage of women to be represented in interdepartmental groups. Secondly, there could be the option of increasing fairness in the allocation of bonuses and raises in salary throughout the organization so that women can be given equal recognition.
7. **Protect the flex factors that are important to work mums:** A staggering 88 percent of career women cite flexibility as the final job satisfaction trigger, preceding pay. As an understanding colleague at work, there are ways that you can facilitate women by proposing flexible work initiatives such as flexitime and off-site or combined work arrangements.
8. **Be approachable:** In most instances, women thrive in their working conditions when they have few stable relationships. You need to take a friendly position and make yourself a reliable individual to the women in

your workforce. Build trust through showing support and being an active promoter of more opportunities to women to thrive in the organization.

C. Challenges Faced by Women

1. **Cultural Norms:** Discrimination is often justified as a cultural norm, preventing the progress of women.
2. **Wage Gap and Leadership Positions:** Women are less likely to hold a leadership position and have a persistent wage gap compared to men.
3. **Safety Issues:** Women tend to be concerned with safety, and this may restrict their life in the general society.

D. Key Determinants of Empowering Women

1. **Education:** Education is the most effective weapon of empowering women. Education equips women with knowledge and empowerment, which allows them to make informed choices and become economically independent.
2. **Financial Independence:** This is necessary so that women can be self-sufficient to live their life on their own terms. This includes equal pay, skill development training and women entrepreneurship.
3. **Role of Society and Family:** Empowerment starts from home with the cooperation of family. The society must promote inclusiveness and enable women to emerge without the fear of being condemned.

E. Role Models and Supportive Schemes

1. **Inspiring Women:** Role models such as Mary Kom and Kalpana Chawla etc. inspire women towards their goal.
2. **Government Programs:** Government initiatives such as the Nirbhaya Fund (2013), Ujjawala, and Mahila Shakti Kendras support women's safety, protection, and empowerment. The Nirbhaya Fund is a dedicated corpus established by the Government of India to finance projects and schemes aimed at improving the safety and security of women.

F. Ways to Empower Women

1. **Equal Opportunities:** To give women equal opportunities with men in all aspects. Encouraging Independence: Enabling women to earn and become entrepreneur.
2. **Education for All:** Girls should be compelled to attend school.
3. **Fair Opportunities:** Giving women the same opportunity as men in every sector.
4. **Promoting independence:** Promoting women to be entrepreneurs and have careers.

IX. CASE LAW

1. **Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan:** The Court held that sexual harassment at the workplace constitutes a violation of the fundamental rights guaranteed under Articles 14, 15, 19(1)(g), and 21 of the Constitution of India. In the absence of specific legislation, the Supreme Court laid down the Vishaka Guidelines as legally binding measures requiring employers to establish complaints committees and adopt preventive and redressal mechanisms to protect women from workplace sexual harassment.²⁰
2. **Mary Roy v. State of Kerala:** The Court Ruled That The ruling was a significant step towards gender equality in terms of rights over property, overturning patriarchal norms.²¹
3. **Meritor Savings Bank v. Vinson:** The Court Held That The judgment provided a legal basis to deal with workplace harassment and thus safeguard the rights of women in the workplace.²²

X. RECOMMENDATION

Women Empowerment recommendations are important in achieving gender equality and a more equal society. The following are some of the particular recommendations to attain women's empowerment on different levels:

²⁰ Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan AIR 1997 SC 3011

²¹ Mary Roy v. State of Kerala, 1986 SCR (1) 371

²² Meritor Savings Bank v. Vinson:477 U.S. 57 (1986)

1. Education and Literacy

- **Compulsory Education:** Provide women with universal access to quality education, with a special emphasis on literacy and vocational training.
- **Scholarships and Financial Aid:** Provide financial aid and scholarships to women to allow them to access higher education.

2. Workplace Empowerment

- **Favourable Workplace Culture:** Have a professional work culture that respects diversity and inclusion, with mentoring programs and flexible work arrangements.
- **Equal Opportunities:** Have clear performance appraisal and equal pay systems on equal work.
- **Leadership Development:** Customize leadership development initiatives to prepare women to take up senior positions in organizations.

3. Political Empowerment

- **Affirmative Action Policies:** Implement policies that guarantee a certain percentage of women in decision-making roles and legislatures.
- **Voting Rights and Participation:** Enhance women's right to vote and take part in political activities.

4. Social and Cultural Empowerment

- **Challenge Discriminatory Norms:** Challenge and deconstruct discriminatory norms against women to bring about cultural change.
- **Community Support:** Mobilize communities to empower and support the rights of women through sponsoring social activities and campaigns.

5. Health and Safety

- **Safety Precautions:** Implement policies to protect women against violence and harassment in the community and at home.

XI. CONCLUSION

Empowerment of women is critical in attaining social justice, economic growth and sustainable development. Although some progress has been achieved, there are still challenges that need to be addressed through constant efforts by governments,

international organizations and civil societies. By eliminating gender inequalities and promoting inclusive policies, societies can help women realize their full potential and have a more equitable and prosperous future.

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