

launching of the state sector Programme in the name and style of 'Kanyashree'. SABLA Scheme is facing the main hurdle as under the Kanyashree Programme support is provided to the adolescent girls in the form of cash. Since most of the beneficiaries belong to the down trodden families of the society the cash component is much more attractive to them than receiving the services under SABLA from the Anganwadi Centres which require their physical attendance.

The problem with this scheme is that adolescent girls normally are not very interested to attend the meetings of 'Kishori Samooh' or participate in 'Kishori Diwas'.

In many cases Anganwadi Workers face problem in engaging the girls in SABLA activities. Sometimes, they have to even face local resistance as some of the families do not allow their girls to access the Anganwadi Centre. But exceptions are also there. The field visit in Tarakdaspur Centre which is a rural Project in Nadia gives a bright picture of SABLA Scheme. Anganwadi Worker, Shukla Biswas, is optimistic about the scheme. According to her, 20 out of 30 enrolled adolescent girls regularly participate in the Kishori Meetings. They discuss about hygiene, physiological problems, trafficking, early marriage etc. They even love to discuss about their affairs and marriage proposals.

### **Recommendations/ suggestions:**

After analysing the findings of the field survey and going through the official data, the following suggestions and recommendations may be made for proper implementation of the scheme, more coverage of adolescent girls and selecting all the districts in the country.

- i. The scheme SABLA is attractive to the school drop outs. Therefore, special drive may be organised by the ICDS functionaries and the Health department personnel to cover the school dropout adolescent girls who still remain uncovered to benefit themselves by way of getting the different services including the vocational training.

- ii. Regular awareness programmes among the school going girls will also attract them to attend the Anganwadi Centres before or after the school period and during the long vacations, like summer, puja vacations and after their annual examinations. For this purpose certain changes may be made in respect of timings of imparting the vocational training and imparting health and nutrition education. The study suggests that the timings of Kishori Meetings clash with the timing of school of the girls. To ensure participation of all the adolescent girls, who are either studying or working, in the meetings, it is suggested, that the government may organise the meetings on holidays or Sundays.
- iii. The adolescent girls under study have suggested that their family members should be allowed to participate in the meetings to make them understand the importance of SABLA Programme in the life of their girl children.
- iv. The government may also consider providing dry food instead of cooked food to the school going girls if they attend the training classes and health and nutrition education programmes before or after their school period. If required, the Government of India and the state Government may make certain changes in the policy for providing the above-mentioned services to the school going adolescent girls.

As per the schematic pattern of SABLA, along with other services like quality professional training and counselling etc., nutrition in the form of cooked food was to have been provided to the adolescent girls from the Anganwadi Centres at the same rate that of the pregnant and lactating mothers. But the problem is that during the survey in Nadia, which is a SABLA district, it has been found that the nutrition component was absent. During the field-survey, most of the Anganwadi Workers expressed that the adolescent girls who attend the Anganwadi Centres are very much inclined to get nutrition. They also hope that this nutrition programme, which is an

important component of SABLA Scheme, will attract more beneficiaries under this scheme.

After meeting the officials of the ICDS Directorate in May, 2016 it has been found that the nutrition programme under SABLA Scheme has been started only in the districts of Jalpaiguri and Alipurduar. But instead of cooked food ready to eat food, in packets, is supplied to the adolescent girls from the Anganwadi Centres of these two districts on weekly basis. The components of the ready to eat food are wheat (ground), Bengal Gram (ground), ground nut (ground) mixed with sugar. The Self- Help Groups have been entrusted to prepare the ready to eat food. According to the Directorate of ICDS though the rate for supply of cooked food to the pregnant and lactating mothers from the Anganwadi Centres has been increased from Rs.5/- to Rs.7/- per day per beneficiary the rate of ready to eat food for the adolescent girls remain at Rs. 5/- per day per beneficiary without any increase. Officials also said that the same ready to eat food will also be provided to the adolescent girls in other SABLA Districts which is now under process. It is expected that it will make this programme more popular among the adolescent girls.

Another important point is that to involve more adolescent girls in this SABLA Programme, community support is crucial. As per the Reports of International Centre for Research on Women, 2013, “to start with the parents and the community first, before reaching adolescent girls” since access to the girls themselves is usually limited as parental control is very strong and girls typically do not have the agency or the space to exercise their own choices, i.e. to “decide what they can and cannot do”<sup>33</sup>. The findings of the field-survey in Nadia also suggest that to reduce opposition from the families of the adolescent girls it is very crucial to involve them in the activities of this scheme.

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<sup>33</sup> Nanda P, Das P, Singh A & Negi R, “*Addressing Comprehensive Needs of Adolescent Girls in India: A Potential for Creating Livelihoods*” .New Delhi: International Centre for Research on Women, 2013

### **(b) Achievements:**

In spite of these drawbacks of this programme, there are certain success stories of SABLA also. 100% adolescent girls, under survey, have the desire to become self-reliant in future after attaining training under SABLA scheme and 93.75% want to continue their study and delay the marriage age.

It may be concluded that if the above suggestions are taken into consideration the Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (SABLA) will definitely, overcoming all problems, prove its success among the adolescent girls, ultimately benefitting the society as a whole. The SABLA initiative offers a timely opportunity and a potential platform for nationwide outreach to address current gaps in programming for adolescent girls. In particular, the inclusion of vocational training offers a unique opportunity to enhance girls' economic options<sup>34</sup>. This scheme is aiming to develop a large chunk of human resource of this country, that is, the women. The significance of this scheme lies in the fact that it covers both the school going and the school drop-out adolescent girls. SABLA is right now at a nascent stage and it will be too early to comment on its success and failures. But the Government of India and all the State Governments, considering its early success, may feel it necessary to cover all the districts of the country for implementing this scheme for the benefit of the uncovered adolescent girls.

## **7.7 Women Empowerment in India: Facts and Future**

Women empowerment means the full control of the women on their lives. Empowerment also means the ability to make decisions. Empowering a woman economically gives her more control over her choices and more options for her future. In the words of Rowlands<sup>35</sup>, individuals are empowered when they are able to maximise the opportunities available to them without constraints (Rowlands, 1997). Beijing Platform for Action, Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women

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<sup>34</sup> Nanda P, Das P, Singh A & Negi R. *Addressing Comprehensive Needs of Adolescent Girls in India: A Potential for Creating Livelihoods*. New Delhi: International Centre for Research on Women, 2013

<sup>35</sup> Rowlands, Jo. *Questioning Empowerment: Working with Women in Honduras*, Oxford: Oxfam, 1997

(Beijing, 1995)<sup>36</sup> declares “Empowerment of women and gender equality are prerequisites for achieving political, social, economic, cultural, and environmental security among all peoples.” According to Young (1993), empowerment enables women to take control of their own lives, set their own agenda, organise to help each other. She says that women should make demands on the state for support and on the society itself for change<sup>37</sup> as empowerment is their right.

It is clear from the discussions in the earlier Chapters that the government of India and the state governments have been trying to empower women since independence. Even in the post-liberalisation period, the Indian state has not withdrawn itself from the field of women empowerment. The different schemes launched by the government and the state government like ICDS, NPAG, KSY, SABLA, Swabalamban, Kanyashree etc. have a holistic approach towards women empowerment. Through ICDS scheme pregnant and lactating mothers along with their children are tremendously benefitted by way of getting supplementary nutrition, health and nutrition education, health care and referral services. As a result, severe mal-nourishment, moderate mal-nourishment, maternal mortality rate and infant mortality rate have been reduced to a great extent. Not only that, Government of India approved the National Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Policy in 2013 and the Ministry of Women and Child Development is responsible for implementing this policy through the vast network of ICDS<sup>38</sup>. To promote Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) and also to make children ready for the school, Government of West Bengal launched a scheme called ‘Shishu Aloy’ in 2015. These are the advanced Anganwadi Centres where the children are getting pre-school education and also food and nutrition and proper health care. The Government has taken the technical help of

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<sup>36</sup> The 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing marked a significant turning point for the global agenda for gender equality. Delegates had prepared a Declaration and Platform for Action aimed at achieving greater equality and opportunity for women. It is a landmark text in the field of gender equality and human security.

<sup>37</sup> Young, Kate. *Planning development with women : making a world of difference*. London: Macmillan, 1993

<sup>38</sup> <http://unicef.in/Whatwedo/40/Early-Childhood-Education> (accessed on 27-04-2016:22:10)

the UNICEF to make the curriculum of these pre-school education centres<sup>39</sup>. Moreover, it may be mentioned here that the grass root level ICDS functionaries, that is, the Supervisors, Anganwadi Workers and Anganwadi Helpers are all women. This large number of work-force, more than 2.25 lakhs, has definitely become economically empowered. Their families have become sufficiently benefitted in running the educational expenses of the children, better maintenance of families and spending money from their pockets for better treatment of all the family members. The women functionaries take their own decisions and enjoy their economic independence. The role of the Anganwadi Workers and Helpers in the empowerment of women is very important. On the one hand, they are the examples of economically independent women who earn their own livelihood and on the other hand, they are instrumental in empowering local women by providing them various services under ICDS Scheme and helping them on different issues. Working for women and children is considered to be respectable in the society. The findings of the research also show that most of the Anganwadi Workers are proud of their job. They enjoy the fact that local people call them 'Teachers' as they give the children pre-school education.

With the financial support given by the government of India and the state government, facilities given for the quality training of ICDS functionaries, support and cooperation received from the sister departments like Health and Family Welfare, Panchayats, Public Health Engineering and School Education, ICDS now stands in a concrete footing to help women in many ways.

With the launching of Swabalamban scheme, a large number of women belonging to the poor families in the rural areas and urban slums have become economically empowered through their income from different trades. They are now in a position to contribute a pretty good amount to the welfare of their families. They have also attained self-respect for themselves. The government of India has withdrawn itself from this scheme since April, 2006. But the government of West Bengal is continuing this vocational training scheme with the support of NGOs to make the poor and marginalised women of the state economically independent.

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<sup>39</sup> Ministry Of Women & Child Development and UNICEF. *Quality In Early Childhood Care and Education: Pictorial Handbook for Practitioners*. New Delhi: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2014.

SABLA is an excellent scheme for adolescent girls especially for the school drop-outs. After completion of vocational training there remains a scope for job-opening. Many of the trained adolescent girls have been engaged in different trades. In addition to that they have started getting nutritional support from the Anganwadi Centres, health and nutrition education and counselling on family welfare matters. In the Kishori Meetings under this scheme, ICDS functionaries try to make them aware about several social problems like trafficking, early marriage, dowry etc. Adolescent girls are being encouraged to continue their study and marry only after attaining the legal age. In West Bengal the government has started Kanyashree Prakalpa to prevent early marriage of adolescent girls and to encourage their further education with the help of a conditional cash transfer scheme<sup>40</sup>. ICDS, therefore, can put the girls centre-stage by active advocacy of raising the age of marriage, making them self-sufficient and delaying the first pregnancy through these Schemes. When all the programmes fully implemented the adolescent girls will be profoundly benefitted which will make them economically and socially empowered in their future life.

No doubt, it is a gigantic task to make all the women empowered. At the same time, the fact cannot be denied that progress is being made in India with respect to women empowerment, but we all know that change takes time. The solutions of women related problems, like the challenges, are not the simple ones. It has to be kept in mind while initiating women empowerment programmes that women are not a homogenous group, and gender intersects with other dimensions of social identity like religion, class, race, and ethnicity to create particular experiences of oppression and privilege. In spite of several odds like budgetary limitations, shortage of man power, inadequate infrastructure etc. the Government of India and state governments have been sincerely endeavouring a lot to achieve this goal of gender equality. Positive Changes in the programmes will definitely improve its impact on women in particular and the society as a whole. It is a fact that without the help of the Indian state holistic empowerment of women is not possible. But state initiative is not sufficient enough to remove all the obstacles to women's equal share of power and prosperity. According to Wendy Harris, CA, President and CEO of CESO, women

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<sup>40</sup> <https://wbkanyashree.gov.in> accessed on 19.05.2016:11:16