



# Women Empowerment Policy

## Preamble

The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. The Constitution not only grants equality to women but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women.

India is also a signatory to several UN Conventions, primarily the Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Beijing Platform for Action and Convention on Rights of the Child where the commitment of the nation to protect and empower its women and girls is quite pronounced. The recent endorsement by India, of the ambitious 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will further change the course of development by addressing the key challenges such as quality education, gender inequality, and violence against women, which is critical for global success of the goals as well.<sup>1</sup>

The current status of women on human development parameters, legal rights for women to life and freedom from violence, economic and social discrimination and their rights to equality and equity shows that a lot remains to be done. It is necessary, therefore, to reinforce the rights-based approach for creating an enabling environment in which women can enjoy their rights.

The re-scripting of women's empowerment has been envisaged as a socially inclusive right based approach while reinforcing the rights and entitlements provided under the Constitution of India. The policy will enable sustainable socio-economic, political empowerment of women to claim their rights and entitlements control over resources and formulation of strategic choices in the realisation of the principles of gender equality and justice.

The National Policy for Women, 2016 has provided a generic policy framework that guides various sectors like education to issue more detailed policy documents that are sector-specific. We have followed the policy framework while drafting this policy to integrate the principles into our prevailing policy, strategy and program documents.

Education is a human right and an essential tool for achieving the goals of equality, development and peace. Non-discriminatory education benefits both girls and boys and thus ultimately contributes to more equal relationships between women and men. Equality of access to and attainment of educational qualifications is necessary if more women are to become agents of change. Literacy of women is an important key to improving health, nutrition and education in the family and to empowering women to participate in decision-making in society. Investing in formal and non-formal education and training for girls and women, with its exceptionally high social and economic return, has proved to be one of the best means of achieving sustainable development and economic growth that is both sustained and sustainable.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> National Policy for Women 2016

<sup>2</sup> Beijing Platform for Action 1995

The empowerment of women has been recognized as the central issue in determining the status of women. The National Commission for Women was set up by an Act of Parliament in 1990 to safeguard the rights and legal entitlements of women.

Similarly, the intention to constitute a women development cell (WDC) is to provide and maintain a dignified, congenial working environment for women employees (including teaching, non-teaching and contractual workers) and students, where they can work, study and explore their potential to the fullest. They can approach the Women Development Cell in case of any grievance.

## **Section 1: Definitions**

- 1.1 University or University or institution:** It refers Madhya Pradesh Bhoj (Open) University (MPBOU), Bhopal.
- 1.2 Harassment:** It is unlawful behaviour towards a person that causes mental or emotional suffering. It includes repeated unwanted behaviour that irritates or upsets someone.
- 1.3 Sexual Harassment:** A behaviour characterized by the making of unwelcome and inappropriate sexual remarks or physical advances in a workplace or other professional or social situation.
- 1.4 Crèche Facilities:** It is facilitation that enables parents to leave their children while they are at work and children are provided with a homelike conducive environment.
- 1.5 Discrimination:** The state of being differentiated because of gender, community and/or physical or mental state.
- 1.6 Gender Sensitization:** It refers making people aware about and raise concerns on gender equality. It helps people in examining their personal attitudes and beliefs and questioning the gender realities.
- 1.7 Information Communication and Technology (ICT):** It refers to all communication technologies including the internet and wired and wireless networks accessible through computers, cell phones, and radio. It enables users to access, retrieve, store, transmit, and manipulate information.
- 1.8 Women Empowerment:** It is about promoting women's sense of self-worth, their ability to determine their own choices and rights to influence social change for themselves and others.

## **Section 2: Policy Statement and Declaration**

### **2.1 The Statement**

Women Empowerment Policy would enable women to capitalize and contribute their fullest potential towards society in general and education in particular. It would culminate in an impactful paradigm shift in their stature and overall wellbeing.

### **2.2 The Purpose**

The policy aimed to bring the advancement, development and empowerment of women through education. The Policy will be widely disseminated to encourage active participation of all stakeholders for achieving its goals.

### **2.3 The Scope**

This policy applies to women employees and students of the University.

### **2.4 The Declaration**

The framework of the National Policy for Women, 2016 has been followed as a guiding document for drafting this women empowerment policy of the university and integrating its principles into prevailing policy, strategy and programs.

## **Section 3: Women Empowerment Practices**

- 3.1** Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for the full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential.
- 3.2** Promoting the de-jure and de-facto enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedom by women on an equal basis with men in all educational spheres.
- 3.3** Promoting equal access to participation and decision making of women in the social, political and economic life of the nation.
- 3.4** Promoting equal access to women to quality education at all levels, career and vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security and public office etc.
- 3.5** Priority will be accorded to increased enrolment and retention of girls and women in the first year of courses; it will be done through the provision of gender-friendly facilities like functional girl's toilets, and recruitment of women teachers. Promotion of skill development, vocational training and life skills as a part of the education curriculum for young women will be given importance.<sup>3</sup> Efforts will be made to address the repetition rates for young women including those from the marginalised

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<sup>3</sup> Strategic objective B.3, Beijing Platform for Action 1995, The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women

communities with varying underlying causes to arrest drop-out. A mission mode approach for literacy amongst women is envisaged.

- 3.6 Strengthening legal systems aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.
- 3.7 Changing societal attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women.
- 3.8 Mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process.
- 3.9 Eliminating discrimination and all forms of violence against women and the girl child.
- 3.10 Building and strengthening partnerships with civil society, particularly women's organizations.
- 3.11 Setting up a Women Empowerment Cell (WEC) to provide and maintain a dignified congenial working environment for women employees (including teaching, non-teaching and contractual workers) and students where they can work, study and explore their potential to the fullest, the WEC has been constituted at the university.

#### **Section 4: Priority Area – Empowerment through Education**

- 4.1 Every effort will be in addressing the infrastructure gap, availability of adequately trained teachers, promoting a safe and inclusive university/campus environment for women coming from remote and tribal areas.
- 4.2 Priority will be accorded to increased enrolment and retention of women in higher education especially from a rural or tribal background, it will be done through the provision of gender-friendly facilities like functional female toilets, **crèche facilities**, ramp/rails, scribe, Braille, lifts and higher recruitment of women teachers. Promotion of skill development, vocational training and life skills as a part of the college education curriculum for young women will be given importance. Efforts will be made to address the repetition rates for women including those from the marginalised communities with varying underlying causes to arrest drop-out. A mission mode approach for literacy amongst women envisaged.
- 4.3 Efforts will be made to provide a supportive environment in the university campus and regional centres through a responsive complaint mechanism to address discriminatory attitudes within the organisation and in practice, particularly on the issue of sexual harassment and intimidation of girls and young women. Hence, a Women Empowerment Cell (WEC) would be established.

- 4.4 Opportunities for recreation and participation in cultural activities will be promoted.
- 4.5 Maternity benefits as per the **Maternity Relief Act** to the working facility and also some reasonable extension of course duration for young women students if required.
- 4.6 Continued efforts will be made for the gender sensitization of the faculty and curriculum, content and pedagogies for an understanding of concepts of masculinity and femininity and gender stereotypes. Gender champions in schools and colleges will be promoted to ensure gender sensitivity in the educational system.
- 4.7 There is a need for quality management of government study centres/universities in terms of teaching, facilities and standards. Monitoring and evaluation by the community, Mothers groups and SHGs will be encouraged.
- 4.8 Major constraints that prevent women from accessing higher and technical/scientific education should be identified and girls will be encouraged to take up new subject choices linked to career opportunities. An inter-sectoral plan of action will be formulated for encouraging the enrolment of women in professional/scientific courses, by the provision of financial assistance, coaching, hostels, child care, etc.
- 4.9 Through innovative partnerships with leading universities at the international level, opportunities for higher education will be expanded for ensuring access and quality to girl students and staff and also for nurturing talent and entrepreneurship to contribute to the national development challenges like gender inequality, poverty, etc.
- 4.10 Distance education plays an important role in providing opportunities for higher education to women of all ages. Universities and academic institutions will be encouraged to launch online distance education courses to promote skill development and entrepreneurship for all women including those who had a break in their educational attainment.
- 4.11 Adult literacy will have an added objective to link literacy programs to life skills, financial literacy, education on rights, laws, schemes etc. in partnership with government schemes such as the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM).
- 4.12 Efforts will be made to remove the disparities in access to and proficiency in information and communication technology (ICT), particularly between socio-economically advantaged and disadvantaged women. Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) will be adopted for building ICT infrastructure, developing applications and locally relevant content using gender-sensitive language, operations and maintenance

and developing the capacity of teachers required for harnessing the full capacity of ICT productive tools. This will be done to reduce the digital divide of the country.

- 4.13** Regular Audits of the various schemes that are being offered to promote women education will be undertaken to assess whether these interventions have resulted in transformative changes.

## **Section 5: Implementation of the Policy**

### **5.1 Actions and Activities**

For translating the policy framework into action, specific, effective and achievable strategies are required at the university level –


- 5.1.1 Constituting the Women Empowerment Cell (WEC) as the policy approved for implementation;
- 5.1.2 Procurement of the data for the enrolled women students would be made towards functioning for the retention of young women students after the first year;
- 5.1.3 Available resources for ICT would be managed, more resources would be added if required to achieve the goal of the policy;
- 5.1.4 Computer/cyber literacy program would be designated for young women to develop their ICT skills and to create awareness about cybercrimes and frauds;
- 5.1.5 Women would be encouraged to attend classes as crèche facilities will be available. Educational toys and light refreshments for little kids would be available in the crèche room;
- 5.1.6 Sanitary pads vending machine would be installed inside the washrooms for the convenience;
- 5.1.7 Partial scholarships shall be introduced for women students in special cases;
- 5.1.8 Regular Audit continuously each year in the month of February, of the various schemes and incentives, subsidies that are being offered to promote women education will be undertaken to assess whether these interventions have resulted in transformative changes;
- 5.1.9 Audit will be done by a committee constituted by the Hon'ble Vice-Chancellor of the university in which Registrar will serve as Vice Chairperson and at least one person from CIQA as its members to evaluate the progress of the policy.

### **5.2 Roles and Responsibilities of Women Empowerment Cell**


- 5.2.1 To sensitise all members of Bhoj University community towards the Supreme Court and statutory mandate prohibiting gender discriminations and sexual harassment at the work place and encourage involvement through academic, cultural and outreach activities such as talks, seminars, workshops, community action, drama, street theatre, and the likes;




- 5.2.2 To provide for dialogue, discussion, and deliberation on woman's rights and gender related issues;
- 5.2.3 To provide for dialogue, discussion, and deliberation on woman's rights and gender related issues;
- 5.2.4 To become a resource centre for women and provide a forum for the exchange of ideas;
- 5.2.5 To review safety and security measures for female employees and girl students on the University campus.
- 5.2.6 Constitution and appointment of the committee will be done through the procedure set in Annexure A.

  
**Dr. Sadhna S. Bisen**  
Sr. Consultant, CIQA  
MPBOU, Bhopal


Prepared by

  
**Dr. Smita Rajan**  
Sr. Consultant, CIQA  
MPBOU, Bhopal

Forwarded by

  
**Dr. Sandeep Kulshreshtha**  
Director, CIQA  
MPBOU, Bhopal

Approved by

  
**Dr. Jayant Sonwalkar**  
Vice-Chancellor  
MPBOU, Bhopal  
Prof. (Dr.) Jayant Sonwalkar  
Vice Chancellor  
M.P. Bhoj (Open) University  
Bhopal (M.P.)

## **ANNEXURE A – CONSTITUTION OF WOMEN DEVELOPMENT CELL**

Gender Discrimination is a systematic, unfavourable treatment of individuals based on their gender, which denies those rights, opportunities or resources within any given society. The Women Empowerment Cell (WEC) is a mandated body as per Section 3.2(15) of UGC Guidelines (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal of Sexual Harassment of women employees and students in higher educational institutions) Regulations, 2015.

In pursuance of the directions issued by the University Grants Commission and Ministry of Education, Government of India, the MP Bhoj (Open) University has set up the Women Empowerment Cell.

### **Objective**

The objective of the WEC is to provide and maintain a dignified, congenial working environment for women employees (including teaching, non-teaching and contractual workers) and students, where they can work, study and explore their potential to the fullest. They can approach the Women Development Cell in case of any grievance.

### **Composition of the Cell**

- There shall be one chairperson, who will be the senior-most female faculty of the university.
- One member should be representative of the Madhya Pradesh Higher Education department.
- One member should be the senior-most male faculty of the university.
- One member from every regional centre, preferable female member; however, if there is no female member then a male member be appointed.

### **Who can approach the WEC?**

Any person including faculty, staff, contractual, temporary, casual worker and student of MP Bhoj (Open) University can approach the WEC.