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GOVERNANCE

- Governance can be defined as ‘the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented.
- **Good governance** means efficiently managing public affairs and resources in a transparent, accountable, and participatory manner to serve society’s needs and citizens’ well-being while upholding the rule of law.
- Good governance aims to ensure that decisions are made fairly and justly, resources are used efficiently, and the rights of individuals and groups are respected.

The various elements of good governance include:

- **Rule of Law** - A fair and just legal framework that applies equally to all citizens, including those in power.
- **Participation** - Involving citizens in decision-making processes, allowing them to express their views and contribute to policymaking.
- **Transparency** - Making information about government actions, decisions, and financial matters easily accessible to the public.
- **Accountability** - Ensuring that government officials and institutions are responsible for their actions and decisions and that mechanisms are in place to hold them answerable.
- **Responsiveness** - Government institutions should be responsive to the needs and concerns of citizens, addressing their grievances and providing timely services.
- **Equity and Inclusiveness** - Ensuring that policies and decisions consider the needs of all segments of society, without discrimination.
- **Effectiveness and Efficiency** - Government processes should be streamlined and resources utilized efficiently to achieve desired outcomes.
- **Consensus Orientation** - Encouraging a spirit of cooperation and consensus-building among different stakeholders.

Initiatives taken by the Himachal Pradesh government to improve governance include:

- Fighting Corruption and Criminalization of Politics:
- **The H.P State Vigilance and Anti-Corruption Bureau** – It was established in 2006 through the amalgamation of the previous anti-corruption unit.
- It began functioning as an independent entity at that time.
- **The H.P Lokayukta Act of 2014** – It plays a significant role in addressing corruption cases and

suggesting appropriate actions.

- This institution acts as a potent deterrent against corruption, enhancing transparency within the system and making government administration more accessible to citizens.
- **Ensuring Service Delivery:**
 - ❖ **Jan Manch** – On June 3rd, 2018, the state government initiated a program called “Jan Manch” with the primary objective of facilitating direct communication with the public and promptly addressing their concerns.
 - ✓ This initiative took place on the first Sunday of every month and rotated through the assembly constituencies within each district.
 - ✓ During these events, all relevant district officers were present to offer immediate solutions to public complaints.
 - ❖ **Lok-Mitra Kendra** – The Web-enabled Government-Citizen Interface, named **Lok Mitra** is one such step of the Himachal Pradesh State Government to ensure good governance.
 - ✓ It aims to make people aware of government policies and programmes, and also provide an interface to interact with various government functionaries and solicit their active and direct contribution to the process of governance.
 - ❖ **The H.P Public Service Guarantee Act in 2011** - It is enacted by Himachal Pradesh to provide time-bound citizen-centric services to the public of the state.
 - ✓ It notified 27 departments and 188 services for the time-bound services.
 - ❖ **HIMBHOOMI AND HIMRIS** – It is a computerization of land records and registration of deeds.
 - ✓ The system is being implemented in all the district headquarters in which data of land records will be entered into computers for future access.
 - ❖ **Sugam** - A comprehensive information service that provides easy access to a wide range of essential citizen services.
 - ✓ These services include accessing the High Court cause list, Vidhan Sabha’s list of businesses, public utility forms, examination results, elector registration, online police

complaints, and a helpline for pensioners.

- ❖ **Sevottam Model** - The term “Sevottam” is formed by blending two Hindi words: “Seva” (service) and “Uttam” (excellence).

- ✓ The primary goal of the Sevottam model is to enhance the quality of public service delivery within the state.

➤ **To Promote Transparency:**

- ❖ **Mukhya Mantri Seva Sankalp Helpline 1100**

- The proactive outreach initiative aims to assist citizens effectively by offering a helpline service through the Citizen Call Centre and other suitable channels. These services cater to various citizen needs, including:

- ✓ Registering grievances
- ✓ Capturing suggestions and citizens’ demands
- ✓ Providing information about government schemes
- ✓ Escalating matters to relevant authorities for timely solutions
- ✓ Through the toll-free number 1100, citizens across the state can proactively lodge complaints.
- ✓ These complaints are then digitally recorded on the portal and monitored until they are satisfactorily addressed.
- ✓ The closure of complaints occurs within the software only after receiving confirmation from the individual who lodged the complaint.

- ❖ **HP MyGov** - This is a new platform that uses technology to connect the government and citizens. It’s aimed at helping the state of Himachal Pradesh develop and grow inclusively.

- ✓ Through MyGov, people can easily share their ideas and feedback with the government.
- ✓ The government considers these inputs seriously and combines them with other contributions to make the state and the country better.

- ❖ **Right to Information Act 2005** - It was enacted in 2005 to make the citizens more aware of the workings of the administration by bringing transparency to the system.

Challenges to Good Governance in the State:

- **Criminalization of Politics** - The unhealthy nexus between politicians, civil servants, and business interests undermines the notions of good governance.
- **Corruption** - A major impediment to development and good governance, diverting government attention and resources.
- **Lack of Awareness** - A significant portion of the state’s population possesses minimal to no awareness regarding the numerous programs or initiatives related to effective governance.
- **Effective Delivery in Remote Areas** - The challenge of providing services to people’s doorsteps due to the challenging terrain in Himachal Pradesh.
- **Lack of Digital Infrastructure** - Only cities or some towns have adequate digital infrastructure to promote digital services to the citizens of the state.
- **Digital Divide in Himachal Pradesh** - Due to a lack of digital literacy Himachal Pradesh has a high digital divide.
 - ❖ E.g., Only around 27.17% of schools in Himachal Pradesh have internet access.

Way Forward:

- **Strengthen Legal Framework** - Enforce stricter laws against individuals with criminal records running for political office and bar them from participating in elections.
- **Transparency and Accountability** - Implement measures to enhance transparency in government operations and hold officials accountable for corrupt practices.
- **Information Dissemination** - Use various media channels, including radio, television, and social media, to inform the public about government programs and initiatives.
- **Infrastructure Development** - Invest in improving infrastructure, including roads and telecommunications, to ensure that remote areas are accessible for government services.
- **Public-Private Partnerships** - Collaborate with private sector companies to expand digital infrastructure in underserved regions.
- **Digital Literacy Programs:** Launch digital literacy programs for citizens, especially in remote areas, to bridge the digital divide.

Good governance is an ongoing process, and Himachal Pradesh’s commitment to transparency, accountability, and public participation will be essential in achieving its goals of efficient and equitable governance.

HIMACHAL PUBLIC SERVICE GUARANTEE ACT 2011

Himachal Public Service Guarantee Act 2011 was enacted by the government of Himachal Pradesh to provide time bond citizen-centric services to the public of the state.

- Currently there are 23 departments that are providing 119 services notified under the Public Service Guarantee Act.

Key provisions of the act:

- **Right to Obtain Services Within Stipulated Time-Bound** – Under the act, the designated officer shall provide the services notified under the acts to the eligible person within the prescribed time limit.
- **Right to Appeal** – Under the act if any person who is not provided with the service within the stipulated time limit or whose application is rejected by the designated office can file an appeal to “the first appellate authority”.
 - ❖ **2nd Appellate Authority** – If the appellant is not satisfied with the judgement of the first appellate authority, he or she can again register an appeal to the second appellate authority within 60 days from the date of the decision to the first appellate authority.
 - ❖ **Penalty** – If and designated officer is convicted guilty, the second appellate authority may impose a lump sum penalty, which shall not be less than Rs 1000 but not more than Rs 5000.
 - ✓ The second appellate authority may order to give any amount as compensation to the appellant out of the penalty.
 - ❖ **Protection of Action Taken in Good Faith** – No legal action can be taken against anyone or anything for actions performed in good faith under this act or its associated rules.
 - ❖ **Bar of Jurisdiction** – Orders made by designated officers, the first appellate authority, or the second appellate authority are immune to challenge in any court or before any other officer/authority.

Benefits of the HP Public Service Guarantee Act in Governance:

- **Government Assurance of Timely Service Delivery** - The PSGA serves as a government commitment to ensure the effective and timely delivery of services.
 - ❖ **Establishment of a Redressal Channel** - By opening a channel for redressal, the PSGA helps streamline administrative processes, leading to

more efficient service delivery and prompt issue resolution.

- ❖ **Enhanced Transparency** - The PSGA brings greater transparency to the application process for public services.
 - ✓ Transactions are meticulously recorded in digital formats, and service providers are obligated to issue receipts to applicants.
- ❖ **Mechanism for Holding Errant Public Servants Accountable** - The act provides a mechanism for holding public servants accountable when they fail to deliver services as required, creating a strong incentive for timely and proper service delivery.
- ❖ **Expedited Service Delivery** - PSGA ensures that services are delivered within defined timeframes, resulting in quicker and more efficient service delivery.
- ❖ **Reduced Risk of Corruption** - PSGA’s transparency measures and adherence to set timeframes play a role in reducing the likelihood of corruption.

In conclusion, the Himachal Public Service Guarantee Act of 2011 stands as a significant legislative effort by the Government of Himachal Pradesh to ensure the timely delivery of citizen-centric services to the public.

RIGHT TO INFORMATION ACT OF 2005

The Right to Information Act was passed in the year 2005. This law empowers Indian citizens to seek any accessible information from a Public Authority and makes the Government and its functionaries more accountable and responsible.

Objectives of the Right to Information (RTI) Act 2005:

- Allow the citizens of the country to question the working government.
- Promote transparency and answerability of the working government.
- Check corruption prevailing in the government to serve the citizens better.
- Make citizens well-informed about the functioning of the government system.

The main features of the Act:

- **Right to Information** - Any Indian citizen can seek any information from any public authority without specifying any reason.
- **Information in Stipulate Time** - Requisite

information has to be punished by the public information officer within the specified time limit which can be denied only under exceptions provided in Act itself.

- **Bodies Covered** – Egg applies to all government departments, corporations, urban local bodies, Panchayati Raj institutions, etc.
- **Adequate Number of PIOs** – The public authorities are required to designate an adequate number of public information officers to provide information and assist public information officers at the sub-divisional or sub-district level.
- **Penalty** – The commissions, both at the central and the state level are empowered to impose a penalty at the rate of Rs 250 per day subject to a maximum of Rs 25000 on erring public information officers in cases where;
 - ❖ The PIO has without any Reasonable explanation refused to receive an application for information;
 - ❖ has not furnished information within the time specified
 - ❖ malafidely denied the request for information, etc.
 - ❖ In certain cases, the Commission can recommend disciplinary action against an erring Public Information Officer.
- **Exceptions Under the Act** – Section 22 of the RTI Act has overriding effects over other laws, including the Official Secrets Act.
 - ❖ Therefore, the RTI Act shall take precedence over any contradictions with regard to the Official Secrets Act regarding the disclosure of information.
 - ❖ However, Sections 8 and 9 of the RTI Act permit the government to withhold information.

The various challenges associated with the RTI Act 2005 in Himachal Pradesh are:

- **Issues on the Public Side:**
 - ❖ **Misuse of RTI** - Because the RTI law doesn't require people to have a valid reason or a direct interest in a matter, some individuals misuse it for personal gain rather than using it for the public good.
 - ✓ E.g., according to a study in Himachal Pradesh, in 51% of cases, the information sought under the RTI Act was used for personal matters and not in the larger public interest.
 - ❖ **Low Public Awareness** - Inadequate public

awareness results in difficulties when filing applications, as there is a lack of user guides.

- ✓ The RTI Act allows applications in writing or electronically, but insufficient efforts have been made to facilitate electronic submissions.
- ❖ **Poor Information Quality** - The study has shown that there is no standardized process for providing information and poor information quality is provided.
- **Issues on the Government Side:**
 - ❖ **Non-serious authority** - The authorities in Himachal Pradesh demonstrate a lack of commitment when it comes to providing information to applicants under the RTI Act and to the general public.
 - ❖ **Inadequate training of PIOs** – According to the study, 56% of 160 Public Information Officers and Assistant Public Information Officers think that the training they receive isn't good enough for dealing with legal matters effectively.
 - ❖ **Obsolete Record Management Guidelines** - Inefficient record management and data collection from field offices cause delays in processing RTI applications.
 - ❖ **Lack of Monitoring and Review Mechanism:** The absence of a centralized database for RTI applicants and their requests, along with responses from information providers, hinders accurate and timely compliance.

Way Forward:

- **Raise Awareness** - Implement extensive awareness campaigns to educate the public about the proper use of RTI and its significance for the greater good.
 - ❖ Provide user guides and facilitate electronic submissions to make the process more accessible.
- **Promote Accountability** - Encourage citizens to hold those who misuse the RTI Act accountable for their actions, ensuring that the law's integrity is upheld.
- **Enhanced Training** - Improve the quality of training for Public Information Officers (PIOs) to equip them with the necessary skills to handle legal matters effectively.
- **Modernize Record Management** - Revise record management guidelines and practices, emphasizing digitization, cataloguing, and indexing to streamline the retrieval of information.
- **Centralized Database** - Develop a centralized database to monitor and review RTI applications,

requests, and responses.

- ✓ This will aid in ensuring accurate and timely compliance with the RTI Act's provisions and improve accountability.

Overall, the RTI Act remains a valuable tool in strengthening democracy by fostering transparency and accountability, but its full potential can be realized through collaborative efforts from both the public and the government to address the current challenges.

PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTION

Panchayati Raj is a system of local governance with three levels: Gram Panchayat (Village level), Panchayat Samiti (Block level), and Zila Parishad (District level).

- The 73rd Amendment Act of 1992 gave constitutional status to Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs).
- The Himachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act was enacted in 1994.
- Himachal Pradesh currently has 12 Zila Parishads, 81 Panchayat Samities, and 3,615 Gram Panchayats.

Exemplifying the Successful Implementation of Panchayati Raj in Himachal Pradesh:

- **Periodic Elections** – The Himachal Pradesh government successfully conducts the periodic elections for the various panchayats of the states.
- **Organization of Gram Sabha** – Every panchayat of the state is provided with the formation of Gram-Sabha.
 - ❖ Additionally, Gram Sabha meetings are planned to be conducted in every district during January, April, July, and October, with the quorum for regular Gram Sabha meetings reduced from one-third to one-fourth.
- **Reservation for SCs and STs** – Seats are reserved for the Scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in every panchayat and at every level as per their population in the panchayats.
- **Reservation for Women** – Himachal Pradesh successfully reserved 50% of seats for women in every panchayat of the state.
- **Formation of Finance Commission** – The Governor of the state established the State Finance Commission every five years to review the financial positions of the Panchayats.
 - ❖ The Sixth State Finance Commission was constituted by the Himachal Pradesh Government on 22nd August 2020. The Commission report covers a period of 5 years from 1st April 2022

to 31st March 2027.

- **Establishment of State Election Commission** – The Himachal Pradesh govt also established the SEC as per the provisions of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act.
- **Devolution of Powers** – PRI in the state is provided with powers and authorities to enable them to function as an institution of self-government.

Even after conferring the constitutional status and protection through the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act, the performance of the Panchayati Raj Institutions has not been satisfactory and not up to the expected level.

The various reasons for this sub-optimal performance are:

- **Lack of Adequate Devolution** – The state has not taken adequate steps to dissolve adequate fiscal powers, even after many recommendations of the State Finance Commission.
 - ❖ E.g., it is paradoxical that most of the functions assigned to Panchayat Samities are being performed by the extension officers of various Departments posted in the development blocks but the elected members of the Panchayat Samitis have no control over the working of these extension officers.
- **Limited Autonomy and State Oversight** - Gram Panchayats have limited control over their lone employee, while in Panchayat Samitis, the Block Development Officer (BDO) serves as the Ex-Officio Secretary, appointed by the State Government.
 - ❖ Zila Parishads in Himachal Pradesh, established after 1996, has a basic staff, including a Stenographer, Clerk, Driver, and Peon, all managed by the State Government.
- **Tied Nature of Funds** - In Himachal Pradesh Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishads have no power to impose any taxes. In the case of Gram Panchayats, it could impose house tax and property tax up to a limited extent.
 - ❖ Thus, Panchayati Raj institutions in Himachal Pradesh are dependent on grants received from the State Government.
- **Reluctance to Use Fiscal Power** – An important power devolved to Gram- Panchayat is the right to levy taxes, but very few panchayats use their fiscal power to levy and collect the taxes.
- **Creation of Parallel Bodies** – Often parallel bodies are created for supposedly speedy implementation and greater accountability. However, there is little

evidence to show that such parallel bodies have avoided the evils including that of partisan politics, sharing of spoils, corruption, and elite capture.

- **Poor Infrastructure** - A large number of gram Panchayats in the state do not have even full-time secretaries. Many panchayats do not have basic office buildings
- **Lack of Awareness** - A large number of elected representatives of Panchayati Rajasthan are semi-literate or literate and know little about their roles and responsibilities, programme, procedure, and system.
- **Lack of Digital Infrastructure** - According to the e-Swaraj portal of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, out of 3615 Panchayats in Himachal Pradesh, only 2031 i.e., 56% of Panchayats are connected to the internet.

SCHEMES RELATED TO THE WELFARE OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Persons with disabilities (PWD) are those who have long-term impairment in terms of physical, mental, sensory and psychological conditions which can stop their equal participation in all aspects of society if met with various barriers.

- According to Census 2011, Himachal Pradesh has around 97,284 people who come under the definition of persons with disabilities.

The challenges faced by PwDs are:

- **Inaccessible Infrastructure** - Many public spaces, buildings, and transportation systems are not designed to accommodate people with disabilities, making it difficult for them to move around freely.
- **Lack of Assistive Devices** - Access to essential assistive devices like wheelchairs, hearing aids, and visual aids can be limited due to cost or availability
- **Stigma and Discrimination** - Negative attitudes and stereotypes about disabilities can lead to discrimination, social exclusion, and marginalization.
- **Limited Employment Opportunities** - PwDs often face difficulties in finding suitable employment due to biases and inaccessible workplaces.
- **Inaccessible Education** - Many educational institutions lack the necessary facilities and resources to accommodate students with disabilities, making it challenging for them to access quality education.
- **Inaccessible Healthcare** - Medical facilities, equipment, and information may not be accessible to PwDs, leading to inadequate healthcare services.
- **Attitudinal Barriers** - Healthcare providers may hold

biases or lack proper training in treating individuals with disabilities.

- **Inadequate Communication Support** - PwDs who have speech or communication impairments may face challenges in expressing themselves and accessing information.
- **Inaccessible Public Transport** - Many forms of public transportation are not designed to accommodate individuals with disabilities, limiting their mobility.

The various schemes implemented by govt of Himachal Pradesh to empower the PwDs are:

- **Himachal Pradesh Vocational Rehabilitation for the Persons with Disabilities Scheme 2007** - The "Himachal Pradesh Vocational Rehabilitation for Persons with Disabilities Scheme 2007" is a program that was initiated by the government of Himachal Pradesh, to provide vocational rehabilitation and support to individuals with disabilities.
 - ❖ The scheme aimed to empower persons with disabilities by helping them acquire skills, gain employment, and lead independent lives.
- **ASEEM (A Scheme for Enabling, Empowering and Mainstreaming of the Specially Abled)** - Govt of H.P. started the ASEEM scheme with the objectives to;
 - ❖ prevention, early detection, screening of disabilities & provision of disability cards;
 - ❖ Programme for awareness generation on disabilities;
 - ❖ Programme for research on disability issues;
 - ❖ Scheme of scholarships to students with disabilities;
 - ❖ Scheme of special education for visually, speech & hearing-impaired children;
 - ❖ Scheme of rehabilitation for mentally challenged children/adults;
 - ❖ Scheme of grants in aid to NGOs working for persons with disabilities.
- **Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016** - The Act aims to provide equal opportunities to persons with disabilities in India.
 - ❖ The Act expanded the criteria for disabilities and added more types of disabilities to the list.
 - ❖ The Act also provides for establishing a National Commission for Persons with Disabilities.
 - ❖ The Act also provides for establishing State Commissions for Persons with Disabilities.
- **Free Travelling Facilities in HRTC Buses** -

Handicapped persons are allowed free travel facilities within the State & blind personnel are allowed free travel even outside the State.

- **Marriage Grants to PwDs** – The Department of Social Justice and Empowerment is providing grants for those persons with disabilities who attain manageable age.
 - ❖ There are two sets of grants as per the degree of disability; one who has 40% to 74% disability will be granted Rs 8000 and those who have 75% to 100% disability will be given Rs 15000.
- **Educational Scholarships** – The state government is giving monthly scholarships to disabled students from 1st standard to postgraduate degrees and courses.
 - ❖ A person, whose family's income is not more than rupees Rs 60,000, is eligible for the scholarship.
- **State Disability Pension** - This scheme is known as Himachal Pradesh Social Security Pension in the form of Rs 400 per month, and is administered by the Department of Social Justice and Empowerment of Himachal Pradesh.
 - ❖ The individual with a disability should be of any age, with a disability percentage of 40% or more, and the income sources should not exceed Rs 15,000 per month, to be eligible under the scheme.
- **Special Ability Rehabilitation Centres (DRCs)** - Two Special ability Rehabilitation Centres are being run through the District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) Hamirpur and Indian Red Cross Society, Dharamshala respectively.
- **Post Matric Scholarship to Disabled Students** - Students with a disability exceeding 40%, as certified by the competent state medical authority, are eligible for a full scholarship if their family's total annual income does not exceed ₹2, 50,000 from all sources.

SCHEMES RELATED TO WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Women constitute 49.28% of Himachal Pradesh's total population as per the 2011 census. The empowerment of women is essential for the overall development of society, the state, and the nation.

Women empowerment is required because:

- **Larger Part of Workforce** - Women constitute 63% of the rural agriculture-based workforce in Himachal Pradesh.

- **Economic Role** - They contribute to the state GDP through self-help groups, paying taxes, and contributing to other manufacturing processes.
- **To Ensure Safety and Security** - It will help to reduce various crimes against women like sexual harassment, and domestic violence by introducing them to their rights.
- **Fulfil Constitutional Obligation** - It will really fulfil the notion of equality enshrined in the Constitution of India.

Various Initiatives Started by the State Government for Women's Empowerment are:

- **Beti Hai Anmol Yojana** – This program is designed for families with up to two girl children belonging to economically disadvantaged backgrounds (BPL families).
 - ❖ Following the birth of each girl child, the government department deposits Rs 10000 into a designated post office or bank account.
 - ❖ These girls are eligible for scholarships ranging from Rs 300 to Rs 1200 throughout their 1st to 12th grades.
 - ❖ These scholarships can be used for expenses related to books, clothing, and other necessities.
- **Mother-Teresa Asahaya Matri Sambhal Yojna** - The objective of this scheme is to provide financial assistance to widow women for educating and looking after their children up to two children till they attain the age of 18 years.
 - ❖ In this came women get Rs 5000 per annum per child.
- **Vishesh Mahila Uthaan Yojna** - Vishesh Mahila Uthaan Yojana was launched by the Women and Child Development Department Government of Himachal Pradesh.
 - ❖ This scheme is specially launched for the rehabilitation of physically and sexually abused women through technical and vocational training.
 - ❖ Under this scheme beneficiary, women are provided vocational training, a monthly stipend, a financial loan to be self-employed at a 4% rate of interest and a subsidy of Rs. 10,000.
- **Sashakt Mahila Rin Yojna** - The 'Sashakt Mahila Rin Yojna' is an initiative of Himachal Pradesh State Cooperative Bank (HPSCB), which will provide loans to women for pursuing their entrepreneurial dreams, engage in livelihood activities, fulfil their day-to-day needs and uplift their families.
 - ❖ Under the scheme, the bank offers credit of

Rs 21,000, Rs 51,000 and Rs 1,01,000 at a relatively low-interest rate of 8.51 per cent.

- **Mukhyamantri Vidhwa Evam Ekal Nari Awas Yojna** - A state government scheme to provide financial assistance to eligible widows and single women for the construction of houses.
 - ❖ A sum of Rs 1.5 lakh is provided as financial assistance under this scheme to about 7,000 women with an annual income of less than Rs 2 lakh per annum.
- **Mukhya Mantri Swawlamban Yojana** - The state government has also launched Mukhya Mantri Swawlamban Yojana under which provision has been made to provide a 30 per cent subsidy to women for setting up their ventures.
- **Self-Employment Assistance for Women** - Under this scheme 5,000 are provided to women having an annual income less than 35,000 for carrying income-generating activities.
- **Rehabilitation Support to Minor Victims of Rape & Child Abuse** - The objective of this scheme is to restore the self-confidence and dignity of a minor victim of rape and child abuse through intensive counselling, financial security, skill upgradation, rehabilitation and livelihood support.
- **Safety and Security** - In 2018, the state govt launched a 24/7 'Gudiya' helpline, for quick police response to cases of crimes against women.
 - ❖ It also launched 'Shakti Button'- a mobile app linked to police control rooms for ensuring the safety of women in the state

Assessment of the Outcomes of Diverse Policies and Initiatives Aimed at Empowering Women:

- **Increased Participation in Labour Force** - The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act boosted women's participation in Himachal Pradesh from 13% to 46%.
 - ❖ In the state, women make up 63% of the agriculture-based workforce, while the national average is only 27%.
- **Accessibility to Health Institutes** - Around 82 per cent of villages have a health sub-centre within 3 kilometres, 93 per cent of which have auxiliary nurse midwives on staff.
- **Reductions in child marriage** - In 2010, Himachal Pradesh instituted the "Beti Hai Anmol program" to provide an incentive for girls' educational attainment and delayed marriage.
 - ❖ As a result, the percentage of women (aged 20-

24) who were married before the age of 18 is 8.6% in H.P. whereas it is 20% in Haryana and more than 30% in Rajasthan.

- **Improvement in Education Enrollment** - These reforms helped the state boost literacy rates among women to 88 per cent and raised school enrollment among girls aged 7-11 to 99.8 per cent. The state also maintains one of the lowest dropout rates in all of India.
- **Decision-making** - Among married women, 90.8 per cent of those in Himachal Pradesh reported participating in household decisions, compared to 84 per cent for all of India. (National Family Health Survey-4)

But apart from all these efforts, there are still many problems that are hindering the overall development and empowerment of women.

The Challenges are:

- **Child marriages** - Despite tall claims by the government to curb child marriages, there are 205 cases recorded in five backward districts of Sirmour between 2015 and 2020.
- **Lack of job opportunities** - Women have less job elasticity as compared to men which reduces their economic independence and empowerment.
 - ❖ E.g. despite being Asia's largest industrial hub, due to its locality to Baddi-Nalagrh and other areas of Solan, the family of girls avoid her movement to these industrial areas due to various concerns.
 - ❖ In agriculture as well their work is restricted to sowing, weed-pulling, thrashing, etc.
- **Less wages** - Despite various laws in force, women get less wages for the same work in many fields in the state.
 - ❖ According to the 68th report of NSSO, the average wage earned by daily wagers in non-public work is Rs. 467/day for men and Rs. 411/day for women in rural areas. It is Rs. 534/day for men and Rs. 450/day for women in urban areas.
- **Lack of land holding** - Though women's participation in the agriculture-based labour force increased significantly, very few women hold the ownership of agricultural land.
 - ❖ According to National Family Health Survey-4, only 9% of women in H.P. hold land ownership.
- **Social constraints** - Being patriarchal in nature society still restrict the movement of women for job

seeking outside town or state.

- ❖ Further higher education of girls has been seen as illogical because girls are considered as “Paraya-Dhan”.
- ❖ After marriage, it is a woman who has to leave her job if such a situation arises.
- **“Sarpanch-Pati” culture** - Though women are given reservation in the Panchayati Raj institution, the real power of the post is enjoyed and practiced by her husband or any male member of the family.

All these issues and challenges restrict women’s empowerment in the state in a true sense. To overcome these issues various approaches should be adopted:

- **Community participation** – Policies and schemes will become effective only when they are accepted at the ground level by society. Hence educating and informing the society about benefits of women’s empowerment is the most effective tool to overcome these challenges.
- **Strict implementation of laws** – The child marriage act and other laws in force should be implemented strictly to reduce the occurrence of child marriage and other crimes against women.
- **Promoting Women Self-Help Groups** – As of now 24500 self-help groups have been formed under the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) in the state.
 - ❖ The main objective of the SHGs is to provide a platform for women to sell their products so that they can be financially strengthened.
 - ❖ Further women of SHGs can also provide financial, emotional, and health-related help to each other.
- **Equal access to land ownership** – Girl child should also provide the land and property ownership in the father’s property, which makes them financially empowered.
 - ❖ Recent amendment to the 51-year-old legislation ‘Himachal Pradesh Ceiling on Land Holdings Act of 1972’ is a welcoming move of the govt.
- **Counter Pradhan-Pati syndrome** – Using various techniques like audits, training sessions, etc., it should be ensured that women representatives take decisions related to their posts by themselves.
 - ❖ Strict legal action should be adopted to counter the Pradhan-Pati syndrome.

Women empowerment is a target under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) which we have to achieve by

2030. Though we are quite ahead of the national level in various indicators of women empowerment, Himachal Pradesh still has to walk a long way to achieve this goal. With “Sabka sath sabka vikas” approach, we will eventually cover this distance.

SCHEMES RELATED TO CHILDREN’S WELFARE

Himachal Pradesh has launched numerous programs to enhance the well-being and development of its children. These initiatives encompass health, nutrition, education, and protection against exploitation.

The various schemes are:

- **Beti Hai Anmol Yojana** - Beti Hai Anmol is the prominent scheme of the Himachal Pradesh Government. It was launched in July 2010. This scheme is a welfare scheme to provide financial assistance to girl children.
 - ❖ The scheme is for girls of BPL Families. Up to two girls in a family. The department will deposit rupees 21,000/- per girl child to the post office or bank account.
 - ❖ The motive is to make girls self-reliant for necessary financial assistance and education.
- **Mukhya Mantri Sukh-Ashray Yojana** – The govt started the scheme for children in need of care (orphans, semi-orphans and specially-abled).
 - ❖ All children/persons up to the age of 27 years covered under the scheme, will be known as “children of the state” and the state government will look after them by following the principle of “Sarkar hee Martha Sarkar Hee Pita”.
 - ❖ Children covered under the scheme will be taken out for educational tours outside the state once a year.
 - ❖ A Mukhya Mantri Sukh-Ashray Kosh with the provision of Rs. 101 crores have been established for this scheme.
- **Mukhya Mantri Vidyarthi Protsahan Yojana** – Under the scheme eligible poor children will be given education loans at the interest rate of 1% to pursue engineering, medical, management, Ph.D., ITI/Polytechnics, Pharmacy, Nursing, and midwifery etc.
- **Scheme for Adolescent Girls** - This aims to support school Adolescent Girls of 11- 14 years of age to back to formal schooling or bridge learning, improving their nutritional and health status on the basis of 90:10 between Centre and State Government.
- **Mukhya Mantri Surakshit Bachpan Abhiyan** – Under the scheme, the people of the state, especially

the children, will be made aware of the provisions of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act 2012 (POSCO).

- **Mukhya Mantri Bal Udhar Yojana** - Under the scheme, financial assistance is provided to children after leaving Child Care Institutions, after completing the age of 18 years to pursue Higher/professional education.
- **Saksham Gudiya Board** – The primary goal of the scheme is to provide policy recommendations aimed at empowering girls and safeguarding their rights.
 - ❖ This includes analyzing existing laws, policies, and initiatives, as well as assessing the effectiveness of programs implemented by various government departments to protect and uplift girls and adolescent girls from various forms of crime.
- **PM Poshan Scheme (Automated Reporting and Management System)** – The Himachal Pradesh government initiated the ARMS program as part of the PM Poshan scheme to promote transparency in the mid-day meal program and ensure that school children in the state receive a consistent and nutritious diet.
 - ❖ This program enables schools to report daily meal data to the government's website.



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