UN Women is the global champion for women and girls. Its establishment in 2010 offers a historic opportunity to accelerate progress for women and for societies. In India, UN Women builds on a strong foundation, taking forward the efforts of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). Working closely with the Government of India and civil society to set national standards for achieving gender equality, UN Women is an advocate for change in policy and laws. It also coordinates the UN system’s work on advancing gender equality in India.

The five priority areas for UN Women in India are:

### Expanding women’s leadership and participation

India has the largest absolute number of elected women representatives at the grassroots. Lack of awareness about their rights, insufficient family support and illiteracy can prevent them from performing their duties. UN Women and the Government of India train almost 67,000 elected women representatives to become effective leaders at all levels of local governance, starting from the Gram Sabhas (public meetings). Through the programme in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and Rajasthan, these trainings strengthen their leadership skills and their participation, enabling them to perform their roles better and make Gram Sabha meetings more vibrant. Besides training, research on a Gender Responsive Governance Index helps track

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**Women in India**

1. 32% of the population lives below the poverty line
2. Women comprise 48.3% of India’s population but only 26.1% of employed persons
3. The number of girls per 1000 boys in the 0-6 age group have declined from 971 in 1981 to 914 in 2011
4. 80% of rural women are engaged in agricultural production but only 9% own land
5. India has 1.3 million elected women representatives in local bodies, exceeding the 33% percent reservation
6. Only 10% of ministerial positions and 11% of seats in the Parliament are occupied by women
7. 39% of men and women think that it is sometimes or always justifiable for a man to beat his wife
8. Almost 2 out of 3 women reported facing incidents of sexual harassment between 2-5 times in the past year in New Delhi

**Sources:**
Enhancing women’s economic empowerment

Women often do not earn equal wages for equal work. To enhance the skills and business acumen of rural women entrepreneurs and farmers, UN Women supports women with training to develop their own enterprises and market their products.

Increasing access to public schemes also makes a difference for women workers. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) in India guarantees 100 days of paid employment to rural households per year and sets equal pay for equal work for both, men and women. An evaluation of a project under UN Women’s Fund for Gender Equality between 2009 and 2011 in select districts in Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh found a five-fold increase in dalit women accessing work under the MNREGA.

Research by UN Women helps advocate for women’s rights to land and property. A study shows that land ownership provides stability and security to women, protects them from marital violence and enhances their decision-making. Another research study found that even after the Amendment to the Hindu Succession Act, women are forced to relinquish their share in inheritance of property to maintain harmony in the family.

UN Women also supports the Ministry of Indian Overseas Affairs and Women and Child Development to ensure that women migrating to the Gulf countries have better information and rights.

Support during panchayat (village council) elections in Bihar in 2011 and Odisha in 2012 helped women candidates file nominations and manage election campaigns. This led to a rise in women’s share in panchayat leadership from 42 to 50 percent in Bihar.

Initially my identity was that of a woman confined to the realm of my household, but I have now stepped out of that threshold and have found a new platform where I can speak out my mind, express my views and do something worthwhile.

Sunita Rajawat, a Ward Panch (member of the village council) from Vanasthali Gram Panchayat (village council) in Tonk district, Rajasthan.
Engaging women as global peace builders and mediators

Women play an important role in building sustainable peace based on gender justice. UN Women trains and builds gender perspectives of UN peacekeepers and peace builders. For South Asia, UN Women has formed an Expert Group to strengthen women’s leadership that includes the creation of a global roster of women peace mediators.

Making gender equality central to national development planning and budgeting

Gender-responsive budgeting seeks to ensure that the collection and allocation of public resources is carried out in ways that are effective and contribute to advancing gender equality. Since 2008, UN Women has provided support to the Gender Responsive Budgeting cell of the Ministry of Women and Child Development. This support included organisation of 100 training workshops with government counterparts across various ministries. As a result, these ministries now have in-house expertise on gender budgeting.

Feminist economists and UN Women made recommendations to the Planning Commission on the draft approach of the 12th Five-Year Plan, arguing that inclusion needs to be embedded in the growth process. They recommended that India’s growth needed to explicitly address the constraints faced by the excluded and provide opportunities for them to be partners in growth. UN Women and some feminist economists also suggested ways in which major national schemes can be made gender sensitive. In the past as well, UN Women has engaged with the Planning Commission since the 9th Five-Year Plan to ensure that voices of women from the grassroots are heard.

Efforts have been made to better record female statistics and sharpen the quality of sex-disaggregated data in the National Census. UN Women and other UN agencies collaborate with the Office of the Registrar General of India to capture a more accurate picture of the situation of Indian women. Almost 2.5 million enumerators were trained to question women sensitively and ask the right questions. As a result of better enumeration, the provisional data of the 2011 Census has identified an improvement in female literacy rates, female population growth and overall sex ratio but a major decline in child sex ratio.
Ending violence against women and girls

Violence against women is increasing. To prevent domestic violence, UN Women, the UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women and the Lawyers Collective monitor the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005. So far, five Staying Alive reports with the National Commission for Women have tracked progress. The award winning ‘Bell Bajao’ campaign with the Breakthrough Trust urged 130 million men and boys to prevent domestic violence.

The Safe Cities Programme, in partnership with the Delhi Government, is exploring solutions and strategies to make Delhi safer for women by conducting safety audits and making infrastructure safer for women. The South Asia sub-regional component of the Secretary General’s Campaign, “UNiTE to End Violence against Women,” is being implemented to galvanize governments and civil society, and increase efforts to end violence against women.

Another programme empowers 500 widows as agents of change to reduce stigma against them and make them an integral part of national planning and data systems.

UN Women’s initiative to combat trafficking of women and girls in India in six states aims to reduce their vulnerability to trafficking.

Reporting on the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

UN Women works to take forward the key principles of CEDAW in India. Across South Asia, UN Women and the Partners for Law in Development have trained national and state level officials on the use and application of CEDAW in their work. These master trainers have gone on to train others in their respective countries.

“I am not alone, I am not an object of pity either. I am an inspiration to many others who have been through rough weather.”

Mannkunwar from Gulab Ji ka Guda in Rajasthan’s Chittorgarh District was widowed at ten years of age and deprived of her childhood. Today, she works full-time to help single women find their strength and identity.