CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION

The role of government in women empowerment in any modern democratic nation can hardly be over-emphasised. Empowerment of women is now a serious concern with all progressive countries which have an elected representative. While the concept of empowerment has evolved through many stages, succeeding and encompassing the concept of welfare and development, the role of government with regard to women development as well as empowerment has also undergone many changes.

Policy

A policy is typically described as deliberate plan of action to guide decisions and achieve rational outcome(s). However, the term may also be used to denote what is actually done, even through it is unplanned.¹

Prof Dimock and Dimock define policy as “the consciously acknowledged rules of conduct that guide administrative decisions.”²

The term may apply to government, private sector organizations and groups, and individuals. Presidential executive orders, corporate privacy policies, and parliamentary rules of order are all examples of policy. Policy differs from rules or law. Law can compel or prohibit behaviours (e.g. a law requiring the payment of taxes on income). Policy merely guides actions toward those that are most likely to achieve a desired outcome.
Policies refer to those codes of conduct adopted by the administration on the lines of which works are performed. They are free from the clash of diversified views and opinions. Policies also help the executive—the implementing authority in keeping its activities within the prescribed framework of actions. Thus, policies are the guides to the Governments and they give direction to the administrative apparatus.

**Intended Effects**

The intended effects of a policy vary widely according to the organization and the context in which they are made. Broadly, policies are typically instituted in order to avoid some negative effect that has been noticed in the organization, or to seek some positive benefit.

**Unintended Effects**

Policies frequently have side effects or unintended consequences. Because the environments that policies seek to influence or manipulate are typically complex adaptive systems (e.g. governments, societies, large companies). Making a policy change can have counterproductive results.

**Policy content**

Policies are typically promulgated through official written documents. Policy documents often come with the endorsement or signature of the executive powers within an organization to legitimize the policy and demonstrate that it is considered in force. Such documents often have standard formats that are particular to the organization issuing the policy.
While such formats differ in form, policy documents usually contain certain standard components including -

**A purpose statement:** It outlines why the organization is issuing the policy and what are the desired effect and outcome of the policy.

**An applicability and scope statement:** It describes whom the policy affects and which actions are impacted by the policy. Applicability and scope is used to focus the policy on only the desired targets and avoid unintended consequences where possible.

**An effective date:** This indicates when the policy comes into force. Retroactive policies are rare, but can be found.

**A responsibilities section:** It indicates which parties and organizations are responsible for carrying out individual policy statements.

**Policy statements:** These indicate the specific regulations, requirements, or modifications or organizational behaviour that the policy is creating. Policy statements are diverse depending on the organization and intent and may take almost any form.

Some policies may contain additional sections, including-

**Background:** It states any reasons, history, and intent that led to the creation of the policy, which may be listed as motivating factors. This information is often quite valuable when policies must be evaluated or used in ambiguous situations, just as the intent of a law can be useful to a court when deciding a case that involves that law.
**Definitions:** They provide clear and unambiguous note on terms, concepts found in the policy document.

**Types of policy**

Policy addresses the intent of the organization, whether government, business, professional, or voluntary. Policy is intended to affect the 'real' world by guiding the decisions that are made. Whether they are formally written or not, most organizations have identified policies.

Policies may be classified in different ways. The following are the major types of policies broken down by their effect on members of the organization.

**Distributive policies**

Distributive policies extend goods and services to members of an organization, as well as distributing the costs of the goods and services amongst the members of the organization. Examples include government policies that impact spending for welfare, public education, highways, and public safety.

**Regulatory policies**

Regulatory policies, or mandates, limit the discretion of individuals and agencies. These policies are generally thought to be best applied when good behaviour can be easily defined and bad behaviour can be easily regulated and punished through fines or sanctions.
Constituent policies

Constituent policies create executive power entities, or deal with laws. Constituent policies also deal with Fiscal Policy in some circumstances.

Miscellaneous policies

Policies are dynamic. They are not just static lists of goals or laws. Policy blueprints have to be implemented, often having unexpected results. When the term policy is used, it may also refer to official Government policy (legislation or guidelines that govern how decisions should be put into operation). In the operational level things may differ significantly from what actually is the stated policy. This difference is sometimes caused by political compromise over policy, while in other situations it is caused by lack of policy implementation and enforcement. Implementing policy may have unexpected results, stemming from a policy whose reach extends further than the problem it was originally crafted to address. Formation of policies should be within the constitutional framework in accordance with the country. It may take care of social traditions, customs, usages, conventions and public opinion.

Agencies involved in policy making: Policy is the result of diverse views and discussions forwarded by various institutions and organs of the Governments. Prof. Gladden in his book “Essentials of Public Administration”, has given the process and level of policy formulation in the modern countries-
Policy framed by the legislature is the vital and broad policy. Executive implements these policies. Administrative policy, on the other hand, is concerned with the determination and establishment of suitable machinery and procedure for implementation of the legislative policies. Administrative policy sets the time frame and programme of activities for guidance of the staff through rules and regulations. Since policy making is political act, one aspect of the dichotomy of politics and administration is that politics is concerned with policy formulation, setting the goals or making laws whereas administration executes that policy or implements those laws. Today the civil servants play the role of technicians in the process of policy formulation. One is concerned with the end, the other with the means or the instrumentality by which the end is achieved. 3

Policy formation in India: Cabinet is the key policy making institution in India. In India, there are several policy making organs which perform their job at different levels.

The main policy making organs in India

Legislature: Legislature is the supreme and final authority in policy formulation. The role of Legislature is to influence the policy making process, to regulate the policy and to vote in favour or against the policy
placed on the floor of the Legislature by the ministries. However, it is not essential for every policy to get legislative assent.

**The Cabinet and Ministries:** The cabinet is the core body in policy formulation in India. Policies originate from the cabinet. The minister-in-charge of every ministry places policy agenda in the cabinet meetings for discussion. The chief minister or the Prime minister, as the case may be, occupies the pivotal position in the policy making exercise.

**Judiciary:** Though not directly concerned with the policy formulation mechanism, the Judiciary influences the formation of policy through (i) judicial review and (ii) advisory powers of the Supreme Court as provided under Article 143 of the constitution.

Planning Commission and National Development Council, Bureaucracy, Political parties, Pressure groups, Mass media and press also play significant role in policy formulation in India.

**Empowerment:** Empowerment as a concept has been defined in many ways. The concept originated from debates on education in Latin America in the 1970s, especially in the works of Paulo Freire(1970,1973,1985). He proposed that the poor could be enabled to challenge the power structure and take control of their lives through the method of consciousness raising. Social movements world over then appropriated the term empowerment. It became the most commonly used concept of development agencies and also feminist definition of politics.
The term empowerment also refers to a range of activities from individual self assertion to collective resistance, protest and mobilization that challenge basic power relations. For individuals and groups where class, caste, ethnicity and gender determine their access to power, their empowerment begins when they not only recognize the systematic forces that oppress them, but act to change existing power relationships. Empowerment, thus, is a process aimed at changing the nature and direction of systematic forces which marginalize women and other marginalized sections in a given context.

Viewed from the women side, empowerment means the manifestation of redistribution of power that challenges patriarchal ideology and male domination. It is both a process and a result of the process. It is a transformation of the structures and institutions that reinforces and perpetuates gender discrimination. It is a process that enables women to gain access to and control of material as well as informational resources. Empowerment is a process of awareness and capacity building leading to greater participation and greater decision making power and control and to transformative action.

Empowerment is also defined as “a social process enabling people, individually or in groups, to become strong enough to participate within, share in the control of and influence the social structure in which they live.”
Women empowerment as mentioned in the title relates to the process which seeks to build the awareness and capacity level of women in order to enable them for larger and meaningful participation in decision making process of the society and also for engendering positive transformation.

The process of empowerment begins from women’s self consciousness, from the belief about herself and her rights, capacities and self image and awareness of her gender and other sociological and political forces acting on her.

A Brief history of women empowerment initiatives in India

The present status of women empowerment in India has traversed many distances since independence of the country. Persistent demands from women and other voluntary organizations, discussion and resolutions taken in many national and international platforms have influenced major policy decisions of our country with regard to women empowerment.

1. The first five year plan emphasized that adequate services needed to be promoted for women welfare to enable her to fulfill her legitimate role in the family and the community. It mooted the idea of well organized department in the state to initiate comprehensive programmes for women and child welfare. The plan rightly recognized that malnutrition is the primary cause of high infant and maternal mortality in the state. It undertook to develop school feeding schemes for children and creation of nutrition sections in
the state public health departments, maternity and child health centres and family planning.

2. The second plan recognised the problem of women workers and identified that women workers suffer from social prejudices and physical disabilities and are less organized than men. In an effort to provide supportive services to women workers, the plan stated that women should be protected against injurious work, should receive maternity benefit and crèches for children. The plan also recommended equal pay for equal work for women, provision of facilities for training women to compete for higher jobs and expansion of opportunities for part time employment.

3. The third plan stressed upon expansion of girls, education, condensed courses for adult women and social welfare services for women in the rural area. Provision of services for maternal and child welfare, health education, nutrition and family planning was reemphasized as in the second plan.

4. The fourth plan put optimum stress on women education. It made non governmental organizations do the major work in social welfare sector for women. The outlay in family planning was stepped up to to reduce the birth rate from 40 to 25 per 1000 through mass education and motivation with active cooperation of voluntary organizations and local leadership. High priority was
accorded to immunization of pre school children and supplementary diet for children and expectant and nursing mothers.

5. In the fifth plan, priority was given to training women in need of care and protection, women from low income families, needy women and dependent children and working women. Programme for functional literacy to endow women with necessary skills and knowledge to perform the functions of housewife (including child care, nutrition, health care, home economics etc.) was proposed to be launched for the age group 15 to 45.

6. Sixth five year plan: (1980-85) This plan for the first time clearly acknowledged that the continued low status of women was result of inadequate opportunities of independent employment. The demographic trends such as higher mortality and lower economic participation, literacy and sex ratio were issues of concern. It called for a multipronged but interdependent strategy that stressed on family centered poverty alleviation which would be depended on the total development process. It emphasised special support services to expand women’s access to all types of education and proposed child care services to provide support for the education.

7. Introduction of the development programme for women and child in rural area, DWCRA in 1982-83. The objective of this programme was to enable poor women find viable ways of income generation.

This system sought to provide a special component for rural women in general anti-poverty programmes.

9. The seventh five year Plan (1985-90) acknowledged the important role of women in agriculture and allied sectors and the gap between social reality and its perception by society at large. The strategy was to organise women around socio-economic activities with the twin objectives of making their projects economically viable and adding to their social strength for the overall enhancement of their status.

10. National policy on education 1986, emphasised education for women’s equality not just in terms of full and equal access of girls and women to education and the removal of gender disparities but the major responsibilities and importance of education with all its institutions for the genuine empowerment of women by changing the social construction of gender.

11. Creation of the separate department of women and child development in 1986. The department was to serve as an exclusive national machinery for women within the government for gender mainstreaming and advocacy through policy and demonstrative programme initiatives.
12. National expert committee on women prisoners, 1986 recommended far reaching changes for women prisoners.


14. National Commission for Women Act, 1990. created an autonomous National commission for women to act as a statutory body for women, reviewing laws and policies and selectively interfering in individual cases of violation and breach of human rights. The annual report containing recommendations is to be tabled in parliament by the Government of India. This was followed by establishment of state commission of women in the states including Assam.

The objective of putting women’s rights on the national agenda was reflected in the enactment of the National Commission for Women Act, 1990 by the Parliament of India. After overcoming all hurdles the National commission for women was constituted on the 31st January 1992 manifesting the acceptance of the demand of the women’s movement in India to set up a high powered autonomous apex body of women at the national level. The act sets a mandate covering the entire gamut of issue concerning women.
The National Commission for women with the co-operation of the respective Governments, NGOs, Administrative bodies, academicians, researchers, social action groups and all personnel concerned about the welfare of women will continue its march forward towards achieving its goals.


16. The eight five year plan 1992-97 ensured that the benefit of development from different sectors would not bypass women and special programmes are to be implemented to complement the general programmes. It reiterated the formation and strengthening of grass-root organizations to articulate local women's needs and play an important role in decentralized planning and implementation. A policy was adopted to earmark a specific percentage (30-40%) of allocation to women beneficiaries in all antipoverty schemes in rural and urban areas.  

17. The 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments made reservation of one third seat for women in all institutions of local governance and in posts of chairpersons of such bodies.

18. The 9th and 10th year plans put special focus on policies specifically designed to address the question of women empowerment. The ninth plan declared the empowerment of women as one of the
priority of the plan and the control of social infrastructure in the public sphere to women's groups as a strategy of the plan. It called for self-reliance of women self-help groups as a strategy. It declared the flow of benefits to women and children as one of the fundamental criteria for determination of allocation priorities. The tenth five-year plan puts stress on creating an environment through economic and social policies for the development of women to enable them to realize their full potential. It also ensured of taking up measures for providing women equal access to participation and decision making in social, political, and economic life of the nation. Reduction of gender gap, providing equal access to participation and decision making for women in social, political, and economic life of the nation and ensuring equal access for women to health care, quality education at all levels, career and vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security are other areas of concern in the plan.


The current Status of Women Empowerment

The past three decades have witnessed a steadily increasing awareness of the need to empower women through measures to increase
social, economic and political equity, and broad access to fundamental human rights, improvements in nutrition, basic health and education. Along with awareness of the subordinate status of women has come the concept of gender as an overarching socio-cultural variable, seen in relation to other factors, such as race, class, age and ethnicity. It is also called marginalization of women. As far as a society cannot escape the negative effects of gender discrimination against women, empowerment of women will remain as illusion only.

Gender equality refers to that stage of human social development at which “the rights, responsibilities and opportunities of individuals will not be determined by the fact of being born male or female,” in other words, a stage when both men and women realize their full potential. Despite tangible progress achieved in the field of women education, they are still a marginalized section in the sector of organized employment in the country and the state. With profound infrastructural and administrative support base being set up in the remote areas of the state in the health sector, maternal mortality rate and infant mortality rate should not have been so bad as it is now.

In recognition of the importance of establishing gender equality, a prerequisite of women empowerment, around the world, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) was established as a separate fund within the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 1984. At that time, the General Assembly instructed it to “ensure women’s
involvement with mainstream activities.” The Platform of Action resulting from the 1995 Beijing world Conference on women expanded this concept, calling it “gender mainstreaming”- i.e. the application of gender perspectives to all legal and social norms and standards to all policy development, implementation and monitoring- as a mandate for all member states. In this way, the gender factor is no longer to be only a supplement to development but a main paradigm. As a result of the Beijing conference and the many years of work leading up to it- more than 100 countries announced new initiatives to improve the status of women. In 2000, the follow-up Beijing conference further strengthened the application of the mainstreaming concept, and used it to highlight the need for more progress in reaching equality worldwide. The work of the United Nations and many other agencies in advancing gender equality has converged in three closely interconnected areas: strengthening women’s economic capacity, with a focus on new technologies and the new trade agenda; promoting women’s leadership and political participation; eliminating violence against women and supporting the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

The economic participation of women-their presence in the workforce in quantitative terms- is important not only for lowering the disproportionate levels of poverty among women, but also an important step toward raising household income and encouraging development in countries as a whole.
Amartya Sen remarks that societies need to see women less as passive recipients of help, and more as dynamic promoters of social transformation, a view strongly buttressed by a body of evidence suggesting that the education, employment and ownership rights of women have a powerful influence on their ability to control their environment and contribute to economic development. Economic participation concerns not only the actual numbers of women participating in the labour force, but also their remuneration on an equal basis. Worldwide, outside of the agriculture sector, in both developed and developing countries, women are still averaging slightly less than 78% of the wages given to men for the same work, a gap which is conspicuously present refuses even in the most developed countries. In Assam, the female work participation rate rose from a mere 4.66% in 1971 to 21.61% in 1991. Only 3.83% of women work in the organized sector in Assam as per census report of 1991.

While globalization has generated opportunities for local producers and entrepreneurs to reach international markets, it has at times intensified existing inequalities and insecurities for many poor women, who already represent two-thirds of the world's poorest people. Those who have better resources (capital) at hand and are more skilled and trained, are more likely to be benefited by globalization. Poor women with little access to capital and being poorly informed, are usually the least able to seize the long term opportunities offered by globalization.
One of the important tools of gender mainstreaming, has been the concept of “gender budgeting”. It focuses attention on the process of budget formulation, assessing whether a particular fiscal measure will increase or decrease gender equality, or leave it unchanged. Gender budget initiatives (GBIs) not only determine targeted expenditures, or allocate more money to women, but also aim to identify the differentiated impact and incidence of general public revenue and expenditure on women and men. It seeks to significantly contribute to overall objectives like equality, efficiency, transparency, the realization of social, economic and cultural rights, and good governance, thus offering a practical way of evaluating government action (or inaction). National Commission for Women and State Commission for Women in Assam are entrusted with close monitoring and analysis of government policies so that the goal of gender-maintreaming could be achieved. The goal of gender-mainstreaming should be to integrate the large percentage of women who participate economically in the informal sector, and who in some parts of the world provide upwards of 70% of agricultural labour, and produce over 90% of the food, as policy makers or participators in budget deliberations.

Economic opportunity concerns the quality of women’s economic participation and involvement, beyond their mere presence as workers. This is a particularly serious problem in developed countries, where women may gain employment with relative ease, but where their employment is either concentrated in poorly paid or unskilled job “ghettos,” characterized by the
absence of upward mobility and opportunity. This is most commonly the result of negative or obstructive attitudes, and of legal and social systems which use maternity laws and other rules to penalize women economically for childbirth and child care responsibilities, and discourage- or actively prevent men from sharing family responsibilities.

The ghettoization of female labour is a phenomenon which crosses all cultural boundaries, and professions, affecting women in virtually all countries. Internationally, women are most often concentrated in “feminized” professions, such as nursing and teaching, office work, care of the elderly and disabled. In India and Assam in particular, except for a miniscule minority of women taking up professions traditionally held as male prerogative, they are found mostly occupying conventional jobs. This is termed as “horizontal occupational segregation”- where they tend to remain in lower job categories than men. Typically, because these functions are carried out by women, they are the lowest paid, in addition to offering limited or no opportunity for advancement. The term “feminization of poverty” is often used to illustrate the fact that the majority of the poor in the world belong to women.

United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) figures indicate that the vast majority of the world’s countries offer paid maternity leaves, often with guaranteed wage of 50-100% of salary. Interestingly, the United States offer women 12 weeks, but with no pay whatsoever, putting it
in league with Lesotho, Swaziland and Papua New Guinea. This is indicative of the prevailing discrimination against women.¹¹

Although, as of 2000, women are wage-employed in roughly equal numbers with men worldwide, the number of women represented in managerial positions is much smaller. Women have made slow and uneven progress in obtaining a share of managerial positions, which, according to 2002 statistics of the ILO, ranged between 20-40% in 48 out of 63 countries.¹² In addition, women who are in managerial positions often need to make a painful choice between a successful career and family.

Political empowerment refers to the equitable representation of women in decision-making structures both formal and informal, and their voice in the formulation of policies affecting their societies. The inter-Parliamentary union reports a world average of only 15.6% in combined houses of parliament. While women are poorly represented in the lower levels of government, they are rarer still in the upper echelons of decision-making. The absence of women from structures of governance inevitably mean that national, regional and local priorities - i.e. how resources are allocated - are typically defined without meaningful input from women. Policies and programmes formulated with proper deliberations with those who would be directly affected by them, are best implemented in the practical field.

Education is considered to be critical in the Individual life of women in their fight against oppression and in their empowerment.¹³ Educational
attainment is without doubt, the most fundamental prerequisite for empowering women in all spheres of society, for without education of comparable quality and content and of relevance to existing knowledge and real needs, women are unable to access well-paid, formal sector jobs, advance within them, participate in, and be represented in government and gain political influence. Moreover, women ill educated are unable to contribute even in raising children fit for the society. Education and literacy reduce mortality rates of children- including the bias toward female child mortality- and help reduce fertility rates, the importance of literacy for women is all the greater, considering that women still constitute two-thirds of the world’s illiterate population.

In their access to sufficient nutrition, healthcare and reproductive facilities, and to issues of fundamental safety and integrity of person, women have to face discrimination and inequalities compared to men. According to the World Health Organization, 585,000 women die every year, over 1,6000 every day, from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth. The maternal mortality rate in Assam in 1998 was as high as 409 per 100000. This was marginally higher than the average for India which was 407 maternal deaths per 100000 births.

Women’s particular vulnerability to violence is a phenomenon not only in India but even in a country like Sweden, long recognized as a leader in the area of gender equality. Amnesty International, accusing Sweden of gross violations in aspects of women rights, stated that “the prevalence of
gender-biased violence shatters many people’s image of Sweden as being the most gender equal country in the world”. A recent front-page article in the International Herald Tribune also noted that the implementation of violence-related laws in Sweden was marred by “spotty prosecutions, vague statistics, old fashioned judges and unresponsive governments”. The complexity of the social and cultural issues lead to a situation where only a small proportion of the crimes of sexual assault, child abuse, wife battering and gun related violence are ever reported.

The present study is entitled “Government Policies and Empowerment of Women in Assam: A Case Study in Kamrup District”. The study is primarily undertaken to assess and analyse the impact of government policies on women empowerment. As has been discussed already, any government policy aimed at development or welfare of a target group comprises various stages—from conceptualization, formulation and implementation to evaluation.

Government policies that were formulated and implemented during the first five five-year plans were mostly welfare-oriented, yet, these achieved certain positive results that built the foundation for succeeding strategies.

Implementation of programmes with respect to development or empowerment of women at different stages have been analysed through various committees or commissions which have recommended convincing measures for filling up the lackings in the earlier polices.
In the earlier phase of planning till the late seventies, there was lack of convergence and integration among various programmes targeted at development of women:

Many of the Government implemented programmes have failed to address women issues effectively not because there are major faults in the conceptualization of them but because the implementing agencies fail to deliver expected services owing to shortage of trained man power, corruption, negligence and lack of response from target population.

In the context of Assam, it is observed that women in the age group of 18-45 i.e. in the reproductive age group who have been influenced by the relatively intense and effective changes taking place during the last twenty five years or so and are more aware about their educational, economic, political and health status compared to the senior members of their sex. This is highly visible in the small composition of family, power to exercise the reproductive right, numbers of children given birth to, outward mobility, informed choices of employment or other concerns, non-discriminating approach to the rights of the girl child etc.

While percentage of literacy or educational status is higher among women belonging to general caste, it is on the other hand observed that tribal women in most cases are more enterprising economically compared to their other counterparts. The positive trend in Assam is that irrespective of caste differences excepting of course aberrations in some pockets as observed during field study, there is far less gender discrimination in the
family. The greater drop-out rate of girl students in rural areas is not primarily because of lack of parental discrimination but because of other economic compulsions. The infrastructural development with regard to educational and Health institution in Assam during the last two decades is fairly satisfactory. The Sarva Shiksha Abhijan in Assam has particularly improved the infrastructural level of educational institutions. With regard to health institutions, while basic building infrastructure seem to be developed, occasionally service-receivers come across difficulties like lack of residential doctors, life-saving drugs and subsidised transportation facilities for referral service. However, the National rural Health mission implemented since 2005, has undertaken in a big way to eradicate these short comings.

Irrespective of significant rise in literacy due to increasing enrolment and retention rates in formal education institution through special Government measures through National literacy mission, operation Blackboard, SHGs. etc. with regard to women, corresponding rise in economic status of women has not taken place. One reason is that number of Government supported job opportunities are being reduced and rather slow opening in other areas.

The country-wide movement of Self Help Groups which has the basic objective of providing need based and situation specific skills, knowledge and techniques to women so that they could generate sustainable source of income through participation in creation of community areas and other
marketable products, has, in recent time, received intense response in Assam. While it is true that many SHGs formed by women have got access to bank credit and have utilised credit in the effective implementation of their chosen projects with satisfactory economic benefits, it equally is of utmost concern that many SHGs have misutilised their fund and have willfully deviated from realising their basic aim. In such cases, official monitoring on the part of Government development agencies appear to be inadequate.

Without adequate skilled or trained manpower no programme howsoever much noble and perfect it might be, can be successful. This is more conspicuous with regard to health where Government needs to undertake stringent measures to enable related professionals to discharge minimum social responsibilities. Incase of education, Government has used huge amount of financial resources in manpower training, building infrastructure, supply of textbooks, mid-day meals etc, but when it came to choose the right person for the right job, government policies seem to fail occasionally. The criteria of appointment and selection of teachers are not rigidly followed and not transparent.

The study is undertaken to examine the various assumptions regarding the basic flaws in the formulation of policies, if there are any, and also to probe into the mechanism of implementation.
Scope of the study

The study takes into account government policies since 1980 onwards in the areas of women empowerment. The scope of the field study is the Goreswar and Hajo development block areas located in the respective revenue circles of Goreswar and Kamalpur which form a significant part of the erstwhile Kamrup district. The area of Goreswar revenue circle extends from Barnadi River in the east to Puthimari River in the west and from the foothills of Bhutan in the north to Muktapur in the south. It has a population of 1.81 lakh as per 2001 census. A predominantly tribal area with tribal population of 41.71%, the area presently belongs to Baksa district. The Hajo revenue circle shares boundary in the north with Kamalpur and Rangia revenue circles of Kamrup district (R), River Brahmaputra in the south, North Guwahati revenue circle in the east and Barkhetri revenue circle of Nalbari district in the west. The population of Hajo development block as per 2001 census was 1.66 lakh and S.C and S.T population was 11.38% and 0.62% respectively.

Delimitation of the study

The field study is limited only to the development block areas of Goreswar and Hajo in Kamrup district (Rural). The area with its mixed population of Bodos, Sarania-kacharis, Koch-rajbongshis, Muslim, Bengalis, other general caste Assamese population etc. is a replica of other part of Kamrup district. Like Boko, Palashbari, Mirza, Rangia, Kamalpur etc., Goreswar and Hajo have semi-urban population. In the selection of
samples, care has been taken to include women from every economic class, each ethnic and linguistic group and each caste and community. Besides, the women respondents selected are married women as this group is supposed to be equipped with necessary knowledge and experience to respond to the questions of the interview schedule.

**Objectives of the study**

1. The primary objective of the study is to analyze and evaluate the policies implemented by Government of Assam since 1980 for empowering women.

2. The study also seeks to probe into the meaningful participation of women, especially in Assam in the development process initiated by government. For this, study and analysis of the policies would be co-ordinated with field level observation in select areas.

3. For a well formulated policy to bring in desired results, equally effective implementation is essential. In this context another objective of the study is to dwell on the role of various policy implementing agencies.

**Hypothesis**

1. A substantial number of Government policies with regard to women are conceived and formulated without examining the prevailing ground realities.

2. The policy implementing agencies fail to deliver expected service to women.
**Methodology of the study**

The present study falls under the descriptive and field survey method. It is both empirical and theoretical. Emphasis has been made on collection of data and meaningful interpretation of the same in the context of the study. Optimum care has been taken for accuracy and objectivity as far as data is concerned. Data is quantified in order to minimize wrongs and increase reliability.

Field survey method has been undertaken along with the descriptive method in order to find out causal relationship among the variables.

**Sources of data for the study:**

(a) Field sources: In view of the homogeneous economic class and diverse ethnic and community background of the respondents, both proportionate stratified sampling and Simple random sampling is employed for collection of data related to field sources. In this procedure the selection of units from the universe of the population has been done in such a manner so that every unit in the target population has an equal chance of being represented.

For field survey some select areas under Goreswar Development Block and Hajo Development Block in Kamrup District have been taken.

Based on the sampling methods, the tools of (1) Questionnaire and (2) Interview have been employed.

A structured questionnaire has been prepared as a data collection technique. The Respondents who have been selected on the basis of stratified and random sampling have been personally interviewed.
(b) Documentary Sources (Secondary Sources)-

1. Books: Relevant books have been consulted for understanding the theoretical aspects of the study undertaken and for acquiring empirical evidence. This is done to avoid duplication and for arriving at a critical and new analysis.

2. Published Official Data.

3. Relevant Reports of various Government committees.

4. Journals, papers and Internet etc.

Organization of research work

The study includes six chapters. These deal with different aspects of the topic undertaken for the study.

The 1st chapter is entitled introduction. This chapter presents a statement of the problem on which research is to be conducted. A discussion on the scope, background and methodology to be followed in the work constitutes a part of the chapter. Emphasis is given on the conceptual understanding of the problems.

The 2nd chapter will be "Government policies and Economic Empowerment of Women". This chapter comprises of an indepth analysis or study of the various Government policies formulated as well as implemented during the last two decades and more ie. since 1980 for development of the economic status of women.
The 3rd chapter is “Government Policies and Women Education”. The chapter comprises discussion on the various Government policies implemented since 1980s for the development of women education.

The 4th Chapter is “Government Policies and Women Health”. The chapter deals with and evaluates the implementation of Government policies for the improvement of the health status of women since 1980s.

The 5th chapter is “Challenges to women empowerment”. This chapter makes an analysis of the various issues retarding the smooth progress of women empowerment in India.

The 6th chapter is Conclusion. The chapter sums up the discussion in the preceding chapters with presentation of the major findings and suggestions.

Data collected from the field study are incorporated in the related chapters for analysis and evaluation of the different Government policies and programmes.

**Review of related literature**

The following works/books have been studied with a view to understanding the status of economic, educational as well as political empowerment of women in India. The books/works reviewed have thrown considerable light on the status of development concerning women and justify the need for further action in this direction.

In “Status and employment of women in India” a research work by U. Lalitha Devi, first edition in 1982, B.R. Publishing Corporation, Delhi-
110052, the author has analysed the causal relationships between women’s participation in ‘white collar jobs and their subsequent elevation in the social status scale. The obstacles, challenges and opportunities which confront working women within the family, the office and society are discussed threadbare.

Kalima Rose, in ‘where women are leaders/the SEWA movement in India’, 1990, Vistaar Publication, New Delhi, traces the origin, history and strategies of the Self-employed Women’s Association (SEWA). She discusses its evaluation from the initial efforts to organize women in the informal sector to larger issues relating to development. The positive influence SEWA has exerted on labour, employment and human resource policies at national and international level, are discussed.

In “women and Development policies and plan strategies for women’s Development”, vol. 7,2000, edited by Chetana Kalbagh, several important issues relating to women empowerment such as (i) Integration of women in Development Projects (ii) Educational development of girls and women (iii) Planning of women’s development, are discussed. The role of women in the programmes implemented for development of women and the planned strategies for development, are emphasised.

In “Developing women and children in India”, edited by Ashok Kumar, Commonwealth Publishers , New Delhi-11002, 1990, chapter like “Initiatives for educational development of women in five year plans and
national policy on education” traces back the history of development of women’s education in India upto present time.

In “Empowering the Indian women” edited by Dr. Promilla Kapur, Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, government of India, New Delhi-11001, 2001, chapters namely (i) Whose empowerment are we talking of? (ii) Education for women’s empowerment, (iii) Role of Government in the empowerment of women in India, present in details the issues confronting Indian women, possible effective strategies for accelerating the pace of women empowerment and the role of Government in this regard.

Another reviewed work is “women and Political Empowerment”, 1999, edited by Bidyut Mohanty, first published in 2001 on the occasion of women’s political Empowerment Day Celebrations on Panchayats, Women and Family Welfare. The chapters in this edited volume have highlighted and analysed several burning issues concerning empowerment of women in India including the role of panchayat in family welfare programmes, and the urgent need of a new approach to women.

In Woman’s Education and Development, edited by Jandhyala B.G. Tilak, Published by Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, contributors have focused on several important aspects of women including vocational training for women in informal employment; women’s education and development. East Asian lessons for South Asia, women’s education and policy issues etc. The authors have put utmost stress on the fact that without
tangible and meaningful changes in the women’s educational status which can happen to a great extent with government initiatives, perceptible changes with regard to women empowerment can hardly take place.

S. Nagendra Ambedkar and Shilaja Nagendra in their book- Role of Women in Panchayati Raj, ABD Publishers, Jaipur, India, has dwelt at length the issue of political empowerment of women. The book comprises of chapters dealing with the election process in Panchayati Raj System, the role of women in the system, their leadership and the need of political power for real empowerment. The complex factors like economic status, caste and education which play pivotal role in election, are discussed.

In Empowering Rural Women, published by Akansha Publishing House, New Delhi, authors Sujit Kumar Dutta and Dilip Kumar Ghosh have written on the policies and programmes directed at women empowerment. The role of literacy in deciding and shaping the economic profile of women is discussed in detail.

The present study, in addition to throwing light on the areas covered in these books, seeks to study the impact of government policies on women empowerment and find out with probable solutions to the causes of some glaring drawbacks in the implementation of such policies.
**Notes and References:**

2. Dimock and Dimock: Public Administration, 1956, p-82.
4. Evelin Hust, Women’s Political Representation and Empowerment in India, A Million Indiras now? P-46

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