

## AIR Spotlight - NCW and Women Empowerment

AIR Spotlight is an insightful programme featured daily on the All India Radio Newsonair. In this program, many eminent panellists discuss issues of importance which can be quite helpful in [IAS exam](#) preparation. In this article, the topic of discussion is the role played by the National Commission for Women in women empowerment in India.

### Participants:

- Rekha Sharma, Chairperson of the National Commission for Women
- Aditi Tandon, Journalist, and interviewer

### Context

There are several ways to define women empowerment. But simply put, it refers to raising the status of women by promoting equal rights for them, vis-à-vis men. Women face many challenges like the feminisation of poverty to social stigma and learned helplessness. The Covid-19 pandemic exposed the faultlines of gender equality with increasing incidents of violence against women. Also, the nature of the crime against women, in general, has changed with the increase in cybercrime. The [National Commission for Women](#) has taken certain initiatives to fulfil its objectives to represent their rights and to provide a voice for their issues.

### National Commission for Women

- The National Commission for Women (NCW) was set up as a statutory body in January 1992 under the National Commission for Women Act, 1990 to fulfil the constitutional mandate for the same.
- Its functions include -
  - advising the Government on all policy matters affecting women;
  - reviewing the constitutional and legal safeguards for women;
  - facilitating redressal of grievances.
- The commission consists of -
  - A Chairperson, committed to the cause of women, to be nominated by the Central Government.
  - Five members of eminent standing in related fields to be nominated by the Central Government. (At least one member shall be from amongst the SC/ST community.)
  - A member secretary.

### Steps taken by the National Commission for Women

- NCW has launched an initiative called 'We think digital', a digital literacy training program in collaboration with Facebook and the CyberPeace Foundation.
- It has also coordinated and collaborated with all major social media platforms to take down content in social media that is objectionable to women.
- It has increased its online presence to reach a wider section of the population by conducting regular webinars and workshops amidst the pandemic.
- NCW has established a 24\*7 helpline to help women in distress.
- It has reviewed and made recommendations to the Government of India on legislations like the Domestic Violence Act, 2005; Sexual Harassment at Workplace Act, 2013, [Information Technology Act, 2000](#); Maternity Benefit Act, 1961.
- It is also working towards integrating different woman helplines like the helpline of the Ministry of Women and Child Development as well as various state helplines into one.
- To promote the economic empowerment of women, it is organizing entrepreneurship workshops. Apart from this, it has launched a training program in collaboration with IIM, Bangalore.
- It promotes free online counselling for women and their families.

### **Challenges with respect to the NCW**

- The chairperson of NCW is often a political appointee with little or no background of having worked on women related issues. This is often reflected in repeated statements made by NCW chairpersons blaming victims for their plight as was witnessed in the 2012 Guwahati Pub incident. These chairpersons often toe the line of the ruling party and the NCW Act of 1990 makes no mention of the minimum necessary qualifications for people to be appointed as the chairperson of the Commission.
- The limited funds available with NCW often leave little budget to support any public awareness campaigns on gender issues. Moreover, it cannot provide compensation to the affected victims.
- The commission does not have any field staff and depends upon its network with NGOs and women movements to conduct field surveys.

### **NCW Evaluation**

The National Commission for Women has largely failed to uphold the mandate provided under the 1990 Act. Repeated instances where NCW has indulged in victim-blaming have not reflected well upon the organization. Its chairpersons have often had less than a bright background in involvement in women related matters.

Despite its shortcomings, the NCW has played a positive role in arguing in support of the need to grant Reservation for Women in Legislature and strong/efficient implementation of the [PCPNDT Act](#) to strengthen the fight against female foeticide.

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