

## **Cooperative Best Medium for Women Empowerment : Report of National Conference on Empowerment of Women through Coops.**

Inaugurating the National Conference on Empowerment of Women Through Cooperatives in Delhi, Ms. Mamta Sharma, Chairperson, National Commission for Women said that women in large numbers should form cooperatives/SHGs in consumer sector so as to improve their standard of living and feel empowered. She lamented that women empowerment is meaningless for women as the bill for 33% reservation for women is opposed in the Parliament.

The conference organized by NCUI the apex organization of the Indian cooperative movement was attended by around 400 women delegates from all over the country.

Ms. Sharma warned that women should not be considered weak, as they have excelled in all areas of activities. She said mental block about women being incapable should be removed. She also said schemes like MANREGA have immensely benefitted the weaker and vulnerable sections of women by empowering them.

Ms. Pankaj Mittal, Vice Chancellor, Bhagat Phool Singh Mahila Vishwavidyalaya, Sonapat, Haryana said there is need for attitudinal change that small jobs are meant only for women. She further said that glass ceiling has to be broken so that women entrepreneurs emerge. She also said that women entrepreneurs should emerge through cooperatives, and coop can play very important in empowering them.

Ms. Vasudha Mishra, Managing Director, NCDC said women should make themselves strong by working on the principles of cooperatives. The quality of education is important for women, for their empowerment, she said.

Dr. Chandra Pal Singh Yadav, President, NCUI said effective steps should be undertaken for publicising best practices of women cooperatives amongst women. Through cooperatives/SHGs, women can solve their problem of employment, and cooperatives should be encouraged to get involved in the welfare of women, Dr. Chandrapal Singh suggested. NCUI President insisted that the best way of improving women's lot is possible only through cooperatives. They can organize themselves in self help group to which in turn can get affiliated to national level cooperative.

Dr. Bijender Singh, President NAFSCOB said women empowerment will be of no avail if the flawed mindset about women does not change.

Dr. Jaya Arunachalam, Chairperson, WWF, Chennai narrated the success stories of Working Women Forum and Indian Cooperative Network for Women. Through these organizations women have got dignity becoming entrepreneurs, she remarked. Earlier, Dr. Dinesh, Chief Executive, NCUI, underlined the importance of the conference as a step towards women empowerment.

In his valedictory speech at the conclusion of the seminar IFFCO Managing Director U S Awasthi stressed upon the need of associating women in the cooperative movement right from the grass-root level. He exhorted the cooperative leaders to think about it. He lamented that though women's contribution in the society has been immense, but women's participation in cooperatives is negligible.

Referring to the current election of IFFCO delegates which is underway, Dr. Awasthi said that IFFCO has decided to co-opt women at the level in case they do not get elected on their own. True participation would be possible only when they are present in large numbers in the General Bodies, he said. He also said that women should be provided effective tools for empowerment. In this regard, he said that IFFCO has ensured safety of women in the work-place.