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Q6

Women's social capital complements in advancing empowerment and gender equity. Explain.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · GS II · 10 marks · Governance and Policy

Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Core demand of the question

- Define social capital in the context of women
- Show how networks, trust and norms complement legal rights and schemes
- Give Indian examples from SHGs, panchayats and the professions
- Link to gender equity without claiming that networks replace the State

Revision summary

Social capital is trust and networks; for women it makes legal rights usable.

NRLM, Kudumbashree, Jeevika, SEWA and reserved panchayat chairs are Indian examples.

Bonding kin networks can constrain; bridging groups can open credit and voice.

Courts and the 106th Amendment change rules; SHGs and ASHA cadres change practice.

Networks complement the State; they do not replace land title, wages or policing.

Introduction

Social capital is the **trust, networks and norms** that let people act together. For women in India it is the neighbour who watches a child, the self-help group that co-signs a loan, the WhatsApp circle that names a violent husband, and the panchayat quorum that is no longer only male. Law gives a right. Social capital is often what makes the right **usable**.

Body

Complement, not substitute

Formal tools - **Articles 14, 15 and 16**, the **73rd Amendment's** reserved chairs, the **106th Amendment (2023)** for one-third of Lok Sabha and the Assemblies, **POSH, PMMVY, NRLM / Mission Shakti, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao** - change the rules. They do not automatically change who speaks in a village meeting. **Putnam's** language of bonding and bridging capital is useful: a caste-kin circle can trap a woman (bonding that polices), while a mixed SHG or a nurses' union can open a labour market (bridging).

Kudumbashree in Kerala, **Jeevika** in Bihar, **SEWA** in Gujarat, and countless NRLM groups show savings, bank linkage and a public identity that a lone BPL card does not. **Pradhan** women in reserved panchayats, studied since the 1990s, often begin as proxies and sometimes become principals - the shift is social capital accumulating in office. **Anganwadi and ASHA** networks are the State's own female social capital, which COVID-19 made visible.

Equity

Gender equity needs **assets and voice**. SHG credit without land title still leaves the paradox of labour without ownership. Courts have added pieces: **Vineeta Sharma** on coparcenary, **Joseph Shine** on adultery law, **Secretary, Ministry of Defence v. Babita Puniya** on short-service women officers, **Nari Shakti** in the services. None of these works in a hamlet where no woman will witness for another at the thana. That witness is social capital.

- **Limits:** microcredit can become **micro-debt**. Church, caste sabha and khap are also women's networks with conservative norms. **FCRA** and political suspicion of NGOs can thin the bridging organisations that train panchayat women. Social capital **complements** empowerment when the State remains the guarantor of land, police and schools. It does not replace a functioning crèche or a charge sheet.

Flow diagram

Law and schemes -> Rights on paper
SHG panchayat ASHA -> Usable rights
Rights on paper -> Usable rights
Usable rights -> Voice and assets

Conclusion

Women's groups, reserved local office and care-worker cadres turn legal equality into daily coordination. They advance equity when they bridge beyond kin. They cannot be a substitute for titles, wages and a responsive police station.

Facts & figures

73rd Amendment

Reserved seats for women in panchayats, creating a mass of female office-holders who build political capital over terms.

NRLM / Mission Shakti

Union platforms for women's self-help groups, bank linkage and livelihoods.

106th Amendment, 2023

Constitutional reservation of one-third of seats for women in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies, to take effect after delimitation.