



NATIONAL SEMINAR ON WOMEN AND EMPLOYMENT IN INDIA

28-30 August 2024 | Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh

Organised by Centre for Development Studies, Department of Economics, RGU and the Center for Gender Studies, IHD

1. Introduction

Despite a significant positive trend during recent years, India's female labour force participation rate (FLFPR) remains one of the lowest in the world. Official statistics indicate that the FLFPR for women (aged 15 and above) in India stands at 37 percent, significantly lower than their male counterparts (78.5 percent) in the year 2022-23. This rate experienced a consistent decline from 38.9 percent in 1999-2000 to 23.3 percent in 2017-18, before witnessing a remarkable reversal and improvement post-2017-18, surging to 37 percent by 2022-23. Various studies have attributed this decline and subsequent rise in FLFPR to supply and demand side factors, including social norms, increased enrollment rates in higher education, lack of suitable job opportunities, and inadequate work environments, among others.

There are contrasting views on the recent surge in FLFPR, particularly among rural women. Some argue that the 'income effect' forces women into low-paying, non-remunerative unpaid jobs as helpers, mainly in self-employed agriculture, as a response to support family income. On the other hand, others see this as a positive trend, attributing it to an increase in own-account workers and employers, driven by agricultural growth and improved access to basic amenities due to various government welfare schemes. The rise of women in agriculture coincides with a decline in male participation, indicating a feminization of the sector, but also suggests a pre-existing structural shift before the onset of pandemic in the rural economy. Yet, despite these trends, women's employment quality remains poor, seen in their prevalence in the informal sector and the persistent gender wage gap. These are only some partial explanations that requires further in-depth analysis.

Further, the unemployment rate remains higher among females compared to males. Women with relatively higher education levels have significantly higher unemployment rates than their male counterparts. The unemployment rate among females educated up to secondary level or above in rural and urban areas is as high as 8.3 percent and 13.7 percent, respectively, while the rates for rural and urban males were 6.1 percent and 6.8 percent, respectively. Clearly, women face substantial employment challenges, including lack of suitable job opportunities despite the surge in FLFPR. The low geographic mobility of female workers, due to migration costs potentially outweighing earnings, also exacerbates these challenges.

Some projections suggest that by 2035, while the male labour force participation rate may remain relatively stable, the FLFPR is expected to rise. A significant portion of women entering the workforce will be educated. Meeting this demand necessitates not only job creation but also skill development, provision of care facilities, and establishment of suitable institutions. Moreover, it is also important to acknowledge the evolving structure and composition of labour markets, due to technological advancements, digitalization, expansion of the gig economy, and emerging Global Value Chains, all of which have profound implications for women's employment. Addressing issues such as time poverty and accurately measuring women's work, including unpaid domestic work, are also key challenges. According to the NSSO's time use survey, women in the working-age group spend an average of more than two and a half times (7.2 hours) daily on unpaid domestic work, compared to men's (2.8 hours).



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It is evident that women workers have been facing significant challenges in accessing employment opportunities. These challenges are further compounded by the evolving dynamics of the labour markets. This seminar aims to have detailed deliberations on multifaceted issues relating to women's employment, while also attempting to provide strategies and policies aimed at enhancing access to more employment opportunities and improving the quality of work.

2. Tentative Themes:

Some tentative themes of the seminar are the following:

- What are the issues and challenges in measuring women's work accurately in India? To what extent do official labour force surveys accurately capture the complexities of women's employment, including the interplay between paid and unpaid work and social reproduction responsibilities? How well do these surveys reflect patterns and trends in women's employment, considering various aspects such as employment status, location, and type of work?
- What are the factors that contribute to the persistently low female labour force participation rates as reported by official surveys? What led to the decline in female labour force participation in earlier years, considering factors such as increased female education, rising household incomes, or the lack of suitable job opportunities? What explains the recent increase in women's participation in the labour market since 2017-18? What are the variations across different states/regions and factors accounting for this?
- What are the trends in gender equality in work, employment and wages/earnings? Are there variations in trends between different sectors and occupations?
- What is the nature and extent of gender discrimination in the labour market? Are there discernible changes over time? Whether new forms of gender discrimination have emerged in the labour market.
- Why do unemployment rates remain high among educated women? Is it due to labour market discrimination, inadequate care/safety/housing arrangements, rising aspirations, or a lack of suitable work environment and institutions?
- What policies, programs, and institutions are necessary to enhance and improve women's employment and promote equitable and inclusive development?
- How can urban and migration policies, including housing, transportation, and care arrangements, encourage women's labour mobility and safe migration, considering the constraints imposed by traditional gender roles and limited mobility options?
- How can social norms that hinder women's access to employment be addressed in a patriarchal society? What policies and strategies are needed to combat discrimination and violence against women in the workplace?
- What are the challenges and opportunities due to technological advancements, digitalization, and evolving employment relations for women in the labour market, and what policy measures are required to address them?
- Which are the important emerging sectors which can provide decent employment? What challenges do women face in these sectors, and what steps are needed to overcome them?



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- Are the gig and platform economy, care economy etc. providing decent employment? What are the scope and prospects of these emerging sectors in creating jobs for women workers in future? What measures need to be taken to enable decent working conditions in these and other emerging sectors?
- What have been the impacts of various government policies and programs, such as MGNREGA, 'Ujjwala', financial inclusion initiatives, SHGs, MUDRA, and extended maternity leave, in enhancing women's employment? How can these programs be expanded and strengthened?

The above-mentioned themes are tentative only and other themes relevant for the seminar may also be taken up by the prospective paper contributors.

3. Organisation and Output

This two- and half-day national seminar, scheduled during 28-30 August 2024 at Itanagar, will comprehensively address the various issues relating to women's work, as mentioned above, as well as outline a research agenda and policies for enhancing women's employment. Discussions will include both national and regional perspectives, with a dedicated session focusing on women's employment in the North-eastern region. The seminar will begin at 9 am on 28 August and will conclude by lunch (1 pm) on 30 August 2024.

The seminar will be organized jointly by the Centre for Development Studies, Department of Economics, Rajiv Gandhi University (RGU), Itanagar and Centre for Gender Studies at the Institute for Human Development (IHD), New Delhi. Most papers will be solicited by invitation to scholars who have contributed significantly to women's employment. All correspondence should be made on womenempseminar@gmail.com. After the seminar, a report highlighting its key findings and policy recommendations will be brought out for wider dissemination. Later, the selected and revised papers presented during the seminar will be published as an edited book by a reputable publisher.

4. Seminar Coordinators

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