

# Women Livelihood in India

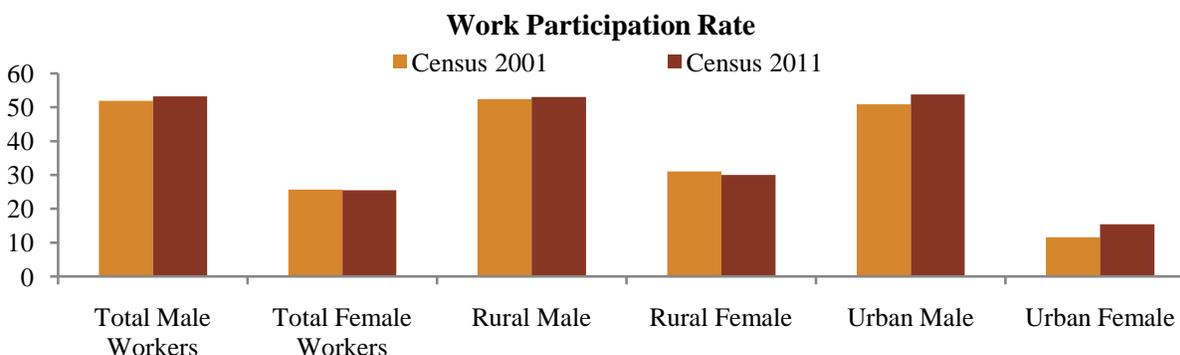
*This report aims to highlight the challenges and opportunities faced by women in securing livelihoods. Major challenges have been highlighted. Relevant strategies for tackling these challenges have been listed out and subsequently examples of states where these strategies have been successfully deployed have also been provided.*

## Current Status of Women Livelihood in India

The involvement of women in the workforce empowers the women and the community. For example, earning mothers are independent and confident along with being more likely to put money back in to the households, over fathers. Despite acknowledgement about the need for women to be in the workforce, working opportunities for women does not fare too well globally. In India the conditions are particularly dismal with India ranking 127 amongst 152 countries according to the United Nations Development Programme's Gender Inequality Index (GII). GII takes into account health, empowerment and economic status of women.

Country	Gender Inequality Index Rank	Share of seats in Parliament 2013	Workforce Participation Rate of 15+ female, 2012
China	37	23.4	63.8
Iraq	120	25.2	14.7
<b>India</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>10.9</b>	<b>28.8</b>
Congo	135	9.6	68.4
Afghanistan	149	27.6	15.7

In India, participation of women in the labour market is extremely low with total workforce participation rate of women being 25.5% (Census 2011) - in some parts of rural India this number can go as low as 10%. As per the Census of 2011, there has been no recorded increase in the workforce participation rate of women in the last decade.



## Reasons for low women participation in workforce:

Women are deterred from entering the workforce because of the lack of economic incentive, access to opportunity and an encouraging ecosystem. In this brief we cover these three causes since they have far reaching impact.

- a) **Work-related wage discrimination** is prevalent in agricultural and non-agricultural activities undertaken by men and women in rural India. On an average, women's wage rates are 75% of men's wage rates. Lower wages than their men counterparts can act as a deterrent for women seeking employment where a woman might ultimately decide it being more beneficial to remain at home and not seek employment.

Activity	Agricultural Occupations		Non Agricultural Occupations	
	Sowing	Transplanting	Sweeper	Unskilled Labourers
<b>Male Worker</b>	Rs. 163.12	Rs. 154.60	Rs. 109.99	Rs. 156.99
<b>Female Worker</b>	Rs.128.14	Rs. 133.90	Rs. 98.88	Rs. 119.97

- b) Financial inclusion of women increases their access to resources, bargaining power in society and the opportunity to earn an income. It also helps reduce women's vulnerability by allowing them to insure against risk and to meet unexpected expenses. However, in rural India, **inadequate banking facilities** and **lack of gender neutral financial markets** restrict the access to capital for women. 21% bank accounts in commercial banks belong to females. The share (in terms of amounts deposited) of females in total deposited amount is 10.3%. Women also lack access to sufficient market information about prices, inputs and competitors, as well as support services they can leverage.
- c) Due to **societal norms and patriarchal structures**, women in India tend to be **grouped in certain industries and occupations**, such as basic agriculture, elementary services and handicraft manufacturing, leading to occupational segregation. 79.2% percent of female workers are engaged as cultivators/agricultural labourers, as opposed to 43.5% of male workers. Occupational segregation creates constraints on careers and has a major effect on the gender pay gap. It tends to cluster women into a small number of low-paying occupations.

## Strategies to improve women livelihood and participation in workforce:

Three strategies have been outlined in this section. The strategies highlight the importance of financial inclusion, technology and community participation in improving access to livelihood opportunities and quality of work. Each of these solutions has been discussed through approaches and cases below.

### a) Enhancing livelihood through financial inclusion

Access to capital and credit for women can be increased through scaling up of women's credit cooperative societies. These societies work on the basis of regular monetary savings by a group of individuals (in this case, women) who then lend back to their members. Such a system ensures greater transparency as there is community involvement in the operation of such a society. It also enhances the access to capital required for self-employment. Further, the chances of loan defaults are reduced due to the role of peer pressure in such cooperatives.

### **Indian Cooperative Network for Women, Working Women's Forum**

Working Women's Forum (WWF) established Indian Co-operative Network for Women (ICNW), Tamil Nadu in 1981. It has now expanded to 3 states with 14 branches. It works to address the critical and financial needs of poor women entrepreneurs.

ICNW reaches these poor women who live/work in remote areas excluded from financial services and or even basic services and helps them to move out of poverty. The credit programme of the ICNW has reached so far 5,44,872 poor entrepreneurs effecting nearly Rs.2343 million and accomplishing about 99.13% recovery rate in the urban slums/rural areas. The members of the ICNW are involved in trades as vendors, home-based workers, weavers, garment makers, food processors, handloom/craft workers, service providers, etc.

### **b) Leveraging technology to create alternative job opportunities**

Though a large number of women in India are involved in agriculture and land-based activities, they have a limited exposure to modern skill training and technologies. Expanding employment opportunities for women outside the traditional job pool will help overcome the problem of occupational segregation and also increase efficiency and income in the existing jobs.

### **All India Society for Electronics and Computer Technology (AISECT)**

AISECT Society is a non-profit that was created in the early 1990s to promote science and technology in rural India.

AISECT enables women to use ICTs to create businesses that offer computer-based educational courses, e-governance access, and mobile phone airtime recharges to customers. It has created financial incentives to encourage women's entrepreneurship within its network, providing women franchisees with a 15 percent discount on start-up and renewal franchise fees, which usually range from 15,000-25,000 INR. Similarly, it offers women CSC entrepreneurs a 50 percent discount on the startup fee for establishing a kiosk. Currently, about 13 percent of entrepreneurs in AISECT's network are women: 400 IT center entrepreneurs and 658 women CSC entrepreneurs.

### **c) Improving access to livelihood programmes through community participation**

Collective enterprises help to mobilize and empower members of the society through their common interest, common resource planning and improved access to social services. Providing access to physical, social and financial endowment helps overcome unequal distribution and gives opportunities to organize and generate business.

### **District Poverty Initiatives Project, Madhya Pradesh**

The District Poverty Initiatives Project (DPIP) is an ambitious project of the Government of Madhya Pradesh for the alleviation of poverty in the State with a particular focus on women and tribal groups. The DPIP was implemented in 2817 villages across 53 development blocks spread over 14 districts.

The target population in the villages was motivated to form groups known as Common Interest Group or shortly (CIG). The project organized families into over 56,000 Common Interest Groups (CIGs), providing them with financial and technical assistance so as to improve livelihood including their organizational capacity.

CIGs were federated into Village Development Committees. The envisioned roles for the Village Development Committee(VDCs) are as a service-provider to its members, managing the Apna Kosh (Village Funds) for microfinance, bookkeeping etc. More than 2,650 VDCs have been registered.

Keeping in line with the women development strategy, the Project has been able to organize 16,093 (29%) subprojects of women. Also, to promote women empowerment, 60% members of the VDC Executive Committee shall be comprised of women members. So far in 80% VDCs only female members are in the Executive Committee where as 94% women chair VDCs.