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Intersecting Identities, Livelihoods and Affirmative Action: How Social Identity Affects Economic Opportunity for Women in India

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Introduction

The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. Male–female gaps are significant in many dimensions, but the contours of these gaps are shaped by the overlap of gender with other social identities such as caste, religion or tribal identities. Thus, women from stigmatized and marginalized groups are disadvantaged along two dimensions and have to battle the double stigma of this intersectionality. India has declined on the political empowerment index as well by 13.5 percentage points, and a decline in the number of women ministers, from 23.1% in 2019 to 9.1% in 2021.

Constraints In Female Labor Force Participation

Stereotyping In Society: India's social norms require women to take responsibility for looking after families and children. This stereotype is a critical barrier to women's participation in the labor market. Because of this, women are in constant conflict over the allocation of time to work and life is a war of attrition for them. **Technological Disruption:** Women hold most of the administrative and computing functions that artificial intelligence and other technologies threaten to usurp. By automating routine jobs, the pressure on women will increase and they will experience higher unemployment rates. **Lack of Gender-Related Data:** Globally, major gaps in gendered data and the lack of trend data make it hard to monitor progress. In India, too, significant gaps in data on the girl child prevent a systematic longitudinal assessment of the lives of girls. In the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index (which measures gaps that exist in the economic participation of women), India slipped to 112th place this year, simply because over 70 lakh Indian women have dropped out of work.

Conclusion

Promoting Women Entrepreneurship: Creating Employment Opportunities is the order of the day. However, encouraging more women to become entrepreneurs will be a long-term solution. By creating jobs, promoting innovation, and encouraging investment in health and education, women's entrepreneurship could transform India's economy and society. **Prioritization of gender statistics:** A UN women's initiative called "Making Every Woman and Girl Count" was launched in 2016 to support the prioritization of gender data, ensure the regular production of high quality and comparable gender statistics and ensure that data is accessible and for information used in politics. Such an initiative must also be implemented in India. **Bridging Digital Divide:** To address this, partnerships between the public and private sectors will be most effective. Actions will need to address affordability of phones and computers, female digital literacy and its social context, and inadequate technical content dedicated to women and girls. Even as India Industries adds more diversity and inclusion initiatives such as increased maternity leave, mandatory paternity leave, the right to and choice of work for women depends greatly on organizations continuing the practice of flexible working. Various economic dimensions and women's economic empowerment remains a significant challenge in India. Economic growth, whether high or low, is not the main factor in shifting the needle on gender equality. Evidence for India shows that a variety of policies impact gender equality; therefore, gender needs to be mainstreamed into the entire policymaking apparatus, and not be compartmentalized into a secondary priority. To tackle inequality fundamentally, we need to mainstream evidence-based research on intersectionality which could inform policy.

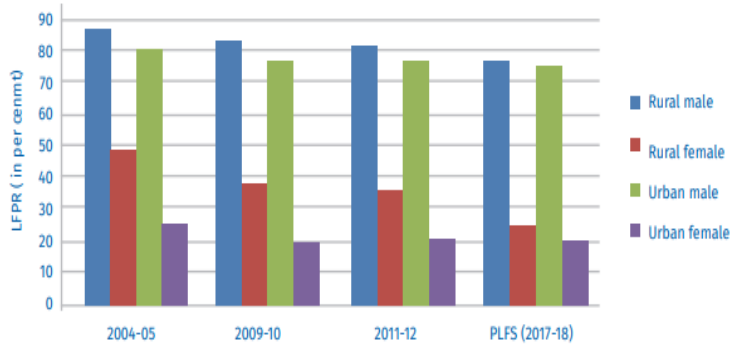
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Figure 1: LFPR in usual status.



Source: PLFS 2017-18, p. 54