



## Empowering Women, Elevating India

This editorial is based on "[India can unlock growth by boosting nari shakti](#)" which was published in The Indian Express on 09/05/2024. The article discusses the challenges of achieving gender parity in India's socio-economic outcomes, highlighting the need for policies that address issues such as low labor force participation among women

**For Prelims:** [Women empowerment](#), [Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana](#), [Beti Bachao Beti Padhao](#), [Mahila E-Haat](#), [Maternity Benefit \(Amendment\) Act 2017](#), [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women](#), [Periodic Labour Force Survey 2022-23](#), [World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index 2023](#), [Production Linked Incentive](#), [Self-help groups](#)

**For Mains:** Key Factors Hindering Women's Socio-economic Growth in India, Measures to Promote Socio-economic Empowerment Among Women

As India sets its sights on becoming a '[developed](#)' nation by 2047, empowering women lies at the heart of this challenge. [Women empowerment](#) and socio-economic development go hand in hand, as development alone cannot address gender inequalities. **Amartya Sen** coined the term "**missing women**" to highlight ongoing gender disparities globally.

With women lagging behind on several parameters of well-being, India must adopt key policies to propel the country towards **gender parity** in socio-economic outcomes.

### What are the Key Provisions in Place for Women's Socio-economic Empowerment?

#### ▪ Constitutional Measures:

- **Article 14:** Guarantees equality before the law and equal protection of the laws, prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex.
- **Article 15(3):** Allows the State to make special provisions for women and children.
- **Article 16:** Provides equal opportunities in matters of public employment.
- **Article 39(d):** Calls for equal pay for equal work for both men and women.
- **Article 42:** Directs the State to make provisions for ensuring just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief.

#### ▪ Government Initiatives:

- [Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana](#): Provides access to affordable credit for women entrepreneurs and self-help groups.
- [Beti Bachao Beti Padhao](#): Focuses on generating awareness and improving women's welfare through education.
- [Mahila E-Haat](#): An online marketing platform to support women entrepreneurs and self-help groups.

- **Mahila Shakti Kendra:** Facilitates empowerment programs and resources at the village level for skill development and entrepreneurship.
- **Working Women Hostel:** Supports safe and affordable accommodation for working women in urban areas.
- [Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana:](#) It ensures housing under women's names.
- [Maternity Benefit \(Amendment\) Act 2017:](#) Increased paid maternity leave to 26 weeks and mandated crèche facilities.
- **International Conventions/Agreements:**
  - [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women \(CEDAW\):](#) Adopted by the UN in 1979, calls for ending discrimination and ensuring equal rights for women.
    - It was signed by India in 1980 and was ratified in 1993.
  - **Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action:** Adopted at the **1995 UN World Conference on Women**, it laid out agenda areas for women's empowerment including economic participation (India is a part of it).
- [UN Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\):](#) Goal 5 aims to **achieve gender equality** and empower all women and girls, including through economic empowerment measures by 2030.

## What are the Key Factors Hindering Women's Socio-economic Growth in India?

- **Entrenched Social Norms and Patriarchal Mindsets:** Deeply ingrained social norms and patriarchal attitudes often restrict **women's mobility, education, and economic opportunities.**
  - The preference for sons and discrimination against daughters persists in many parts of the country.
  - **Example: Son meta-preference** leading to gender-biased sex selection has resulted in skewed sex ratios in states like **Haryana, Punjab**, etc.
- **Low Labor Force Participation:** India's female labor force participation rate is quite low at around 37% as compared to the global average of **47%** ([Periodic Labour Force Survey 2022-23](#)).
  - Also, India has a lower proportion of employed individuals in salaried work compared to China and Bangladesh.
  - The shift away from agriculture and the **prevalence of informal labor have disproportionately impacted women**, with many rural women working in the informal sector.
- **Disproportionate Share of Unpaid Care Work:** Indian women bear a disproportionately higher burden of [unpaid domestic and care work](#) relative to men. This restricts their time available for education, skills development, and paid economic activities.
  - Women spend nearly **three times (2.8)** as much of their day on unpaid care work as men (UN Women).
- **Gender Pay Gaps:** There exist significant gender pay gaps across various sectors and occupations in India.
  - Women often experience discrimination in **hiring, promotions** (glass ceiling and glass clip), **and wages** compared to their male counterparts.
  - In [World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index 2023](#), India ranks 127 out of 146 countries and has closed 64.3% of the overall gender gap.
    - However, in economic participation and opportunity, the country has only achieved **36.7%** parity.
- **Lack of Property Ownership and Financial Inclusion:** Despite laws granting equal inheritance rights, only about 20% of women own land or property in India. Limited asset ownership restricts women's economic bargaining power and access to credit.
  - [National Family Health Survey 2019-21](#) data shows a higher percentage of men owning property compared to women.
    - Specifically, **42.3% of women and 62.5% of men own a house**, while ownership of land, either solely or jointly, stands at **31.7% for women and 43.9% for men.**
- **Exposure to Violence:** The high prevalence of different forms of violence against women, including **domestic violence, sexual harassment, etc.** impedes their freedom of movement and ability to participate safely in economic spheres.
  - Over 28,000 complaints of crimes against women received in 2023 ([National Commission for Women](#) (NCW)).

- 50% of women suicide deaths were of housewives in 2021 ([National Crime Records Bureau](#))
- **Limited Education:** As per the **National Family Health Survey 2019-21**, the overall female literacy rate is **71.5%**, significantly lower than the male literacy rate of **84.7%**.
  - At the elementary school level, the gender parity index is close to 1, meaning equal enrollment of girls and boys. However, it **declines at higher education levels**.
- **Limited Political Participation:** Women's representation in Parliament is low - only 14.4% in the Lok Sabha and 13% in the Rajya Sabha.
  - While the [Nari Shakti Vandana Adhiniyam 2023](#) has been passed providing 33% reservation to women in Lok Sabha and State Assemblies, its implementation is still pending.

## What Measures can be Adopted to Promote Socio-economic Empowerment Among Women?

- **Increasing Women's Labor Force Participation:** Raising women's labor force participation (LFP) rate from the current around 25% to **50%** could bring India closer to an **8% GDP growth rate**, according to [World Bank](#) estimates.
  - The government should focus on **expanding manufacturing capacity**, particularly in labor-intensive sectors such as **readymade garments, footwear, and light manufacturing**, where women form a large proportion of workers.
  - These labor-intensive sectors could be brought under the ambit of the [Production Linked Incentive \(PLI\) scheme](#) to address cost disadvantages.
  - India can also learn from **Iceland's Equal Pay Certification** that mandates companies prove they don't discriminate
- **Improving Access to Skilling:** There is tremendous scope to raise the number of training institutes that cater exclusively to women from the current **17% of Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs)**.
  - Career counseling, job placement cells embedded in training institutes, and harnessing alumni networks to activate women "**role models**" and mentors for female trainees may be effective tools to improve employment outcomes.
- **Enabling Women's Mobility in Urban Areas:** As India urbanizes at a rapid pace, cities must be planned with a gender lens to **welcome, accommodate, and enable women's mobility**.
  - With rapid demographic shifts and population aging, a high-quality, subsidized urban care infrastructure will not only release women from care work but also create new jobs for them in this sector.
- **Clean Energy to Fuel Dream Energy :** The government could provide **cash rebates to consumers at the point of purchase of clean technology** along with production incentives that create new jobs in the clean energy sector.
  - Adopting such measures could help reduce the significant time burden women face in activities like cooking with inefficient, polluting fuels and make them more focused towards their goals.
- **Developing Micro-credentialing Platforms:** Develop online platforms offering stackable micro-credentials focused on in-demand skills .
  - These bite-sized courses with the help of **Generated AI** can be completed flexibly, allowing **women to gain relevant skills** without disrupting childcare or work schedules.
- **Women-led Supply Chain Networks:** Create government-backed initiatives that connect **women-led [self-help groups \(SHGs\)](#) directly to large corporations** and government procurement programs.
  - This provides women with a stable market for their products and services, bypassing middlemen and increasing profit margins.
  - Women-led startups should also be encouraged. For example, **Falguni Nayar**, a self-made entrepreneur, who has transformed the Indian beauty market with the founding of **Nykaa**, the **country's first online beauty e-marketplace**.

### **Drishhti Mains Question:**

Examine the factors hindering women's socio-economic empowerment in India and propose effective policy interventions for inclusive development.

## UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

### Prelims

**Q. Which of the following gives 'Global Gender Gap Index' ranking to the countries of the world? (2017)**

- (a) World Economic Forum
- (b) UN Human Rights Council
- (c) UN Women
- (d) World Health Organization

**Ans: (a)**

**Q. Two of the schemes launched by the Government of India for Women's development are Swadhar and Swayam Siddha. As regards the difference between them, consider the following statements: (2010)**

1. Swayam Siddha is meant for those in difficult circumstances such as women survivors of natural disasters or terrorism, women prisoners released from jails, mentally challenged women etc., whereas Swadhar is meant for holistic empowerment of women through Self Help Groups.
2. Swayam Siddha is implemented through Local Self Government bodies or reputed Voluntary Organizations whereas Swadhar is implemented through the ICDS units set up in the states.

**Which of the statements given above is/are correct?**

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

**Ans: (d)**

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### Mains

**Q.1** "Empowering women is the key to control population growth". Discuss. (2019)

**Q.2** Discuss the positive and negative effects of globalization on women in India? (2015)

**Q.3** Male membership needs to be encouraged in order to make women's organization free from gender bias. Comment. (2013)