



Economic Participation of Rural Women

*This editorial is based on [“Recognising the ‘compulsory’ woman worker”](#) which was published in *The Hindu* on 20/06/2022. It talks about the struggle of rural women workers in the process of switching roles to earn livelihood.*

For Prelims: Labour Codes, Labour Bureau, Related Government’s Schemes

For Mains: Issues of Women in Rural Economy, Measures that can be taken to Uplift Rural Women Workers, Related Government’s Schemes

India is celebrating and commemorating the progressive 75 years of India after independence with ‘Azaadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav’ and promulgating the mission of warranting women as **“Empowered women- Empowered Nation”**.

The need to improve women’s participation in the economy has been a long standing priority and is also crucial towards achieving the [Sustainable Development Goals](#).

A report by [“The Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy”](#) shows the labour participation rate of rural women was only 9.92% in March 2022 as compared to 67.24% for men.

With continuous dodging between different types of work to earn livelihood, even with low pay and tough working conditions, one can refer to such women workers as **“Compulsory Workers; whose work never ends”**.

With the rural economy constituting a significant part of India’s National Income, there is a need to look into the issues of rural women and take urgent actions.

What are the Various Challenges Faced by Rural Women Workers?

- **Mechanisation of Rural Economy:**
 - With the arrival of hitech machines in the agriculture sector, operations have become less labour intensive and resulted in a decrease in working days to less than 3 months/year. It forced many rural women to migrate and become part time construction workers.
- **Incomplete Presentation of Data:**
 - Women who stopped looking for work due to the belief that “no work is available” are wrongly described as women “dropping out” or “Leaving the market”, showcasing as a “choice”, rather than a compulsion forced upon them, hence rural economy suffers
- **Absence of Pay Parity:**
 - In the field of manual labour work, women are being paid less than men in terms of piece

rate due to physical constraints in lifting heavy weights.

- One particular project in Kalaburagi district of Karnataka which focuses on creation of percolation ponds. Since the digging of ponds required lifting about 3,000kg of mud a day and women were not able to meet the targets, they did not get the piece rate of ₹309; they got only ₹280 to ₹285.

▪ **Lack of Education:**

- Majority of women construction workers are not registered as “**Construction Workers**” and therefore ineligible for any benefit accruing to them from the Construction Workers’ Welfare Board.
- The paid formal jobs go to men and women with higher educational qualifications, leaving women with education till secondary level for non-agricultural, construction, house care and other roles.

▪ **Limitation of MGNREGA:**

- The [Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act \(MGNREGA\)](#), a labour demand-driven programme, is limited to providing only 100 days of paid labour on public works projects per year.
- For the rest of the period, women workers have to continuously look for alternative source of income meet expenses

▪ **Lack of Nutritious Food:**

- The high prices of essential commodities have led to a huge cut in women’s consumption of vegetables and pulses.
- The deprivation of nourishment that women face due to high prices and low incomes is another dimension of the ‘compulsory’ woman worker’s life.
- Due to a patriarchal society, boys are given relatively more nutritious food as they are deemed breadwinners of the family, especially if the family is poor and is not in a position to provide nutritious food to all the children.

▪ **Financial Constraints:**

- What the women earn from multiple tasks, for which there are no fixed rates is in no way equal to the amount of labour they do.
Due to non-availability of sufficient funds and lack of knowledge, they’re most vulnerable to land in debt traps.

What Initiatives have been Taken for the Upliftment for Rural Women Workers?

▪ **e-Shram Portal:**

- The Ministry of Labour and Employment launched the [e-Shram](#) portal.
- The aim is to register 38 crore unorganised workers such as construction labourers, migrant workforce, street vendors, and domestic workers, among others.
- If a worker is registered on the e-shram portal and meets with an accident, he will be eligible for Rs 2.0 Lakh on death or permanent disability and Rs 1.0 lakh on partial disability.

▪ **The Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP):**

- The Ministry of Rural Development launched [MKSP](#) in 2011.
- Aim is to impart skill development and capacity building programmes for rural women.
- This scheme was introduced as a sub component of [DAY-NRLM \(Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana — National Rural Livelihoods Mission\)](#) and implemented through State Rural Livelihoods Mission (SRLM) across India.
- Under DAY-NRLM scheme, trainings on use of latest agriculture, allied techniques, agro-ecological best practices are being imparted to women farmers through the community resource persons and extension agencies.

▪ **Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY)**

- The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship implemented [PMKVY](#) in 2015.
- It provides several short duration skill training programmes viz. Short-Term Training (STT) and [Recognition of Prior Learning \(RPL\)](#), etc. for rural youth and women to earn their livelihood. Government schemes viz. [The Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana \(DDU-GKY\)](#) is a placement linked skill development program for wage employment for rural youth.

- **Biotech-Krishi Innovation Science Application Network (Biotech-KISAN) Programme:**
 - The Department of Biotechnology (DBT) under the Ministry of Science and Technology initiated the [Biotech-KISAN Programme](#).
 - It provides scientific solutions to farmers in the north east region to link available innovative agriculture technologies to the farm with the small and marginal farmers, especially women farmers of the region.
- **Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana (PMJDY)**
 - [PMJDY](#) has boosted confidence and prospects of rural women participation in economic activities. The Jan Dhan campaign has ensured access to financial services, viz, banking/ savings and deposit accounts, remittance, credit, insurance, pension in an affordable manner to rural women.
- **Other Initiatives**
 - [Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana \(PMMVY\)](#)
 - [Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Ann Yojana](#)
 - [Sub-Mission on Agricultural Mechanization Scheme](#)
 - [PM-KISAN Scheme](#)

What Should be the Way Forward?

- **Survey Conduction:**
 - Timely village surveys should be conducted which could reveal the real image of ground reality, as with the deep penetration of capitalist processes in rural India, there is a crisis of livelihood options for rural workers.
 - Widespread surveys of poor rural women and how they spend their time are an urgent necessity.
- **Adult Education and Training:**
 - One of the greatest barriers to the sustainable development of women is their lack of access to quality adult education and training. Capacity building and adult training range from providing adult education, life, and social skills training.
 - When women have access to quality holistic personal, emotional and entrepreneurial development training opportunities, they will be empowered to speak for themselves.
- **Health:**
 - Women are primarily vulnerable to every form of health issues in different communities.
 - Individuals, organisations, and agencies can design projects that focus on providing affordable health care and training for women on healthy living, getting and taking clean water, keeping the clean and green environment and access to basic monthly menstrual care and maternal care.
- **Extension of PM-KISAN Scheme:**
 - The annual cash transfer of ₹6,000 to landowning farmers under PM-KISAN Scheme should be extended to rural landless labourers also.
- **Minimum Wages:**
 - There should be strict implementation of minimum wages with piece rates fixed for different types of women's labour.
- **MGNREGA Standards:**
 - The performance standards set under MGNREGA should be established gender wise and the work sites made more worker friendly. The 'compulsory' woman worker must be recognised and protected by laws and policies that address her issues.

Drishti Mains Question

Despite the government's continuous efforts to uplift women's status in the rural economy, the traditional struggle for women performing temporary jobs at lower wage rate still prevails. Discuss.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions

Q. Among the following who are eligible to benefit from the "Mahatma Gandhi National Rural

Employment Guarantee Act”? (2011)

- (a) Adult members of only the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe households
- (b) Adult members of below poverty line (BPL) households
- (c) Adult members of households of all backward communities
- (d) Adult members of any household

Ans: D

Ans: (d)

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