

Employment Status of Women in Informal Sector

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Informal labour sector has long been viewed as a transitory phase in the economies of any developing nation. It is mostly view as involuntary and caused by high rates of natural demographic increase, placing constraints on occupational structure of the city combined with rural and urban migration. Whatever may be the reasons for the emergence of the informal sector, the reality is, it has come to stay as a permanent feature in he economies of the developing countries. Studies have shown that the actual worker participants in this sector have always been pushed to Subordinate positions and have been made Invisible. Policy option has always overlooked their existence. They have always been considered as a reservoir of cheap labour available for exploitation. Majority of these workers are unskilled and non technical workers, but the fact remains they meet the growing needs of the poorer communities and increase the earning opportunity through works in marginal or survival conditions. When we come to realities of acts, bulk of the third world poor are woemen workers living in sub human conditions of starvation and squalor. It is arecurring story of incomplete human existence for the female poor in all developing countries due to powerlessness.

Ninety four percent of the world's working women and eighty nine percent of india's working women belong to this sector. Both in urban and rural areas, they experience great many diffeculties in their daily struggle for survival. They are mostly categorized as hawkers and vendors, piece rated workers, petty producers and those provide consumer services among the class of people who are not able to pay high service charges for the same. In the urban centres most of them are street vendors, pavement hawkers who face daily struggle to ply trades, be it procuring goods from wholesale market or in transportation, besides, poor storage facilities lack or permanent structures and training, long and arduous working hours, sexual harassment, harassment from police and municipal authorities, as well as lack or access to credit are examples of their unfavorable conditions. The wholesalers, money lenders and middle men provide credit on things, leading to low profits and marginal subsistence for women vendors, In rural situation, we are aware that women constitute 50% of agricultural labour force in India. They play a major role in the agratian economy and participate in all stages of crop production Factually, they are invisible contributors to the productive process. Lack or organization and other infrastructure among the peasantry and the landless in India have forced them to a status of low productivity . Their working conditions are harsh, the hours of work are mostly long and the wages are low.

In rural areas, fish trade, livestock rearing, delicate handicrafts production viz. lace making bidi rolling, agarbathi rolling, are mostly handled by women workers But they are doubly disadvantaged by both hard working conditions coupled with poor living arrangement reinforced by social disabilities. Caste and gender situations are additional barriers to women workers in India.

Women play a very useful role in the family and community as major contributors to family income both i urban and rural areas. they play a crucial role in agrarian economy as invisible contributors to production process During the off seasons, most of them are engaged in some kind of home based production or micro business in rural shanties (roughly built hut) and are victims of harsh working conditions and go through series of economic problems, with no legal protection. The social legislations at the grassroots are totally ineffective. Rampant alcoholism among men results in low male contribution in the family. Thus, women

workers go through series of oppressions due to class, caste and gender situations.

Working women's Forum (India) WWF (I), a grass - root organization of poor working class women, was initiated in 1978. The objective of the forum is to empower the women workers in the informal sector and to strengthen their economic roles. The forum has achieved this empowerment through credit assistance to strengthen production requirements of women workers, and through intensive family planning programme, which eventually reduced their reproductive roles, to reduce the problem of poverty in working class families.

We have narrowed down everything mentioned above to a policy formulation option with under noted measures, suggested from our experience in the WWF (I)

The nature of work in which these women are employed many differ in nature but from the view points of income and conditions of life and work, all these women earn more or less the same wages and their living conditions are similar and also they go through same kind of oppressions. Therefore it would be proper to bring them under one umbrella called informal sector.

1. There are home based workers for whom their are contractors or sub contractors, who are their well defined employers.
2. There are vendors and hawkers, both in urban and rural areas who may be called self employed women or microentrepreneurs.
3. There are many handicraft workers, and artisans, who work for others on piece rate wages. These are workers who are subjected to very large scale exploitation by exporters and merchants.
4. There are construction workers who work in jobs of high risks.

Commission on Women Workers

Recently, the Government of India is trying to appoint a panel for self employed women. It will be more appropriate to name such a panel as a Panel or Commission on Women Workers rather than self employed. The commission can go round the country and visit the piece rate women workers in a large number of industries of units, women workers who work as home based producers, study many such occupations in which they are micro- entrepreneurs, their own rights, along with the conditions of life and work of rural based women artisans and prepare a profile of women workers state wise.

Enhancing Women's Capabilities Towards Social Transformations The Right to Decent Livelihood.

Being unorganized conglomerations, women worker's earnings are so meager and irregular that they hardly make both ends meet. Further, their struggle for housing water and civic amenities are enormous in the urban slums. Their landless counterparts in the rural areas suffer equally due to under employment, low wages. Sometimes with limited work options to even 45 to 60 days in a year. If they happened to be a part of drought prone areas, it is even worse. Thus, it is more than an annual feature that rural poor are on their migrating journey to the already overcrowded city slums, in search of new work options and continue to be victims of vicious circles of poverty. There are women workers of women's Working Forum (WWF) who work as weavers of cloth, mats and baskets, cigar or agarbathi rollers, food processors, either work alone or collectively in other branches. They work as agricultural labourers on farm lands or they work for their kith and kin. They are providers of their families, working in service occupations i.e. dhobis, cooks sweepers and water carriers etc. They are integral part of the production process and contribute to the informal economy. Unfortunately, they have little or no access to fruits of their won labour, not that of the government's assistance.

Protective Measures for Women Workers

1. **Employment :** As regard to the protective measures in the case of rural workers, both among those work as plantation laborers and agricultural workers, there are large number of legislations enacted by the Indian Parliament, but enforcement becomes often difficult because of the clever tactics of the employers.
2. **Maternity Benefits:** When it comes to entitlement of maternity benefits, it is always stipulated by the employers that the workers have to be permanent and must have put in 200 days of work or so. Female workers are not given those many days of work just to prevent them becoming eligible for the maternity benefits and so on.
3. **Night Work :** After 66 years of independence, night shift work for women workers has become a reality which was so long denied to them (except nursing jobs) and thus depriving of the benefits related to night shift work.
4. **Other Welfare Measures :** It is a fact that many women do not have rest shed in their work place. They are not given time to look after their small children and are not given casual leaves. Even changing rooms and separate toilets are not provided in many factories and plantations.
5. **Health Hazard :** Many women are required to spray chemicals and insecticides in plantations which affect their reproductive capacity. There is no law to prevent this.
6. **Sexual Harassment :** Women go through a lot of sexual harassment from managers and supervisors. However, even though under the provisions of law women can lodge a complaint, women never come out to complain for fear of losing the job.
7. **Minimum Wages :** Women workers in many industries, contractual farms and plantations are not paid the minimum prescribed wages as per the law. Women rarely complain for fear of losing the job.

Working Women's Forum (India)'s success, especially its operation in the southern and western parts of India (now moving towards north too) can be analyzed in development terms, as growth with equity and distribution betterment in quality of life, increase in the women worker's visibility/ empowerment (through access to credit/ employment/ empowerment / support services) resulting in the increase of women's income, consciousness and worker solidarity.

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