

# Towards Gender Equality in Employment

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## 1. Introduction:

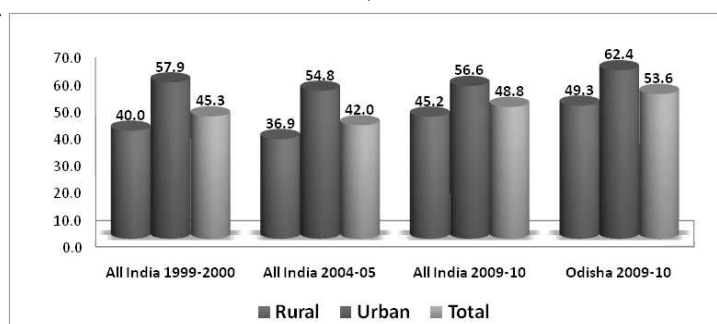
Women's empowerment and gender equality have been recognized as key priorities not only to the wellbeing of nations, but also to social and economic development. Gender inequality exists in all societies and at all levels of society. There is sharp decline in female employment in the last decade at national and sub-national level. Although the gradual decline in female work force participation rates in urban areas has been an observable phenomenon for the last three decades, but the sharp decline in female employment in the second half of the last decade (a decade of rapid economic growth) has raised concerns among the policy-makers regarding gender equality, women empowerment and women livelihood strategies. It has also raised question on adequate participation of women in the growth process and nation-building.

## 2. Current scenario:

After sixty-nine years of independence, there exist visible gender disparities in India as well as Odisha in several human development indicators. As per 2011 census, the literacy in female population in Odisha is only 64 percent compared to about 82 percent in case of

male population indicates gender gap of about 18 per cent. The women employment both at National as well as State level in the organized sector stands at a much lower level compared to male employment, though there is some improvement in recent years. A sizeable portion of rural women participate in farm operations like sowing, transplanting, weeding, hoeing and harvesting, though there exist differentiation in wages among men and women for the same type of jobs. Women's participation in agricultural activities is the major reason for relatively lower gender gap in rural areas compared to the urban areas.

**Chart-1: Gender Gap in Employment (both urban and rural): All India vs Odisha**



(Source: World Bank Report "Republic of India: Women, Work and Employment" Dt.26th February, 2014)

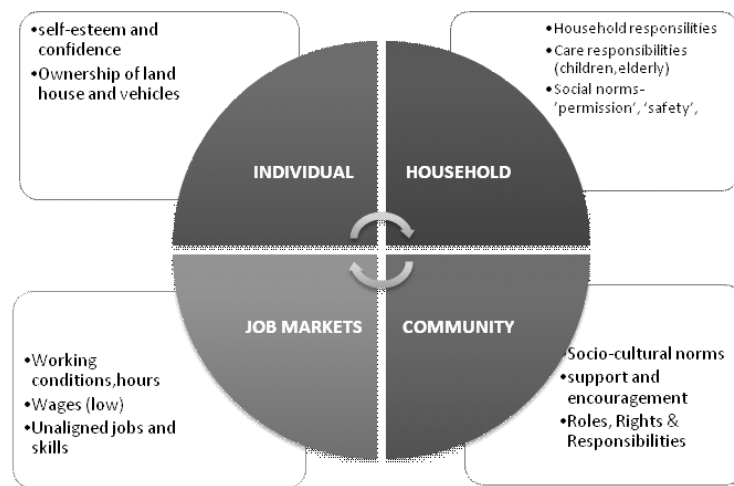
Statistics shows that, the gender gap in employment in India had shown some improvement during the period from 1999-2000 to 2004-05. However, the gap has widened sharply after 2004-05 and the gender gap in both rural and urban employment in 2009-10 is even wider than the level achieved in 1993-94. The overall gender gap in the country is just below 50 percent which should be cause for concern. The situation in Odisha is even worse than the national level. The overall gender disparity in employment is more than 5 percent and the gap in urban areas is more than 60 percent.

### 3. Possible reasons for lower Women urban employment

What have been the barriers to women's work participation, and what are the related policy implications? Some of the key barriers are identified in Figure-1, which organizes them into Individual, Household, Community, Market and Geographic groups and identifies some broad related phenomena (e.g., Ability, Need, Discrimination, and so on). There are supply-side barriers such as the social norm of marriage and motherhood being 'preferred' for women over work (shown in the Community and Household arenas), and women's care responsibilities being considered their primary role (a situation that plays out in the Household, Community and Job Market arenas). Male and female workforce decisions are inter-dependent, and women's participation, in particular, is subject to being able to balance work and care. Another set of barriers is related to the inadequate demand for women workers. This includes the poor alignment of jobs with women's skills, working

conditions that discourage female participation, and low rates of formal employment generation (all in the Job Market arena). These are some of the barriers with a view to identifying what could be done about them to progress toward more gender-equal work participation.

**Figure-1**



### 4. Well-being, Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality

Women's empowerment is defined as "women's ability to make strategic life choices where that ability had been previously denied them" (Kabeer 1999). As we articulate it, empowerment is midway in the change processes that benefit women at individual, household, community and broader levels. As shown in Figure 2, the vital improvements in well-being, changes can result in women's empowerment, where women gain agency and resources to make decisions, build confidence and act in their own interests. Deeper and truly transformative changes reshape societal norms, attitudes and institutional practices. Greater gender equality in markets, political institutions, family systems and social roles provide an ongoing foundation for sustaining women's well-being and empowerment.

Figure-2



## 5. Strategies to achieve Gender Equality

Gender equality is essential for meaningful inclusion. In the context of urban development, while empowerment is about enabling women to use the spaces and pathways created for their engagement in city planning, it must also be about building capacities among local government institutions to listen to the voices of women and monitor gender based outcomes. Only then can such engagement be meaningful.

### a. Women's Rights to Urban Spaces

People, who own land, benefit from the economic and social security. Women, however, have traditionally been excluded from land ownership; an asset-less-ness that has contributed to their continued poverty/insecurity. Only a very small percentage of all women have legal title to housing/land. Among the poor, women land owners are likely to be a negligible number. Women's lack of title/ownership makes them a voiceless and vulnerable constituency. Housing design like homes with in-the-house facilities for water and toilets, neighborhoods with better linkages to markets, schools, child care, health, education and transport services, can all increase women's abilities to be more productive and participative.

### b. Right to Social Services

Women study for fewer years than men and have less control over how long and what to study. They also get a smaller share of family resources, both food and health care, that results in enduring disadvantages extending across generations. Improvement in women's status/value and control over assets significantly improves both their own and their children's food and health security.

### c. Access to Infrastructure

Several important links are there between physical infrastructure and women's economic activity. As women and girls are largely responsible for household tasks related to water supply, cooking, cleaning, and so on, improvements in water supply or energy are expected to reduce the time they spend on housework, freeing up time for productive activities. Electricity improves access to information through radio, television, phone networks, and so on - these information and communication technologies (ICTs) have the potential to connect producers to markets and job-seekers to opportunities as well as enable a host of social and economic services including banking, bill payments, etc.

**d. Safety and Security**

The term 'security' refers to the economic, environmental and social security of individuals and groups. In a male dominated system and because of inherent biological differences (men being physically stronger than women), women experience less safety and are subjected to greater personal violence, both inside the home (domestic), in the community and on the streets. Poor women in urban areas are more exposed to risk because they are often located in sites that are prone to crime and /or in environments that are in contravention of the law. Woman should be ensured dignity and respect so that she can also enjoy her human rights and fundamental rights with sense of pride, freedom and confidence. To ensure this at every level the society must work together to give an edge to the solution.

**e. Improving Working condition**

To ease the dichotomy between home-based and factory-based work, women home-based workers could be encouraged and assisted to organize into producer groups, co-operatives or small/medium enterprises for better access to markets, credit, information, and improved returns to their labour. Factory-workers in garment manufacturing and similar sub-sectors also have significant needs to address including safe buildings, proper facilities, health and social protection, and some job security. While expanding this sector could serve to increase women's employment, economic growth and exports, it is imperative to improve working conditions and enforce relevant regulations.

**f. Decision-making**

Although a majority of men say that husbands and wives should make decisions jointly, a significant proportion feels that husbands should have the

major say in most decisions, particularly in decisions related to large household purchases and visits to the wife's family and relatives. Enhancing their access to and control over economic resources and enabling them to establish and realize their rights are also essential means to empower them to be more autonomous in decision making.

**6. Conclusion**

A number of fundamental changes must occur for employment to be more empowering for women. First, while increasing the jobs available to women is an important step to improving women's empowerment through employment, these jobs must go beyond what is traditionally available to women and the opportunity structures for women in all positions must be enhanced. Second, the most successful economic empowerment programmes are those that provide not only jobs, skills training or financial assistance to start small businesses, but those that incorporate rights awareness education, provide a network of supportive peers and those that work to improve women's self-esteem. Improving women's self-esteem and knowledge about their rights can increase their negotiating power and their ability to assert themselves and make choices that best meet their and their children's needs. Third, the importance of education for women and girls cannot be underestimated. Education not only expands women's economic opportunities, but it has repeatedly been shown to delay age at marriage, delay age at first birth and improve women's capabilities on a whole host of issues. Ensuring women and girl's education is fundamental to improving women's empowerment and furthering women's rights and equality. Fourth, policies must be put in place that guarantee women's rights and protect women in the workplace, the home and the community. These

four points are only some of the things that must occur for work to be more empowering and to continue the push from empowerment as a process towards empowerment as an outcome.

It is important to mention that empowerment is a state of being as well as state of mind and before full empowerment can be realized, women need to not only act differently, but also to think differently, to value themselves more, and to really believe that they are equal. Of course the challenge lies not just in individual women, but also in society and so while promoting individual women's empowerment is incredibly important, it is not enough to change the environment for women in India or in other developing countries. As many scholars have noted, empowerment must occur at all levels of society, women must mobilize and fight for their rights, men must participate in the process, and governments must actively support women's equality in all spheres of life. Globally and at a local level, women must be empowered in the home, in the community, in the economy and in politics. When thinking of women's empowerment in this way, it is easy to see why individual women's empowerment is so important: it is a seed for change at the most basic level. The importance of individual women's empowerment in the home cannot be underestimated and understanding the connections between employment and empowerment is necessary in order to understand the barriers to empowerment and to understand how

employment can make a difference in women's lives.

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