

What will work? Empowering women economically

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March 24th, 2018

Female disadvantage begins early and persists over time...



Picture credit: ASER (2017)

- By the time Kalyani is 18, she will be married.
- Her access to and ownership of resources will be limited, if at all.
- She will lose her existing social network and kinships post marriage.
- Within 2 years of marriage she will give birth to her first child.

Wither economic opportunities?

- In 2011, only 20% of **rural** married women in age 15-60 were in the labor force, *30 percentage points* lower than for unmarried women.
- While workforce participation rates amongst **urban** unmarried women went up by 11 ppt between 1999-2011, it has been stagnant for married women at 20% for the past thirty years.
- For married and unmarried **men**, the participation rates are high (around 95%) and constant over time. If anything, married men have a slightly higher rate of labor force attachment than unmarried men.

Wither economic opportunities?

- *Lack of ownership of productive assets* by women limits their entrepreneurial ability.
- *Low human capital* investments in girls, both in terms of quality and quantity, restricts labor market access.
- *Absence of a strong social network*, limits information about job and market opportunities.
- *Gendered division of time* use within the household confines women to within homes.

Supply side constraints

Cultural norms underlying the traditional role of men and women in the Indian households lead to

- higher elasticity of women's relative to men's labor supply, due to lack of job market skills and low education.
- non-substitutability between male and female labor in home production
- absence of child care services coupled with the shift towards more nuclear families may have exacerbated the burden of domestic work on women.

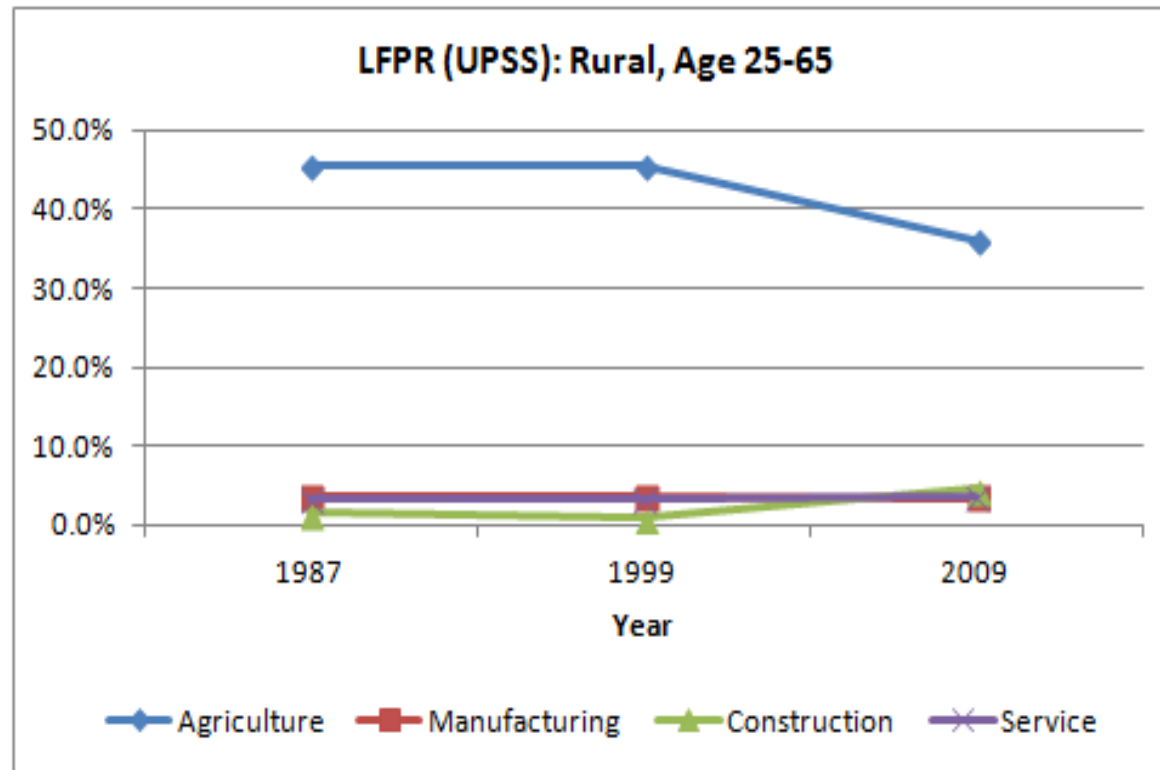
Demand side constraints

- lack of (good) jobs which women with relatively low levels of education can engage in (e.g. manufacturing)
- absence of flexible work hours
- safe and easier physical access to work
- persistent gender gap in wages and earnings

Identifying and alleviating constraints

- **Macro economic framework with a life cycle approach**
 - What constraints women's access to economic opportunities at various stages of her life?
 - Which sectors of the economy have shrinking opportunities for women?
 - Which sectors are more likely to engage women productively with 'good' jobs?

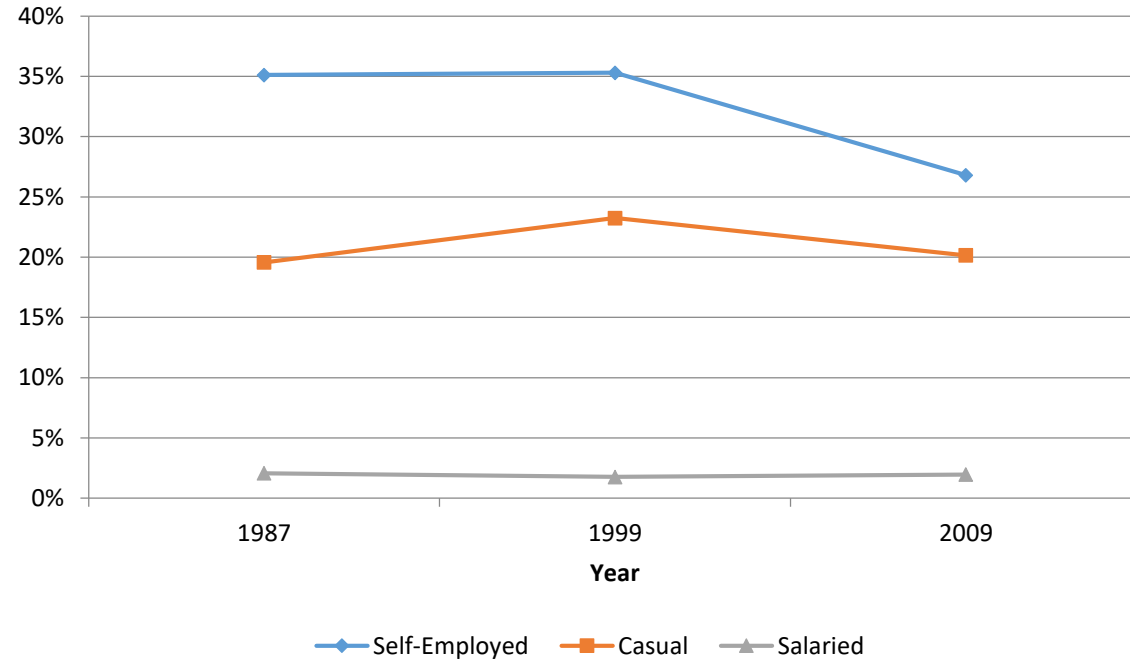
Women's Labor Force Participation (Rural)



Source: NSS various years (own calculations)

Women's Labor Force Participation (Rural)

LFPR (UPSS): Age 25-65



Source: NSS various years (own calculations)

Identifying and alleviating constraints

- **Microeconomic and sectoral analysis**
 - Agriculture:
 - reducing unpaid work, adopting new technology on the farm, access to markets
 - Manufacturing:
 - skill training, child care services
 - Services:
 - safety

What works?

- The constraints women face in achieving economic empowerment are multifaceted.
- We need evidence on the relative effectiveness of interventions and policies that address the multidimensionality of this issue.