

# GENDER IN FOCUS

July 2021 | Volume 4



## Dear readers,

Thank you for your enthusiastic response to Gender in Focus. IWWAGE has been told many times that it is valuable to have a quarterly which reflects on the gender landscape in India, and how it is evolving. We regret the delay caused in publishing this edition. Many of us, like you, fell victims to the second wave of COVID-19, and some of us lost our loved ones.

It has been a devastating time for everyone, but especially for women. IWWAGE has been trying to keep the spotlight on how the pandemic has affected women, by engaging in multiple debates around the issue, including for example whether women should be paid wages for housework, how data can be collected from women, especially at a time when evaluation agencies only have phone surveys to rely on, to how the Indian economy can build forward better and equitably so. In March 2021, on the occasion of International Women's Day, the Indian Statistical Institute and IWWAGE, as part of their partnership organised the third annual workshop on Women in the Economy that saw participation of many scholars writing about the barriers women face to working. At around the same time, IWWAGE partnered with IDRC, BMGF and other agencies, to release an Evidence Review of the Global Childcare Crisis, and how it is affecting women's prospects.

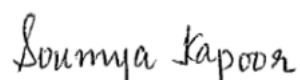
In April 2021, IWWAGE embarked on an ambitious online platform called Gender Samvaad, which allows SHG members to have a direct interface with senior officials of the NRLM, and exchange best practices on how collectives can be used to build livelihoods, address food and nutrition security, and impacts of COVID. The Samvaad has been extremely successful, and the three dialogues hosted so far by IWWAGE have solicited participation of more than 3000 NRLM cadres, officials and members joining from across the country. IWWAGE has also partnered with NRLM to release a compendium of case studies of select SHG women who have fought to rebuild their lives by leveraging the strength of their groups; and another on village and cluster level social action committees,

which are being used by women as platforms to fight against injustices and claim their rights and entitlements. The latter was released in a Samvaad by the then Honourable Minister of Rural Development, Shri. Narendra Singh Tomar, and Minister of State, Sadhvi Niranjana Jyoti.

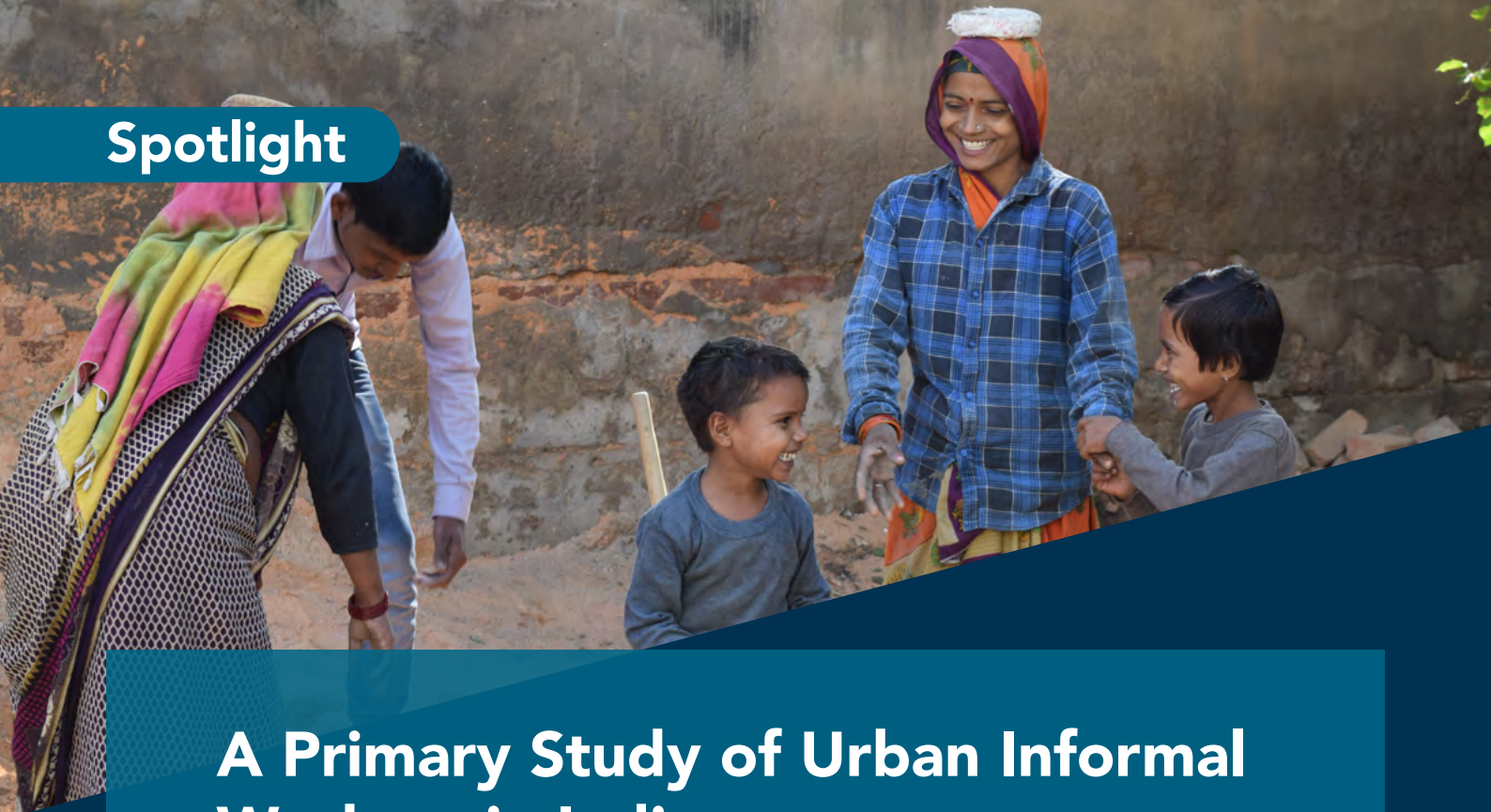
In addition to the Gender Samvaad, IWWAGE has been trying to amplify its voice in policy circles, by helping states articulate guidelines on new policies such as a gender sensitive Urban Employment Guarantee Scheme (in Tamil Nadu, in partnership with The Quantum Hub), and building data monitoring tools to monitor outcomes for women e.g. a gender dashboard (for Andhra Pradesh).

Besides innovations in advocacy, IWWAGE has also been trying to establish its footprint on research around issues such as the most important barriers to and solutions for enhanced female labour force participation, and how intersections with caste and religion, further worsen outcomes for women. Working papers on these themes were released this year. IWWAGE has also commenced a partnership with the World Bank to strengthen gender budgeting as a tool for better outcomes for women (in Punjab), and with Sanhita to evaluate their work on trainings around sexual harassment and the POSH Act. This issue also covers our ongoing work on the GRC pilots (SWAYAM) and findings from the first round of its process evaluation (by IDInsight); early findings from a survey of informal workers in urban India (conducted for SEWA); and our ongoing research around the Haqdarshak digital app in Chhattisgarh.

I do hope you enjoy reading about IWWAGE's work, and wish you and your families a healthy and safe next quarter.



**Soumya Kapoor Mehta,**  
Head, IWWAGE



# A Primary Study of Urban Informal Workers in India

*Assessing the cascading effects of COVID-19 on informal workers' livelihoods and earnings*

Employment in India is overwhelmingly informal; more than 90 per cent of workers are informally employed. India's informal economy comprises 400+ million workers, and there are multiple layers of informality permeating it. It is plagued by low earnings, precarious working conditions, insecure jobs, and near absence of social protection. Informal workers include domestic workers, contributing family workers, own-account workers, contract and temporary workers, and other non-standard forms of employment. While COVID-19 has severely impacted and has exacerbated inequalities in the informal economy, women and men are affected differently, as women are more likely to be at the bottom of the informal economy hierarchy, working in more vulnerable positions than their male counterparts.

Against this backdrop, the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), together with the Initiative for What Works to Advance Women and Girls in the Economy (IWWAGE), conducted a large-scale primary study at the end of 2020 to generate evidence on working conditions in the urban informal economy and the impact of COVID-19 on informal workers' livelihoods and earnings. The study was designed as part of a larger research on

*"When the lockdown was eased, domestic workers like me were all set to go back to work. But the world has changed post-COVID, there are no travel facilities and many of us have lost our jobs. Domestic workers are still considered as 'virus carriers' and avoided."*

**- Vijayakumari, Domestic worker, Kerala**

the future of informal work in India, to which many experts contributed. More specifically, the study focused on sector-specific issues and challenges, existing government policies and programmes for informal workers, gaps, difficulties and challenges in accessing the entitlements, and the pandemic's overall impact on these workers.

We gathered quantitative and qualitative data from informal workers engaged in different sectors in five cities across India – Delhi, Lucknow, Ranchi, Ahmedabad and

Trivandrum. We conducted phone surveys with them and relied on other methods including interviews with key informants associated with the sector and focus group discussions that SEWA facilitated. Our research revealed that low income and savings levels, lack of employment security, lack of access to social protection, and inability to switch to work-from-home afflicted most workers in the urban informal economy and rendered millions jobless for several months. The adverse impacts on indebtedness, nutrition, health and education have the potential to cast a long shadow. The response to this unprecedented crisis must include short-term measures to restore livelihoods and repair household balance sheets, besides long-term efforts to reduce insecurity and informality, and increase scale and productivity.

Some key findings from our research are noted below:

- Domestic workers continue to struggle for visibility and work in dire working conditions, mostly without any contract (54 per cent) or work based on oral agreement (38 per cent). Sixty-seven per cent said they never got any increment, whereas 25 per cent reported getting yearly raise. While reporting on leave entitlements, a mere 15 per cent received a weekly day off, while 53 per cent had no provision for paid leaves.
- Street vendors are a large and prominent segment of the informal economy in cities; however, economic downturns make them very vulnerable. Our findings suggest that street vendors are susceptible to harassment, evictions and confiscations, with 28.5 per cent reporting harassment by police and municipal authorities. An overwhelming 88 per cent of vendors were not aware of The Street Vendors Act.
- The construction sector has been a significant absorber of workers leaving agriculture over the past two decades.

However, multiple intermediaries, late payment of wages, arbitrary reduction of salaries and verbal abuse characterise the construction industry. Nearly half of the construction workers interviewed said they did not receive any skill training for construction work, and 44 per cent learned on-the-job. Female construction workers were even more disadvantaged.

- Construction workers were one of the hardest hit during the lockdown. Seventy-eight per cent lost their employment, and 91 per cent experienced a drop in their income during the lockdown period.
- Informal workers depend heavily on day-to-day wages for sustenance; the lockdown had severe impact on their earnings, which witnessed on an average, a 90 per cent drop, with little signs of recovery to previous income levels pre-lockdown.
- Of all the government's initiatives during the lockdown, the ones addressing food security were availed the most by informal workers in cities. Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Ann Yojana, Public Distribution System, and the emergency ration and cooked meals programme were the most effective, though their overall uptake was not universal.
- The cash transfer schemes were not effective in reaching the informal workers. Only 38 per cent of our respondents reported receiving any Direct Cash Transfer.
- Awareness about social protection policies was low across all three occupation types, with more than one-third of the respondents unaware of any social protection schemes. The Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme and Ayushman Bharat were the most heard of schemes. However, enrolment was low across all social protection and social security schemes, with more than 85 per cent of our sampled respondents not enrolled in any programmes.

**REPORT TO BE PUBLISHED SOON - FOLLOW OUR WEBSITE FOR UPDATES**



# Evaluation of the Implementation of the SWAYAM Project

## *Using the power of collectives to strengthen women's economic and social empowerment*

IWWAGE has been providing technical assistance to NRLM to support its gender operational strategy and institutionalise gender across all levels of the Mission. The partnership conceptualised through project SWAYAM (Strengthening Women's institutions for Agency and Empowerment) aims to strengthen capacity of staff at all levels in the NRLM through trainings to work on gender issues; redesign the existing gender training curriculum used by State Rural Livelihood Missions; design and test innovative solutions for delivering the trainings; design, pilot and evaluate the impact of Gender Resource Centres/Gender Justice Centres (GRCs/ GJCs) to promote gender equality and help women claim their entitlements; and build performance indicators, generate rigorous evidence and develop knowledge management mechanisms to inform programme design.

The SWAYAM programme is currently being implemented by IWWAGE and IWWAGE partners<sup>1</sup> in the states of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh and Odisha, with the goal to enhance women's empowerment and strengthen women's groups. To generate evidence about the lives of Self-Help Group (SHG) women, and the implementation of the programme across the SWAYAM geographies, IDinsight<sup>2</sup> undertook a process evaluation, data for which was collected through phone surveys between the months of January and March 2021.

The first round of survey shows that a majority of women within the SWAYAM areas are from vulnerable groups, including from marginalised caste groups and predominantly from agricultural households.

Overall SWAYAM is working through two main strategies to improve empowerment

<sup>1</sup> Chaitanya Wise and Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) in Chhattisgarh, PRADAN, Jagori, and Transforming Rural India Foundation (TRIF) in Jharkhand, Anandi and International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW) in Madhya Pradesh and Project Concern International (PCI) and Kudumbashree in Odisha.

outcomes. The first is gender training, and the second the establishment of GRCs. On gender trainings, the survey reveals that SWAYAM's cascading training model, is working effectively. Over 73 per cent SHG women, and 100 per cent gender champions (master trainers) who have attended trainings recalled learning at least one SWAYAM topic, and across groups 60 per cent women reported to have learnt something new in the trainings.

GRCs are platforms through which women can access support and help for varied issues. They are currently active in Madhya Pradesh and Odisha. The survey shows a high awareness of the centres (45 per cent of women, 69 per cent of VO/CLFs, and 100 per cent of gender champions, panchayat leaders, and block and district staff were aware of them), despite the low usage which might be due to the pandemic and lockdown restrictions.

*Many women in the blocks where SWAYAM activities are being implemented are from more vulnerable groups: the majority of women are from more marginalised caste groups and are from agrarian households. Therefore, SWAYAM programme activities have tremendous scope to improve the lives of women in these communities.*

In summary, there are various indicators that are encouraging for the SWAYAM model. Over 75 per cent women responded that it is impermissible for a man to be physically violent with his wife; additionally, more than 70 per cent gender champions responded that they have led efforts to resolve community issues, demonstrating women's involvement in resolving disputes and being involved in the larger community. Thirty-three per cent women responded that they attend gram sabha meetings, while this number is much higher for gender champions (71 per cent). It is our hope that by the end of the project many more women will be getting involved in decisions that affect them, by participating in village level decision making processes. SWAYAM has come a long way and holds great promise of strengthening women's agency, identity, well-being, and solidarity, through women's collectivisation, prioritising women's perspectives and being responsive to their needs and aspirations.

## Working or Not: What Determines Women's Labour Force Participation in India?

Women's labour force participation is abysmally low in India, and pronounced gender gaps characterise the labour market. Since the mid-2000s, women have been dropping out of the labour market at an alarming rate. Despite rising GDP, increasing educational attainment, rising household incomes, and declining fertility rates, women's paid work participation remains dismal. IWWAGE conducted in-house research to explore this issue of puzzling decline and reported findings in a recently released working paper. More broadly, the paper unpacks the key factors determining women's labour market participation in rural and

urban India. Furthermore, the study provides systematic evidence on the country's gender gaps in employment and labour market outcomes.

The paper utilises household-level data from Periodic Labour Force Surveys (PLFS) covering 2017-18 and 2018-19. The analysis of long-term trends is also presented using various NSSO's Employment-Unemployment Surveys (completed in 1993-94, 1999-00, 2004-5, 2009-10, 2011-12). The findings highlight that women have notably lower employment rates than men and the decline is not limited to young women workers.

<sup>2</sup> IDinsight uses data and evidence to help leaders combat poverty worldwide. IDinsight deploys a large analytical toolkit to help clients design better policies, rigorously test what works, and use evidence to implement effectively at scale.



Women's participation is volatile across all age brackets, especially between 25 to 59 years. Interestingly, rural women's participation rate declined by 24 percentage points since 1993-94, whereas urban women (whose labour force participation has been traditionally low) experienced only a marginal decline. The study also shows that women's participation in rural areas dropped across all states during 2011-12 and 2018-19, mainly on account of declining employment opportunities for women. More educated women were unemployed in 2018-19, while their enrolment in schools and colleges continued to rise. More specifically, the data confirm a U-shaped relationship between education and women's labour force participation, which is strongly evident in urban women.

The paper underlines the disproportionate amount of unpaid care work and domestic work undertaken by women and the multiple societal constraints they face to joining the labour force. This, in turn, limits their mobility and labour market choice and forces them to take non-wage employment or remain

out of the labour force. Furthermore, as the household's income levels elevate, the likelihood of a woman being in the labour force decreases. Similarly, marriage and young children negatively affect the probability of women's participation.

The paper's findings underscore the importance of supporting women's entry into the labour market through policies, including imparting vocational and technical skills, which can significantly encourage their labour market participation and mitigate persistent inequalities in India's labour market outcomes. The paper finds that training of any kind can have a strong, positive effect on women's chances of being in the labour market. The study further highlights the need for a comprehensive and integrated approach to breaking down the barriers to women's economic engagement. It suggests investing in gender-responsive policies and programmes, such as providing childcare facilities, and providing access to better-paid formal jobs or entrepreneurship opportunities.

[READ THE PAPER HERE](#)





# Stories of Hope and Resilience

## *How SHG women demonstrate grit, strength, perseverance and hope*

Our experiences make us who we are. Identity markers such as gender, race and ethnicity play a major role in shaping our lives, especially our encounters with oppression, disadvantage and discrimination. Gender norms and stereotypes, often tend to define a woman's life, resulting in violence and harassment, restrictions on freedom and mobility, limited choice of opportunities, and often denial of basic rights like education and health.

Through the compendium 'Stories of Hope and Resilience' IWWAGE and the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Rural Livelihood Mission (DAY-NRLM) attempt to showcase the life and experiences of rural women and

their gendered disadvantage, struggles and barriers. Released on 16 April 2021 at the launch of the Gender Samvad initiative by the honourable Secretary Rural Development, Shri Nagandra Nath Sinha, the compendium captures the stories of ten women, across seven states.

*"As a SHG member, regular savings and loans have helped me not only tide over my medical expenditures, but also build a house and establish a stationary and gift shop. Today I am proud to have supported my sister to complete her education. She works in Delhi, and I have also completed schooling from the National Institute of Open School." - Rita Chetry, Assam*

Rajamma personifies perseverance and strength. She shared her story of coming out of prostitution with the help of the SHG network in Andhra Pradesh, who supported her to carve out a new life by educating her daughters. Ambika Thapa in Assam, runs a Children's Home, Mission Concern. Being a SHG member has enabled her to put her resources and income towards helping orphaned and abandoned children. Rita Chetry's story is one of



exemplary determination. Today, she owns a stationary shop and manages the business, and also works in Assam as a community resource person to bring other women like her out of poverty. Coming from a traditional family, Lalita's journey of overcoming repressive gender norms and shifting the gender perspectives within her family, is a remarkable feat. Today she works as a Gender Community Resource Person (CRP) and runs the family business registered in her name. Sumitra, branded a witch, is fighting all odds to stand up against the alleged accusations against her and her family. Where the panchayat and community systems have failed her, she hopes that the Anti-Witch Hunting Programme of the Jharkhand State Livelihood Promotion Society (JSLPS) will ensure justice for her. Shabana, in Kerala, has left an abusive relationship to reinvent her life as the owner of a food stall.

Shanti, also from Kerala shares how the SHG movement in the state supported her through a deceptive marriage that led to her contracting HIV.

*Married at age 17, and giving birth to her first child at 18, Lalita's journey from a person who subscribed to traditional gender norms to being a gender champion, deserves accolades. She attributes this change to Bihan, (Chhattisgarh) and says "it is only now that I have started living".*

After getting proper treatment she has started her own stitching business. The SHG loan has made her self-sufficient and today she stands on her own feet. Shakuntala Devi in Rajasthan overcame many barriers to be elected a ward panch; she

attributes her success to the confidence she gained from being an SHG member and leader. She has also been a strong advocate against the pardha pratha in her village, and as the ward panch advocates against stereotypes and discrimination against women. Urmila, from Maharashtra broke the traditional cycle of exploitation,

where young women from her family were sold, and now lives a life on her own terms by forming her own SHG. The Maharashtra State Livelihood Mission (MSRLM) gave special permission to form an SHG of only five women, to support extremely vulnerable women like her to come out of poverty and live a life of dignity. Finally, Moazungla in Nagaland shares her story of successfully rehabilitating her husband, and starting income

*She recalls feeling nervous on her first day at a meeting where she took off her ghongat while sitting with the other male members of the ward. "I did it because I believe the ghonghat is a sign of weakness. People expect us to be hidden, quiet and think us incapable of having our own views or making decisions. I wanted to change that." - Shakuntala Devi, ward Sarpanch and Samta Sakhi from Udaipur*

generating activities with the help of her SHG, that allowed her to pay back the substantial loans taken by her husband while he was an alcohol and drug addict. Moazungla has not only fulfilled her dream by becoming a CRP, but also helps other women to improve their lives.

The Stories of Hope and Resilience weaves together narratives of grit, strength, perseverance and hope. These inspiring stories demonstrate the journeys that women have taken to change their circumstances and build better futures for themselves. The compendium of case studies is representative of a number of women around the country who have been supported by DAY-NRLM, to overcome their circumstances and to lead more meaningful lives.

[READ THE COMPENDIUM HERE](#)



## Role of Collectives in Agent-based Entrepreneurial Models: Insights from Chhattisgarh

### *Evaluating the use of digital solutions to enhance women's agency and empowerment*

Innovative digital solutions can increase the penetration of services provided by women's collectives addressing mobility, costs, and time issues. Digital empowerment not only provides easier access to services, but helps women to connect in the community and with SHGs, and support information dissemination in critical times like the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the state of Chhattisgarh, IWWAGE and LEAD are partnering with the State Rural Livelihoods Mission (SRLM) and Haqdarshak Empowerment Solutions Private Limited (HESPL) to promote access to social protection for SHG members and their communities as well as to enhance livelihood opportunities, through the implementation of a digital solution. Within this project, SHG members receive training on how to use a mobile application, Haqdarshak, which provides a ready reference to more than 200 central and state government welfare programmes, their benefits, eligibility criteria, documents required, and the application process for each scheme. The trained agents, known as Haqdarshikas, offer door to door services to their respective communities using the app to support households to gather information and apply for government programmes in exchange for a small fee.

LEAD/IWWAGE is conducting an impact

and process evaluation of the Haqdarshak programme, to assess its effectiveness and efficiency. The primary questions the research will answer are regarding the social and economic empowerment of the agents as well as on the access and uptake of government entitlements among citizens. In addition, the research explores the characteristics and conditions that influence the performance of the agents, recruitment and training strategies, and integration within the broader social protection ecosystem.

Beginning from agents' selection, arguably one of the most important steps in the process, we observe that involving Cluster Level Federation (CLF) and Village Level Organisation (VLO) leaders might help improve the identification of high-potential SHG women who can become Haqdarshikas. Preliminary survey findings and field insights (summarised in the table below), reveal that several factors lead to agents dropping out of the model, including lack of motivation, access to smartphones, and time. Additionally, several women stop participating in the programme as a consequence of not having the right information about the initiative itself, which ends up not meeting their expectations. Arguably, CLF and VLO leaders, could fix both issues ensuring that the right

Motivation to attend training	Reasons for never starting to work	Reasons for dropping out
Help people	Lack of time	Could not find interested citizens
Create own identity in community	Did not understand the programme	Mobility issues
Earn money	Not interested in the programme	Technical issues
SRLM staff asked	Tech issues	COVID-19

information is provided to participants before the training and applying their own judgement to ensure that only women that have the right motivation and personality to successfully become self-employed agents are called upon.

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, agents' training had to be conducted remotely. E-trainings show promise in terms of learning, with high degree of retention of the training material. However, the lack

of human touch, which is so essential for the agents' initial buy-in, was identified by training participants as a significant issue. Therefore, CLFs and VLOs can help link the Haqdarshikas in their network through the creation of support groups that can promote mutual

learning, information sharing, accountability, and increase performance and motivation. Additionally, encouraging CLFs and VLOs to support, discuss, and recognise the work of Haqdarshikas, could help these agents gain further legitimacy and support in their communities. This is not only necessary to ensure that citizens are willing to avail and pay for the services of the agents, but also to

ease the relationship between Haqdarshikas and other institutions and agents that are part of the social protection infrastructure.

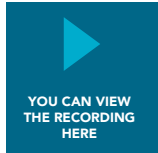
It is worth remembering, that while Haqdarshikas can help facilitate and support the application process, they still need to interface with other application touchpoints such as CSCs, banks, post-offices, and Panchayats to submit applications to various government schemes and documents. The perspective of the touchpoints on the Haqdarshikas' services has been mixed: some feel they are getting more applications because of the work of Haqdarshikas. On the other hand, others feel that the additional charge levied by the Haqdarshika is unnecessary and the citizen should approach the touchpoints directly. CLFs and VLOs can help Haqdarshikas navigate and improve their relationships with other local stakeholders, through direct mediation.

In summary, in a tech-enabled agent-based model like Haqdarshak, the characteristics, motivation, capacity, relationships, and commitment of individual agents are, indubitably, critical success factors. However, our study shows that women's collectives and, more specifically, the SHG network can play a fundamental role to ensure the success of the programme and amplify its impact, providing legitimacy and recognition to the agents, enabling the creation of a space for mutual support and learning, and ensuring that the best possible agents are selected for the job.

*While the evaluation is still ongoing, early results show that women's collectives can play an important role to support delivery and enhance the impact of this tech-based entrepreneurial model.*

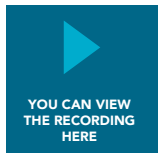






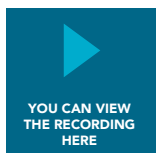
## Collecting data from women and girls remotely: lessons from the field

With the onset of the pandemic, data on its wide-spread socio-economic and gendered impact came largely from remote data collection methods, including phone surveys. However, these methods were replete with several challenges. This panel discussion aimed to navigate the challenges faced in collecting data remotely, the measurement biases encountered, and how survey design and its implementation need to evolve to capture the gendered impacts remotely, and provide a way forward for organisations to make research and survey design more gender responsive. Organised as part of the gLOCAL Evaluation Week 2021, convened by the Global Evaluation Initiative (GEI), the event was a dedicated week for global knowledge and experience sharing events related to monitoring and evaluation. The panel included Kaliat Ammu Sanyal, Research Manager, IWWAGE; Divya Nair, Director, IDinsight; Muzna Alvi, Research Fellow, IFPRI; and Vineet Bhandari, Associate Partner, Dalberg.



## Building forward better and more equitable: gendered impacts of the pandemic

COVID has laid bare deep, pre-existing gender inequalities in India. Even before the onset of the crisis, progress toward gender equality had been uneven - women's labour force participation rates had been declining, majority of women were engaged in the informal sector, were burdened by unpaid care work and faced gender-based violence. It is important to account for these impacts that have affected women and girls far more significantly. The panel shared insights on various dimensions impacting women's socio-economic empowerment, and identified policy solutions for a more gender responsive path to recovery and resilience. The panel included Ashwini Deshpande, Professor of Economics and Founding Director, CEDA, Ashoka University; Dipa Sinha, Assistant Professor, Ambedkar University; and Yamini Atmavilas, Senior Program Officer, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The webinar was organised as part of the gLOCAL Evaluation Week 2021, convened by the Global Evaluation Initiative (GEI).

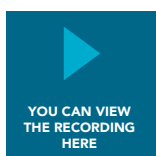


# Learning session on role of digital solutions to support SHG groups to create livelihood opportunities

LEAD/IWWAGE organised a webinar on April 7, 2021 on an ongoing project in partnership with the Chhattisgarh SRLM, which is testing the role of digital solutions to support Self Help Groups (SHGs) to create livelihood opportunities, increase social connectedness, and build sustainable social security nets.

The webinar brought together experts, each presenting insight from their work on the same overarching project: Aniket Doegar, CEO, Haqdarshak Empowerment Solutions; Dr. Fabrizio Valenti, Head Financial Inclusion, LEAD at Krea University; Dr. Charity Troyer Moore, Director for South Asia Economics Research, Yale University; and Dr. Giorgia Barboni, Assistant Professor, Warwick University.

The ongoing evaluation of the Haqdarshak programme, which uses an app to promote access to entitlements and entrepreneurship, shows good results in terms of increased uptake of schemes and documents and suggests that employing simple behavioural nudges and offering tangible income solutions can increase the application's value proposition over time. Access to mobile phones and the constraint of digital literacy emerged as an issue in all presentations but is being explicitly tackled by Mor Awaaz. This IVR solution provides vital health information to rural women and is experimenting whether this use-case, together with a simple training, can effectively tackle barriers to women's mobile engagement. Finally, an ongoing study on information sharing among SHG women, highlighted how smartphones facilitate the exchange of information among women, and impact their productivity and mental well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic. While digital solution has some limitations in terms of capacity and access, yet it can play an important role in fostering a more equitable and inclusive future.



# Debates for and against wages for housework

The idea of a wages for housework movement and a salary for housewives has sparked much interest and debate in the Indian context. The prospect of a salary for housework has found support amongst many who consider women's unpaid domestic and care labour as work and believe that recognising and paying for such work would empower women. Equally, there are concerns that a demand for payment to housewives will take the debate away from where its focus should be i.e. better measurement of women's unpaid work so it gets counted in labour statistics; improved access to infrastructure such as piped water, clean energy and transportation which would allow women to access opportunities; and provision of universal, quality child care centres which would free women from the burden of care. In case wages were to be paid to women for housework, there are unresolved and debatable issues like how to value unpaid domestic and care work and who pays for it, should the payment be conditional or unconditional, short-term or long-term and many more. IWWAGE hosted a panel discussion in collaboration with King's College London, the European Research Council, Feminist Economics Saturday Discussion Group (FESDIG) and the Laws of Social Reproduction project on March 6, 2021 to discuss implications of wages for housework for the collective mobilisation of Indian housewives. The panel was chaired and moderated by Prof. Bina Agarwal, University of Manchester and speakers included Prof. Ashwini Deshpande (Ashoka University), Prof. Prabha Kotiswaran (King's College London), Dr. Ritu Dewan (Feminist Scholar), Ms. Selma James (International Wages for Housework Campaign), Justice Sridevan, and Ms. Soumya Kapoor Mehta (IWWAGE).



## Wages for housework: a campaign revisited in the age of the pandemic

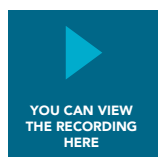
Women in India spend up to 352 minutes per day on domestic work which is 577 per cent more than men (52 minutes) and at least 40 per cent more than the women in China (234 minutes) and South Africa (250 minutes). Time-use data from 2019 gathered by the National Sample Survey Organisation revealed that more than 80 per cent of women and girls above 6 years engaged in unpaid domestic work, compared to over a quarter of men. Unpaid domestic and care work (UDCW) is thus highly gendered and highly unequally distributed in India. A striking election promise by Makkal Needhi Maiaam, a new political party in Tamil Nadu to pay housewives a monthly wage, has sparked a national debate over salaries for housewives. Feminists have taken two distinct positions. Some believe that paying women for housework will entrench gendered stereotypes and detract from current efforts to improve care infrastructure, social protection policies and investments in education and employment opportunities. Others believe that the recognition of UDCW through a state-funded unconditional cash transfer need not come at the expense of existing efforts but will go a long way towards putting a price and making valuable what is presumed to have no value because it is done for free on an altruistic basis. Now several political parties in four Indian states have promised women a monthly allowance as part of their election manifesto. These developments are not unique to India.

In the US, there is a range of proposals to alleviate child poverty through child tax credit within the Biden stimulus scheme, Mitt Romney's social security scheme for children as well as calls for a Marshall Plan for Moms by tech entrepreneur Reshma Saujani. In the UK, the International Wages for Housework Campaign is calling for a care income for mothers.

These interventions present feminists with an occasion to revisit the Wages for Housework Campaign of the 1970s which first put the recognition of UDCW on the political map, explore its resonance in the post-pandemic moment and assess the range of solutions that feminist economists and lawyers have developed to recognise women's UDCW in the intervening years since the Wages for Housework Campaign was first initiated.

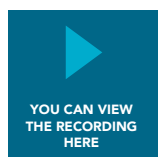
On 25 June 2021, the Laws of Social Reproduction Project organised a roundtable to revisit the campaign on wages for housework, and what it meant in the current context. The roundtable was organised as part of the International Association for Feminist Economics (IAFFE) conference held in Quito between 22 and 25 June, 2021. The panellists included Prabha Kotiswaran, Bina Agarwal, Diane Elson, Ashwini Deshpande and Soumya Kapoor Mehta.





## Women in the economy

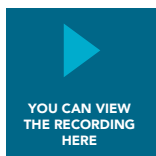
Women's formal engagement in the economy is often invisible in developing settings, but there are several factors that can both hinder and promote their participation in the workforce. In a workshop on 'Women in the Economy' organised online by the Indian Statistical Institute (ISI), Delhi (with support of IWWAGE), economists discussed new research that throws a more 'gendered' light on some of the emerging issues around women's work. The workshop organised between March 11 and 13, 2021, was the third in a series of such annual workshops organised as part of the ISI and IWWAGE partnership. This particular chapter covered papers across a range of issues including women's demand of and access to healthcare, gender disparities in nutrition, gender gaps in entrepreneurship and financial inclusion, job application behaviour, peer effects in the workplace, and gender effects of climate change. The keynote address was delivered by Prof. Siwan Anderson, University of British Columbia, who spoke about her research on female landlords in India. The workshop also comprised a panel discussion, and the best two papers were awarded by a jury comprising of Prof. Rohini Pande, Prof. Siwan Anderson and Prof. Ashwini Deshpande.



## Sharing best practices to address gender issues through women-led institutions

The Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana- National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY NRLM) has adopted a focussed approach towards gender mainstreaming in its programme architecture. This includes establishing institutional mechanisms like Social Action Committees at the village organisation (VO SAC) and cluster federation levels to serve as response mechanisms to various issues that women and girls face, and that continue to act as barriers for them in accessing their rights and entitlements to lead a decent living. These Social Action Committees have shown exemplary leadership in strengthening the gender responsiveness of the programme at the grassroots level, especially at a time when the COVID crisis has heightened the need for such bottom up mechanisms that women can easily access to raise their concerns and grievances.

National Webinar on sharing of Best practices adopted for addressing gender issues by VO SACs held on June 29, 2021 brought together the voices of women who have engaged with VO SACs to address challenges as diverse as enrolment and retention of children in schools; asset creation in the names of women; prevention of violence against women; the practice of child marriage; and ensuring food and nutrition security. Organised as part of the Amrut Mahotsav, the event also marked the release of a compendium of case studies showcasing best practices from social action committees across India. The event was presided by the former Honourable Minister for Rural Development, Shri Narendra Singh Tomar, and the Minister of State, Sadhvi Nriyanjan Jyoti, and senior officials from Ministry of Rural Development, including Secretary, Shri Nagendra Nath Sinha, Additional Secretary, Smt. Alka Upadhyay and Joint Secretary, Smt. Nita Kejrewal.



# Ensuring an inclusive response and recovery from COVID-19: best practices from SRLMs

Gender Samvaad is a joint attempt between DAY NRLM and IWWAGE to create a common platform for generating greater awareness on NRLM's interventions across the country and best practices, with a focus on hearing voices from the states and the field.

The second Gender Samvaad held on July 2, 2021 focused on the challenges posed by the second wave of the pandemic and the extent to which States have been able to respond to these by leveraging the collective potential and solidarity of women's groups. The dialogue will showcase best practices from the states in responding to the emerging needs ranging from access to health and other services, information related to COVID-19, access to food, and opportunities for work. The online event brought together the voices of state rural livelihood mission officials together with those of women affected by the pandemic. The focus states in the second dialogue were Bihar, Kerala and Meghalaya, talking about how they have been ensuring food security for communities and access to health information across all age groups. The second dialogue was attended by more than 3000 participants from across the states.

Smt. Aparajita Sarangi, Member of Parliament; Shri. Nagendra Nath Sinha, Secretary MoRD; Smt. Alka Upadhyaya, Additional Secretary; Smt. Nita Kejrewal, Joint Secretary; Shri. Balamurugan D, CEO cum State Mission Director, Jeevika, Secretary RD, Govt. of Bihar; Shri. S. Harikishore, Executive Director, Kudumbashree, Govt. of Kerala; and Shri. P. Sampath Kumar, Principal Secretary, Govt. of Meghalaya, C&RD Dept. Health and Social Welfare Dept. shared their insights and experiences at the webinar. The event also brought voices from the field, and experience sharing from women Community Resource Persons who spoke about the problems faced by their families, coping mechanisms adapted, the role their groups have played during the pandemic, the duties performed at the village level and preparedness for future challenges.



Photo credit: Adam Cohn/Indian Women, Gujarat/flickr

# Evidence Review of Self-Help Groups and COVID-19

## *Effects on and challenges for the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) in India*

With the aim of synthesising emerging evidence on COVID-19 and women's groups in India, the Evidence Consortium on Women's Groups (ECWG) collaborated with IWWAGE, LEAD at Krea University and a number of other partners to prepare a brief, to stock-take how the COVID-19 pandemic and its fallout have impacted women's groups of the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM).

resilience among SHG households in the short-term, but could also lead to challenges for long-term group sustainability.

In view of mobility restrictions due to COVID-19 and requirements of social distancing, NRLM suggested use of digital technology for group functioning, and conducted large scale digital trainings on COVID-19 awareness and behaviour change for staff and community cadres in cascade mode. Digital innovations such as Haqdarshak, a mobile application in Chhattisgarh, trained SHG members as agents providing citizens information and support on accessing entitlements under the national COVID-19 relief package. Nevertheless, leveraging digital technologies at scale remains difficult owing to challenges in smartphone access, ownership and use by women and need for digital literacy. Additionally, suspension of physical meetings may have affected women's access to social solidarity and support, with SHG members reporting missing different types of support such as having a space to talk to other women and meeting friends.

SHG members were seen to have played a pivotal role though as partners in community response, through the large-scale production of masks, hand sanitiser and protective gear, besides activating community kitchens.

*The brief identified three main ways that COVID-19 has affected women's groups – with SHGs possibly serving as a source of resilience and social protection to members in the face of economic shocks, social distancing resulting in changes in SHG functioning and SHG members partnering in community response.*

In terms of resilience of members, evidence from India is mixed, suggesting SHG households had lower mobilisation of monthly savings, with a lower decline in savings in blocks with some NRLM fund disbursement compared to blocks without disbursement.

SHG households reported statistically significantly smaller decline in consumption compared with non-SHG households, which could indicate higher



SRLMs too responded with a range of interventions to address community needs, including related to food security and gender-based violence, through partnerships and convergence and innovations in pilot projects.

Going forward, it would be crucial to have more mixed-methods research for unpacking - the benefits and risks to members from participation in COVID-19 response activities, how SHG membership may have contributed to resilience and how community resource persons and SHG networks could be further leveraged for awareness-raising

and facilitating access to entitlements and services. Policy measures could be directed towards supporting groups and federations to prevent a decline in savings, by regularly tracking MIS data, ensuring flexibility in loan repayments and providing members with cash transfers through a dedicated crisis amelioration fund. Efforts could also be made to strengthen SHG-bank linkage, expand the Business Correspondent (BC) network, ensure convergence with other social security schemes and encourage public procurement from SHGs with assured inputs, marketing and payment to secure members' livelihoods.



## From Aspiration to Empowerment: Impact of Women's Collectives

### *Documenting best practices from the field*

In India, DAY-NRLM is the largest government programme working exclusively with rural women, yet there remains the need to move from 'working with women' to working with a 'gender equality and rights approach'. Rural women face numerous structural and institutional constraints in realising their right to livelihoods, resources, decent work and social protection. NRLM believes that gender mainstreaming should feature in its framework, systems, institutions and processes to achieve sustainable social, economic and political goals that have direct and indirect impact on the quality of life in a community.

To facilitate gendered social action at the grassroot level and as part of its gender operational strategy, the NRLM has also established several institutional platforms at the village level, which self-help group members can approach in times of need. Prime among them, is the Social Action Committee (SAC), which is to be formed in each village, at the Village Organisation (VO) level, with 3 to 5 Self-Help Group (SHG) leaders as its members. This is supported by a Gender Forum (a more informal body with SHG members) which is to support and guide the SAC. Together, the Gender Forum and the VO-SAC are to prepare a Gender Action Plan to resolve critical gender issues in the village, that may range from, say, prevention

of child marriage, to containing alcoholism, strategies to increase participation of women in the Gram Sabha, ownership of women over assets etc.

The compendium, ***From Aspiration to Empowerment: Impact of Women's Collectives***

contains inspiring stories of VO-SACs from across states, in how they handled incredibly complex issues and furthered the agenda of gender equality in their villages. They range from how a Social Action Committee helped increase women's access to rights and entitlements through engagement with public institutions; to how another increased women's access to property by encouraging land ownership in their name. One case study discusses how women's access to common property resources can be increased through



*Since 2018, more than 21,000 VO-SACs have been formed across India, focusing on issues as diverse as enrolment and retention of children in schools; asset creation in the names of women; prevention of violence against women; access to rights and entitlements; and ensuring food and nutrition security with a gender lens.*



collective efforts. Besides these efforts, other economic issues covered by VO-SACs include addressing wage disparities between men and women in the village through collective action; addressing issues of drudgery through collective action; the labour rights of migrants; and lately, COVID-related gender issues.

Some VO-SACs have done commendable work on the rights of the girl child, by working on prevention of child marriage, increasing girls' retention in schools, and preventing child abuse. Case studies in this volume cover such cases as well. Finally, the compendium documents cases where VO-SACs helped women fight adverse social norms, practices and behaviors that affect them. These include for instance tackling the scourge of alcoholism, the high incidence of domestic violence, and child abuse and

human trafficking. In tribal dominated areas, where some women are labelled as witches, a case study discusses the vital role played by a VO-SAC in addressing the practice of witch hunting.

Broadly, the case studies highlight how VO-SACs have used multiple strategies including restorative justice, collective action, offering support to women (including psycho-social support) and sometimes even engaging with men to address issues that matter to women. They show how placing women's interests first and putting in place platforms which women can approach easily and speak to, can provide a prompt source of action, a first port of call to poor marginalised women in villages. For the state, these VO-SACs also act as the eyes and ears of the village, and a public acknowledgement of the distress that rural women have been facing for long.<sup>3</sup>

[READ THE COMPENDIUM HERE](#)

<sup>3</sup> IDinsight uses data and evidence to help leaders combat poverty worldwide. Our collaborations deploy a large analytical toolkit to help clients design better policies, rigorously test what works, and use evidence to implement effectively at scale.



# Intersecting Identities, Livelihoods and Affirmative Action: How Social Identity Affects Economic Opportunity for Women in India

The male–female gaps in labour force participation rates (LFPR) in India are strong and persistent, as female labour force participation (FLFP) continues to decline from its already low level. There are several explanations advanced for this. Part of the problem is the inability of the statistical system to correctly count women's economic work. Women are involved in economic work in far greater numbers than labour force statistics are able to capture. Additionally, the registered decline has been in paid employment, and not in women's reproductive labour.

There is a large body of academic research that views the decline in recorded FLFP as a decision taken by women to drop out of paid work. There is indeed a supply side constraint that women have to battle; the real cultural norm that prevents women from participating in paid work is the belief that they are primarily responsible for domestic chores and care work.

However, there are important demand side reasons for the decline in FLFP. This is the problem of the low demand for female labour, especially commensurate with women's increasing educational attainment. The other important dimension characterising gender gaps in the labour market relates to wage gaps and employer discrimination.

This paper written by Prof. Ashwini Deshpande for IWWAGE, presents a

landscape assessment of the current state of gender inequality in the economic sphere in India, which is a key facet of overall inequality. Her assessment comprises the latest empirical evidence based both on demographic survey data, as well as key results from cutting-edge scholarly literature. Thus, women from stigmatised and marginalised groups are disadvantaged along two dimensions and have to battle the double stigma of this intersectionality.

The paper outlines the trends in overall gender gaps in the areas of labour force participation, self-employment and education over the last couple of decades, but highlights the role of intersectionality that goes into producing structures of advantage and disadvantage. It discusses policies such as the National Rural Livelihood Mission designed to encourage self-employment, which have had several other positive impacts, such as increase in empowerment and autonomy, but their record in terms of enhancing livelihoods is mixed at best. Evidence shows that policies such as employment guarantee schemes or transport infrastructure could end up having positive gendered effects, despite their gender-blind design. The paper argues that in order to tackle inequality fundamentally, we need to mainstream evidence-based research on intersectionality, which should be the basic lens to informing policy.

*Male–female gaps are significant in many dimensions, but the contours of these gaps are shaped by the overlap of gender with other social identities, such as caste, religion or tribal identities.*

[READ THE PAPER HERE](#)



# National Rural Livelihoods Mission and IWWAGE Launch Gender Samvaad

Gender Samvaad is a joint attempt between Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY NRLM) and IWWAGE to create a common platform for generating greater awareness on NRLM's interventions across the country and best practices, with a focus on hearing voices of gender champions from the field. Organised as a bi-monthly webinar, the Gender Samvaad will facilitate dialogue between states on empowerment models they are using particularly the micro level processes, systems and practices conceptualised and being implemented to empower women. The platform also serves as an opportunity to hear from experts from civil society organisations, academia and development practitioners on what might be workable solutions for furthering the mandate of gender equality and women's empowerment, with groups or women's collectives serving as platforms. In the current context of the pandemic, it is imperative to organise such dialogues for exchange of knowledge on practices that can help address the varied range of challenges posed by the pandemic leveraging the SHG platforms.

As part of the ongoing Amrut Mahotsav to celebrate the 75th Anniversary of Indian Independence, the Gender Samvaad was launched on April 16, 2021 with around 1400 participants including rural women, state representatives, CSOs and academia from across India. The event was attended by senior officials of the Ministry comprising Shri Nagendra Nath Sinha, Secretary, Ministry of Rural Development; Smt. Alka Upadhyaya, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Rural Development; and Joint Secretary, NRLM, Smt. Nita Kejrewal. Community resource

persons, who are women SHG members from various states, were also invited to share their experience of overcoming several barriers to improve their lives and livelihoods.

A compendium of case studies, documenting good practices and stories of resilience and change among SHG women shared by various State Rural Livelihoods Missions, was launched at the event by the Secretary, Rural Development. [Read the compendium, Stories of Resilience and Hope here.](#) The stories narrate systemic processes adopted to strengthen women's groups in developing strong collectives as well as individual identities. A short film was launched by the Joint Secretary, NRLM, Smt. Nita Kejrewal, showcasing IWWAGE's support for operationalising NRLM's gender strategy and the various pilot interventions underway to set up institutional platforms for rural women to access justice, information and entitlements. [The film can be viewed here.](#)

This was followed by a panel discussion that included leading gender and livelihoods experts to emphasise the importance of improving women's livelihoods, their agency, and their understanding of their rights and entitlements. The panel comprised Dr. Lakshmi Lingam, Dean, School of Media and Cultural Studies, TISS; Ms. Sejal Dand, Director and Founder Member, ANANDI; and Dr. Renu Golwalkar, Global Director, Gender, Youth and Social Inclusion, Engender Health. The session was moderated by Soumya Kapoor Mehta, Head IWWAGE. [Click here for recording.](#) For wider outreach, a dedicated web page has been designed to house all learning materials emerging from the Samvaad.

THE PAGE CAN BE ACCESSED HERE

# Gender engagement with the Government of Andhra Pradesh

IWWAGE has embarked on a three-year partnership with the Government of Andhra Pradesh (GoAP) to assess the performance of select government welfare schemes and improvements in human development, with a focus on women's empowerment and gender equality. The most recent manifesto of the Honourable Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh indicates a commitment to addressing women's needs by pledging a significant share of proposed benefits to women in the form of cash transfers, education reimbursements, healthcare provision, loan waivers for Self Help Groups, women's housing, etc. Over the three-year long engagement, we will use quantitative

as well as qualitative methods of research (a series of primary surveys, focus group discussions and stakeholder interviews) to inform on the ground-level scenario on coverage, targeting, entitlements, and performance of these flagship schemes for women and girls. The study aims to inform programme implementers and policymakers on the design, uptake and impact of schemes while also supporting course correction in policies. A progress tracking system, representative at the district-level, will be developed that allows for close end-to-end monitoring of programs to determine gaps in delivery and utilisation of benefits.

# Gender budgeting for Government of Punjab

The World Bank has initiated a project in the Programme for Results (PforR) modality with the Government of Punjab (GoP) which will focus on strengthening fiscal and financial management, improving data systems to support policy and service delivery and strengthening local level fiscal frameworks, with a special focus on strengthening gender equality and empowering women and girls in the state. Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) has been identified as an essential tool in achieving these goals and IWWAGE has been brought on board as the Technical Resource Agency for providing ongoing

and intensive support to the GoP for implementing gender responsive budgeting.

IWWAGE will support the GoP for a period of two years (2021 to 2023) by creating a roadmap on GRB for the state, planning and coordinating capacity building activities for participating departments of the state, reviewing the current schemes and budget statements of select departments and helping the nodal agency, Department of Social Security and Women and Child Development of GoP in drafting a gender budget statement.

# Evaluation of the POSH Act in West Bengal

IWWAGE has been engaged by Sanhita, an organisation based in Kolkata, West Bengal working broadly on gender mainstreaming and specifically on effectively implementing the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 in the eastern region, to conduct a process and outcome evaluation of their work conducted in the last five years.

Despite constitutional guarantees, the implementation of the sexual harassment at workplace act remains

largely underutilised. Low reporting of cases, stemming from lack of awareness, fear of dismissal, low levels of confidence in redressal mechanisms and stigma remains a recurring problem under this Act. Sahita has been engaged in sensitising, orienting and training different stakeholders to understand and implement the Act. The data collection for this study has been completed and IWWAGE is currently in the process of analysing data and writing up the results.

# Solutions for Transformative Rural Enterprises and Empowerment (STREE)

In November 2020, the STREE team resurveyed 205 enterprises that previously reported business closures in round 1 of its COVID-19 impact survey to document how many women-led businesses had recovered since June-July 2020. The resurvey finds improved market optimism since the national-level lockdown began in March 2020. Over 70 per cent of the businesses that reported closures in June-July 2020 were operational by November with over 58 per cent reporting an improvement in income levels from round-1.

On the occasion of International Women's Day this year, LEAD at Krea University formalised a partnership with WE Hub, a first of its kind state-led incubator under the Government of Telangana. The partnership is aimed at conducting joint research and policy engagements with WE Hub to measure its impact so

far and document the key research questions with regards to women entrepreneurship and economic enablement. STREE is currently in the process of identifying key research questions in a consultative process with the WE Hub team.

STREE has also been working with the non-farm team at NRLM to develop the training modules for One Stop Facility (OSF) district and block-level training. Specifically, STREE has been working with RBVPL Ltd to (i) modularise a 70-hour long training material, (ii) draft a facilitator's guide for a training-of-trainers format, and (iii) draft an end-assessment training comprising of situational and objective questions. The STREE team was successfully able to pilot the content in Bihar on April 12, 2021 and they are currently preparing for a virtual roll-out across 12 other states.





# COVID-19 and women's labour crisis: reiterating an inclusive policy response

For women, who have been marginalised in most parts of the developing world throughout the period of globalisation, the pandemic has significantly increased the unequal nature of development. There is ample evidence which shows that women are more adversely affected than men by the social and economic effects of infectious disease outbreaks. In terms of economic opportunity, it has been seen that more women lost jobs compared to men and fewer have been able to rejoin labour force. In the context of the long-standing debate in India on the low and declining female labour force participation, it is also important to understand how the pandemic would further affect these trends. These are also relevant for better policy responses towards increasing women's employment. Although nationally representative data are not yet available to

assess the employment and income situation of women post the pandemic and lockdowns in India, it is important to understand the circumstances of women's participation in the labour markets pre-pandemic.

The paper published in the Economic & Political Weekly, COVID-19 and Women's Labour Crisis: Reiterating an Inclusive Policy Response, by Sona Mitra, principal economist at IWWAGE, and Dipa Sinha from Ambedkar University Delhi presents an analysis of the situation of women's employment pre-lockdown and some indications on what the impact of COVID-19 could be, based on microstudies and other literature available. Further, the adequacy of the social protection and employment generation programmes of the government that are specifically aimed at improving female labour force participation is assessed.

[READ THE PAPER HERE](#)

## Women's labourforce participation in India: state-wise trends

Women's labourforce participation rates (LFPRs) reveal that while women in Tamil Nadu show substantially higher participation in the workforce as compared to women all over India. In context of West Bengal, women's work participation rates have been typically low, compared to women all over India.

In Tamil Nadu, urban female workforce participation rate (FWPR) has been stagnant at around 21 per cent since late 1990's, regular employment is predominant among the urban workforce and rising over time, and the tertiary sector contributes to more

than 50 per cent of urban employment of women. In rural areas, while casual wage work predominates, there has been a persistent decline in the share of casual employment in recent years. Non-agricultural employment of rural women is significant, with Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme being an important source of employment for rural women. Furthermore, in both rural and urban areas, there is high incidence of women's entrepreneurship as a major share of the self-employed women are either working in their own enterprises or as employers.

[READ THE TAMIL NADU BRIEF HERE](#)

In West Bengal, self-employment is predominant and regular wage work and daily wage work has declined across both rural and urban geographies. In rural areas, around 70 per cent self-employed women are own account workers, and this share is greater – about 79 per cent – for urban areas. Self-employed women are majorly concentrated in manufacturing and

agriculture, mainly in home-based small-scale enterprises which are self-owned. Although the recent round of periodic labourforce survey – PLFS 2018-19 – shows improvements in workforce participation rates across the state, a widening gender gap in workforce participation in rural areas is a cause for concern.

[READ THE WEST BENGAL BRIEF HERE](#)

## Analysing the constraints to women's economic participation in the context of pandemic

As a part of the project undertaken by Indian Statistical Institute (ISI) and IWWAGE, a set of four briefs have been developed to understand the challenges faced by women while engaging in remunerative economic activities. The briefs also evaluates the existing programmes with gender lens, that aim at unleashing women's economic potential fully in India, and offers policy recommendations. As the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns have impacted women adversely, these briefs also assess the gendered experience of the crisis, on the lives and livelihoods of women, including their physical and emotional well-being.

### Home production, technology and women's time allocation

The gender gap in time use, especially related to cooking and fuel collection, constrains women's participation in remunerative activities, while also disproportionately having higher adverse health impacts for women. More efficient technology for home production—in the form of LPG (liquefied petroleum gas) usage for cooking—may enable women to invest the time and effort saved in more productive activities and thus increase their wellbeing. This aims inducing households to switch to LPG for cooking, through information campaigns on the health benefits of clean fuels and the existing LPG subsidy. It builds on the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, which seeks to expand access to clean fuel among rural households.

### Impact of COVID-19 on urban poor in industrial clusters: a gender lens

As work opportunities in agriculture shrink, the future lies in improving women's access to jobs in manufacturing and services. It is therefore, important to understand the demand and supply factors that determine their participation in these sectors. The project seeks to examine the profile and background of women workers in contemporary industrial and urban landscapes—types of opportunities available, barriers to participation, and aspirations and expectations from industrial employment. It further aims to situate the findings within the context of existing policy and regulatory frameworks, and the implications they hold for women's industrial employment, while also assessing the impact of the pandemic on the lives and livelihoods of women.

### Nudging households to increase the usage of clean fuel

Air pollution is a grave public health concern and cooking with solid fuels is a major contributor, which also has a disproportionately adverse impact on women. In this project, based in Madhya Pradesh, villages were randomly assigned to a campaign by public health workers to either raise awareness about health effects of solid fuels and mitigation measures, or health awareness on the LPG subsidy programme, or a 'control' group in which no information is provided. In the 'health only' intervention, households become more likely to have a

smoke outlet or a separate cooking room, indicating that financial constraints and design of public subsidy schemes are salient in inducing regular usage of clean fuel.

### **Women in agriculture: gendered impact of mechanisation on labour demand**

The trend of mechanisation in agriculture, which increased exponentially since the 1990s, has had an adverse impact of farm employment, especially that of women. When

the production process is sequential and the division of labour across complementary tasks is gendered— as is the case in agriculture— technological change can have a differential impact on women's and men's labour. By constructing a comprehensive database of multiple secondary data sources on farm employment, agricultural inputs, climate and socio-economic characteristics at the district level in India, this study explores various aspects of the gendered effects of technological change in agricultural production.

[READ THE BRIEFS HERE](#)

## **Media coverage**



### **Investigating gender disparities in India's vaccine rollout**

**- *Hindustan Times***

While less than 20 percent of India's adult population has received their first Covid-19 vaccine dose, clear gender disparities have arisen in the rollout. A recent analysis by Ashoka University shows that for every 100 men, around 86 women were vaccinated. This is significantly lower than India's sex ratio of approximately 924 women per 1,000 men. As the vaccination programme continues, addressing these gaps is an urgent priority. When India started its vaccination drive, women comprised a majority of recipients

because of their roles in frontline work. However, as the general population started getting vaccinated, these numbers began reversing, with more men being vaccinated. In April alone, 2.4 million fewer women were vaccinated than men. Soumya Kapoor Mehta, Head IWWAGE and Steven Walker, investigate the challenges and barriers to improve gender-balanced vaccination efforts and offer some great recommendations in this

[READ THE ARTICLE HERE](#)



# What's keeping women away from the workforce?

**- Forbes India**

The COVID-19 pandemic has been terrible for women in the economy. As per data from the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), the overall labour force in India shrank by 1.1 million in April to 424.6 million, compared to 425.8 million in March, taking the labour force participation to 39.98 per cent and increasing the unemployment rate to 8 per cent. If we specifically study female labour force participation (FLFP) in India, it's been showing a downward trend since 1993-

94, with the country ranking low among other developing countries. The pandemic has only exacerbated these concerns, with more women falling out of or not participating in the workforce. Forbes India writes on the various factors behind the declining number of women in the workforce, while spelling out policy measures that will help improve their economic participation, citing the latest study released by IWWAGE.

[READ THE ARTICLE HERE](#)

# IWWAGE study highlights reasons for declining female labour force participation in India

**- Business World**

Women's participation in India's labour force has been steadily declining since 1993-94 and India has one of the lowest female labour force participation rates among developing countries. Despite decades of policies and programmes aimed at addressing this issue, the figure has remained consistently low. IWWAGE's recent study shows that the primary decline has come from rural areas, with participation dropping by 24 percentage points since 1993-1994. By contrast, the participation of urban women during this

period saw only a marginal decline, from 25 percent to 22.5 percent. Gender disparities in the workforce are evident across the country, with even the better-performing regions displaying a colossal gap when compared to male workforce participation across both urban and rural areas. While many factors influence these statistics, a number of trends have stood out. Drawing on IWWAGE's study, Business World examines the determinants of women's declining participation in the Indian labour force.

[READ THE ARTICLE HERE](#)

# The number of working women in India has been steadily declining, here's why

- **Business Insider**

India has one of the lowest female participation rates in the workforce among developing countries. Further, female labour force participation rates have seen a steady decline over the past two decades. While women's participation in the urban labour force has declined marginally from 25 per cent in 1993-94 to 22.5 per cent, women's participation in the rural labour force has declined by 24 per cent. During the period

between 2011-2019 in the agricultural sector, the percentage of female labour saw a sharp dip from 62 per cent to 54.7 per cent. Overall 71 per cent of women are engaged in low productive activities, which shows that women continue to take vulnerable and marginal jobs. More than half of them get engaged in self-employment but mostly are underpaid helpers or contributing family workers.

[READ THE ARTICLE HERE](#)

# Women, work and COVID-19: enterprises, SHGs and workers

- **EPW Engage**

There existed many on ground realities during the first phase of the pandemic, which showed signs of an overstressed health system, precarity of livelihoods of women workers and women-led enterprises, and the important role that women self-help groups (SHGs) working in rural areas played to help contain the spread of COVID-19. The latest EPW engage series published in collaboration with IWWAGE focuses on the precarity of livelihoods of women workers and women-led enterprises, and the important role SHGs played during the COVID-19 pandemic. This series of articles focuses on both the

economic and the infrastructural support that women-led organisations have provided and the manner in which they were affected during the pandemic. The articles also talk about the working conditions of front-line women workers, and their work within their respective communities. Further, the detailed surveys of women entrepreneurs and women informal workers throw light on economic shocks that women in the informal sector faced due to an unprecedented lockdown. The articles find dismal utilisation of schemes launched by the government to provide relief during the pandemic.

[READ THE ARTICLES HERE](#)

# How women are shaping political fortunes in India

- *Hindustan Times*

The results of the recently concluded assembly elections have reaffirmed the importance of women as a voting bloc in India. Political parties are taking cognisance of this changing trend. They recognise that women now vote for parties or candidates who they believe are likely to address issues that concern them. Politics aside, for feminists, what is more heartening to see are

the shifts recorded in female voter turnout over time, even in traditionally backward states. Soumya Kapoor Mehta writes about the changing trend and the factors contributing to it where not only more women are stepping out to vote, but their voting preferences are no longer in line with those of their families or communities.

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# Will payment for housework discourage women from paid work?

- *IndiaSpend*

The idea of a wages for housework movement and a salary for housewives has sparked much interest and debate in the Indian context. Election promises in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, West Bengal and Assam are trying to make this invisible, unpaid domestic and care work more visible by providing cash incentives to 'homemakers'. If implemented as a payment for women's unpaid work, they could well become the first such programme in the world even as there is no evidence that

such policies change gender stereotypes. Some researchers, economists and women's groups consider that the policy might further entrench existing gender norms that confine women to the house. On the other hand, the policy could reduce the gender gap in the labour force (as women are paid for work within the house) without more women actually participating in paid work outside the house.

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# I can't earn more than Rs 125 a day no matter how hard I work

- **IndiaSpend**

Around 91 per cent of Indian women in paid jobs are in the informal sector. Despite these numbers, women working in the informal sector have to deal with the double whammy of insecurity as well as gender bias—their incomes tend to be low and fluctuating, they do not have the bargaining power to seek better terms or working conditions, and they

have low social status. IndiaSpend spoke to women in India's informal sector with special emphasis on the textiles and garments sector, one of India's oldest industries to investigate the disadvantages and challenges women face in the informal sector, more so in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

[READ THE ARTICLE HERE](#)

# Future is female, but why are women leaders missing from India's political arena?

- **News 18**

Globally, India ranks in the bottom quartile when it comes to women's representation in parliament. According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2020, India ranks 122 out of 153 countries. The recent election of Kamala Harris as the first woman vice president of America has ignited the aspirations of countless women in politics globally. However, in India, climbing the ladder of political leadership for women remains an inequitable feat.

While reservations and active efforts to increase diversity have improved women's participation in politics, much of the day-to-day functioning of Indian politics, even grassroots governance, remains a man's game. The absence of women in political leadership stems from gender gaps in overall political participation. Soumya Kapoor Mehta and Steven Walker from IWWAGE look at barriers and challenges to women's leadership.

[READ THE ARTICLE HERE](#)

# It's time to compensate women's unpaid labour

- **IDR online**

Indian women devote almost 10 times more performing unpaid domestic and caregiving work than men. Evidence suggests that the burden of managing these responsibilities often forces women to take up part-time, low-quality jobs in the informal sector, because of the flexibility they offer. Many also have to engage adolescent girls in helping with household work. In other words, the unpaid work performed by women fundamentally alters opportunities for both women and girls, restricting their participation in social and political activities, and reducing their

leisure time. Furthermore, it can even result in drudgery, which adversely impacts health. There have been welcome developments for women's movements—which have long argued for the recognition of women's unpaid labour. However, they have also raked a debate around the issue of monetising 'housework'. Soumya Kapoor Mehta and Sona Mitra from IWWAGE look at the challenges to monetise or assign a value to women's housework activities, and a road map to go about doing that.

[READ THE ARTICLE HERE](#)

# Lack of mentoring, networking hold back women entrepreneurs

- **IndiaSpend**

Business in India is dominated by men—only seven in 100 enterprises in India are run by women. This is despite the fact that female entrepreneurship can potentially generate millions of jobs and pull more women into the employment stream. IndiaSpend did a two-part investigation into why India reported the third highest gender entrepreneurial gap in the world. In the first story in the

series, 'Women Run Fewer Than 13 per cent of India's small businesses. Here's Why', IndiaSpend explored why women's requirement for institutional finance remains largely unmet. In this, the concluding part issues like social norms, poor support networks and logistical issues that inhibit women entrepreneurs were explored.

[READ THE ARTICLE HERE](#)

# Founders podcast on women entrepreneurs

Female entrepreneurship is particularly critical for India because it catalyses women's participation in the labour force, at a time when India's Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR) is at a historic low, having fallen to 17.5 per cent in 2017-18. Women business-owners could potentially create 150-170 million jobs in India by 2030, as per a 2019 report. Yet, only seven of 100 entrepreneurs in India are women and of them nearly half get into business out of necessity rather than aspiration, says a November 2020 IWWAGE report. India ranks 70th among 77 countries covered in the Female Entrepreneurship Index. In the

two-part series on women entrepreneurs, Founders spoke to Soumya Kapoor Mehta, Head IWWAGE, Hardika Shah from Kinara Capital, Lavanya Mohan and Professor Seema Jayachandran from Northwestern University. The first part 'interruptions' discusses how women entrepreneurs juggle it all to make it work. It talks about the 'interruptions' in lives of women entrepreneurs, which may be seen as the natural order of things for women - getting a steady job, earning a safe and regular income, and the idea of being settled. The second episode 'dreams' talks about the economics of female entrepreneurship and what it takes to make a dream come to life.

[LISTEN TO PODCAST - FIRST PART 'INTERRUPTIONS'](#)

[LISTEN TO PODCAST - SECOND EPISODE 'DREAMS'](#)





# IndiaSpend videos in partnership with IWWAGE

## Explained: State of Women's Employment in the Public Sector

Women in India are dropping out of jobs despite rise in education levels. The public sector provides the highest number of jobs

to women. In 2018, over 1 crore women were employed in this sector. Global studies suggest that one way to get them back in the workforce is by increasing opportunities for them in the public sector.

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## Women in Public Sector: Nurses On The Frontline

The public healthcare sector often attracts women as it is believed that the profession provides better job security. But, the professionals aren't paid enough. At a

time when COVID cases have reached a peak during the second wave, our frontline workers are back dealing with the emergency. IndiaSpend spoke to the nurses at Cooper Hospital in Mumbai about dealing with the pandemic, managing work life balance and more.

[WATCH THE VIDEO HERE](#)

## Women In Public Sector: Cops On Duty

As part of its Women at work series, IndiaSpend looked at representation of women cops working in the public sector. Women constitute just 10.3 per cent of the

total police workforce in India and there is a push to increase their representation. IndiaSpend met passionate women officers and constables at the Shahu Nagar police station in Mumbai to understand their everyday work conditions and challenges.

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## Is The Burden Of Childcare Destroying Women's Careers?

Childcare is a massive challenge for working mothers, especially in the informal sector, which employs nearly 90 per cent of the

India's working women. Seventy-three per cent of Indian women leave jobs after giving birth. Can families and employers provide women with better childcare assistance? IndiaSpend reports on COVID-19's impact on the childcare crisis.

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