

#AccelerateAction

This year, International Women's Day (IWD) adopts the theme "Accelerate Action", emphasising the urgency of advancing gender equality. Current projections suggest that, without intensified efforts, achieving gender parity could extend to year 2158 — approximately five generations later. This theme serves as a clarion call for swift, decisive measures to dismantle systemic barriers and biases hindering women's progress. It underscores the necessity for collective action to foster meaningful and lasting change. IWD 2025 encourages individuals and organisations to expedite their efforts toward a more equitable future, ensuring that gender equality is not a distant goal but an imminent reality.

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Every great nation thrives on the capabilities of its women. A McKinsey study also reveals that advancing women's equality could boost global GDP by USD 28 trillion. However, in India, despite constituting 48 per cent of the population, women contribute just 18 per cent to the GDP, as per the National Family Health Survey.

There is no quick fix to advancing equality, which demands consistent, decisive action, as highlighted through this year's International Women's Day theme: Accelerate Action.

INVESTING IN ECONOMIC PARITY

As per the Global Gender Gap Report (GGGR) 2024 by the World Economic Forum, India has achieved near gender parity in educational enrolment across all levels. Despite this significant stride, the gains in education don't translate into the employment landscape. The report ranks India 142nd out of 146 countries in terms of economic participation and opportunity, with the female labour-force participation rate being 35 per cent as opposed to 76.41 per cent for men.

Farzana Afridi, professor of economics and head, economics and planning unit, Indian Statistical Institute, Delhi, remarks, "The continued predominance of the agricultural sector and relative



ADVOCACY AND ACTION

Engage in collective action at the grassroots level and advocate for policy changes that promote gender equality



COMMUNITY BUILDING

Create spaces for women to connect, support, and empower each other



KNOWLEDGE AND AWARENESS

Learn about feminist issues and share knowledge with others

shift towards the services sector, bypassing manufacturing, contributes significantly to the continued high levels of informal, low-paying work by women. This lack of

structural transformation carries adverse implications for women's productivity." Moreover, she points out that social and cultural norms continue to dictate the kind of work women should or shouldn't do, while many still carry a disproportionate burden of unpaid domestic work.

As a result, creating robust job opportunities in the non-agricultural sector becomes paramount.

The issue: The economic and political underutilisation of Indian women, despite their significant potential to contribute to the nation's growth. Although progress has been made, there remains a gap in translating education into economic participation, while systemic barriers continue to restrict access to opportunities.

Stat checks: Despite making up 48 per cent of the population, women contribute just 18 per cent to the national GDP. India is ranked 129th out of 146 countries on the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2024, indicating a drop from its 2023 ranking of 127.

Why it matters: When women have equal access to education, employment, and leadership opportunities, their skills and capabilities will be fully realised, which can further foster a more stable, inclusive, and sustainable future.

"Tamil Nadu is a good case in point, in terms of investing in high labour standards—such as guaranteeing safety, housing and decent pay for women workers—in new electronics manufacturing units," illustrates Afridi.

Sona Mitra, director (research and policy) at the Institute for What Works to Advance Gender Equality (IWWAGE), concurs, "It's a must to engage women in remunerative activities and enhance their participation in emerging sectors and STEM careers while encouraging opportunity-oriented entrepreneurship instead of distress-driven self-employment."

PROMOTING POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

The GGGR 2024 ranks India with in the top 10 on the head-of-state indicator (40.7 per cent), but scores for women's representation at the federal level, in ministerial positions (6.9 per cent) and parliament (17.2 per cent), remain quite low.

Hence, the successful passing of the Women's Reservation Bill is a significant development, which would boost women's political representation. Nalini Gulati, economic advisor at 'Ideas for India', an economics and policy portal of the International Growth Centre, further mentions, "Following the 73rd Constitutional Amendment in 1992, which mandated that one-third of village government head positions be reserved for women, there was a sharp increase in female sarpanchs. Studies have documented various positive effects of this change, ranging from

CONSUMER CONNECT INITIATIVE

SMASHING THE GLASS CEILING

A study by Avtar, a workplace culture consulting firm, revealed that only 19 per cent of C-suite roles in India are held by women—significantly below the global average of 30 per cent. When it comes to the advancement of women to leadership roles, the GDDR 2024 prescribes a value of 3.9 to India, 1.7 being the scale.

Addressing this discrepancy requires a multi-pronged approach. Nirmala Menon, founder and CEO of Interweave Consulting, a diversity and inclusion (D&I) consultancy, believes that companies and governments must collaborate to shape empowering workplace policies and societal norms for women. "For instance, the government can incentivise companies excelling in gender diversity through tax breaks, regular audits, and progress disclosures. More organisations can retain female talent through

THE LONG ROAD TO EQUALITY

India is sitting on a goldmine of untapped potential—its 'naari shakti'. But what's holding back its women from realising their full capability? Let's find out

targeted hiring, returnship programmes, flexible working, part-time roles, mentoring opportunities and childcare support. It's also vital to normalise men's roles as equal partners at home through parental leave and benefits," she describes. Yukti Nagpal, the director of Gulshan Group, adds, "Business owners must also proactively create an equitable environment by ensuring safety, implementing POSH guidelines, and offering logistical support such as safe transportation." With bold action, India can unlock the complete potential of its women and set an example for the world to follow.

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