

## Women In Unorganized Sector

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In the words of president APJ Abdul Kalam "empowering women is a prerequisite for creating a good nation, when women are empowered, society with stability is assured. Empowerment of women is essential as their thoughts and their value systems lead to the development of a good family, good society and ultimately a good nation."

Any strategy aimed at economic development will be uneven without involving women who constitute half of the world population. There has been a sea change in women's participation in the last three decades with the increase in the number of enterprises and their substantive contribution to economic growth. Globalization has brought a wide range of economic and social opportunities to women workers. In this dynamic world, women are the important part of the global search for sustained economic development and social progress. In India, though women have played a key role in the society, but their ability has not been properly admired and utilized due to the lower status of women in the society. So at present, women's involvement in economic activities is marked by a low work participation rate, excessive concentration in the unorganized sector and employment in less skilled jobs.

'The unorganized sector constitutes of all enterprises having less than the total workers, operating on a proprietary or partnership basis.' The unorganized sector which continues to remain bigger in India, covers most of the agricultural and non-agricultural, rural and a major part of urban labour. Almost 400 million people - more than 85% of the working population in India - work in the unorganized sector. Of these, at least 120 million are women. Women working in the informal sector are not included in the official statistics and their work is undocumented and considered as disguised wage work, unskilled, low paying and does not provide benefits to the worker.

The informal sector was 'discovered' in the 1970s when Keith Hart first used the term as "covering marginal livelihoods and survival activity outside the regulatory reach of state and not yet able to be absorbed by industry and emphasized the role (or failure) of formal sector employment in defining the informal sector."

The International Labour Organization says that women represent:

- i) 50% of the population
- ii) 30% of the labour force
- iii) Perform 60% of all working hours
- iv) Receive 10% of the world's income
- v) Own less than 1% of the world's property

The unorganized sector is mainly featured with low incomes, seasonal employment which has mainly contributed to poverty, has lack of protection from government. The unorganised sector uses mainly labour intensive and indigenous technology. The workers in unorganized sector, are so scattered that the implementation of the Legislation is very inadequate and ineffective. There are hardly any unions in this sector to protect their interests. But the contributions made by the unorganised sector to the national income, is very substantial as compared to that of the organized sector. It adds more than 60% to the national income while the contribution of the organized sector is almost half in spite of the larger control over resources and socio-economic power enjoyed by the organized sector.

According to census 2001, women constitute 48.26 percent of the total population in India and 25.67 percent of female population is designated as workers. Moreover, these workers contribute 62 per cent to the gross domestic product (GDP), and 50 per cent to the national income. This sector includes workers employed in a wide range of economic activities, from street vendors and casual workers in a tea-shop to agricultural workers, small and marginal farmers to 'beedi' workers, construction workers, salt pan workers and sub-contracted and temporary workers of factories, cotton and tea plucking labor, pottery and handloom workers and domestic servants. However, unlike workers in the formal sectors, they do not have access to regular incomes or welfare benefits, making them extremely vulnerable to change and insecurity

Report of national commission for enterprises in the unorganized sector estimates the total Indian labour force is likely to be around 502 million by 2012 and 551 million by 2017 - more than the population of India in 1971 i.e. 548 million.

It is only from the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-78) onwards that the role has been recognized to some extent from women welfare to women development and empowerment. Several policies and programs have been implemented for the development of working conditions of women in different enterprises in India. The Indian economy has been witnessing a drastic change since mid 1991, with new policies of economic liberalization, globalization and privatization initiated by the Indian government

The unorganized sector plays a vital role in terms of providing employment opportunity to a large segment of the working force in the country and contributes to the national product significantly. The contribution of the unorganized sector to the net domestic product and its share in the total NDP at current prices has been over 60%. In the matter of savings the share of household sector in the total gross domestic saving

mainly unorganized sector is about three fourth. Thus unorganized sector has a crucial role in our economy in terms of employment and its contribution to the National Domestic Product, savings and capital formation. But despite being nearly half of the country's population, the percentage of women in leading managerial positions is extremely low. For the vast majority of women workers in India work in extremely exploitative conditions, women in poor families are even more powerless. An estimated 12.39 crore women work in the unorganized sector. Of these, 10.6 crore are in rural areas and the remaining women work in urban areas. The Report of the Working Group on Social Security, submitted in June 2006 to the Planning Commission for the Eleventh Five-Year Plan, shows that a total of 39.7 crore workers are employed in the organized and unorganized sectors in India. Only 7% of this huge labour force is in the organized sector, which includes workers on regular salaries in registered companies and firms. The remaining 93% work in the unorganized or informal sector. The female work participation rate is reported to have increased from 19.7% in 1981 to 25.7% in 2000. This is one of the reasons that globalization has brought about major part of the women labour force in the unorganized sector.

Unfortunately, women in the economic sphere have limited opportunities than men, they earn about half of men's income, and have no ownership of resources. The policies of liberalization have in fact had a deteriorating effect on women's employment. Due to limited mobility of women, they are forced to take up jobs that offer very poor wages and little social security, in response to the employers' need for a more flexible

labour force. Women's weaker bargaining power, vis-à-vis employers as well as male co-workers, is generally regarded as a prime reason for the employment of women in such large numbers in most menial tasks, using the least technology.

Most of the rural women are illiterate and constitute one third of the rural workforce in India. As most of them are trapped in vicious circle of poverty, women workers face serious problems and constraints related to work such as deprivations, lack of continuity, insecurity, wage discrimination, occupational segregation, unhealthy job relationship, absence of medical, old age and accident care etc. The exploitation of female labourers in rural regions happens to be more as they are concentrated in a few occupations which are generally lower paid and are of part time nature. In the initial planning, gender concerns remained missing because human factor in development was not given much importance. It is the time to address the issues and discuss the kind of policy reforms and bring about institutional changes required for the upliftment and empowerment of rural female labour force. Empowerment should aim at changing the nature and direction of the power structures which marginalize the women laborers.

#### Estimates of Informal Sector Employment:

The estimates obtained were adjusted for census population as on First January, 2000. These adjusted estimates by sector and size are given in Table 1.1

Table-1.1: Estimates of Employment in Informal Sector

Sl. No.	Sector	Estimated Number of Workers (Million)		
		Male	Female	Total
<b>1.</b>	<b>Agriculture:</b>			
1.1	Rural	137.51	87.09	224.60
1.2	Urban	4.95	3.24	8.19
	<b>Total</b>	<b>142.46</b>	<b>90.33</b>	<b>232.79</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Non-agriculture</b>			
2.1	Rural	40.35	11.68	52.03
2.2	Urban	45.13	10.36	55.49
	<b>Total</b>	<b>85.48</b>	<b>22.04</b>	<b>107.52</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>All India</b>			
3.1	Rural	177.86	98.77	276.63
3.2	Urban	50.08	13.60	63.68
	<b>Total</b>	<b>227.94</b>	<b>112.37</b>	<b>340.31</b>

Source: The data sets of NSS 55<sup>th</sup> round survey (July 1999 to June 2000) on employment-unemployment.

India's economy has undergone a substantial transformation since the country's independence in 1947. A wide range of modern industries and support services now exist. In spite of these changes, agriculture continues to dominate employment. Agricultural workers constitute by far the largest segment in the unorganized sector and their number according to 1991 Census was 74.6 million. In addition, a significant number, 110.7 million, are listed as cultivators (large, medium and small) of whom approximately 50% belong to the category of small and marginal farmers. Many of these small and marginal farmers on account of utterly deficit, small and uneconomic holdings and low yield work on the land of others. Further, a significant number engaged in

livestock, forestry, fishing, orchards and allied activities as well as small and marginal farmers work as agricultural workers in their spare time or in times of difficulty to supplement their meager incomes.

In spite of the fact that these agricultural workers have such numerical strength, they are extremely vulnerable to exploitation on account of low levels of literacy, lack of awareness, persistent social backwardness and absence of unionization and other forms of viable organization. The avenues of stable and durable employment for them have been limited leading to migration to different areas in search of better avenues of employment and wages but with a lot of dislocation

of family life, dislocation of education of children and numerous other handicaps.

Women constitute an important segment of the Indian labour force whose working conditions have not made significant progress. Despite some noticeable advances for a small percentage of women, women as a whole have been relegated largely to agricultural and menial pursuits that pay the lowest wages. In some ways, as the overall economy has grown, the situation of working women in India has even deteriorated. In 1911, for example, three-quarters of the working women of India were agricultural workers; in 1991, the proportion was over 80 percent. Nearly 70 percent of the population as a whole derives its livelihood from land resources, and women contribute an estimated 55 to 66 percent of the total farm labour force.

The poor and deteriorating status of rural women has been attributed to their declining economic participation and other factors like the modernization of the agricultural sector. Since globalization is introducing technological inputs, women are being marginalized in economic activities, men traditionally being offered new scopes of learning and training. Consequently, female workers are joining the informal sector or casual labour force more than ever before. Additionally, women are traditionally responsible for the daily household chores such as cooking, fetching water, looking after children and related activities.

If all activities — including maintenance of kitchen gardens and poultry, grinding food grains, collecting water and firewood, etc. — are taken into account, then 88 percent of rural housewives and 66 percent of urban housewives can be considered as economically productive.

Women's employment in family farms or businesses is rarely recognized as economically productive, either by men or women. And, any income generated from this work is generally controlled by the men. Such work is unlikely to increase women's participation in allocating family finances. In a 1992 study of family-based textile workers, male children who helped in a home-based handloom mill were given pocket money, but the adult women and girls were not.

The shift from subsistence to a market economy has a dramatic negative impact on women. Where technology has been introduced in areas where women worked, women labourers have often been displaced by men. Threshing of grain was almost exclusively a female task, and with the introduction of automatic grain threshers — which are only operated by men — women have lost an important source of income.

The total employment in the economy as estimated was 396.77 Million as on 2000.

The break-up of total employment by sector and size is given in Table 1.2.

**Table-1.2: Estimated Total Employment in the Economy**

Sector	Estimated Number of Workers (Million)		
	Male	Female	Total
Rural	196.74	104.02	300.76
Urban	77.05	18.96	96.01
Total	273.79	122.98	396.77

Source: The data sets of NSS 55<sup>th</sup> round survey (July 1999 to June 2000) on employment-unemployment.

The employment in the informal sector as per the new definition is thus about 85.77 percent of the total employment. However, the women workers in the informal sector constituted about 91.38 percent of the total women workers. Similarly,

among rural workers, about 92 percent were in the informal sector. The percentage share of informal sector workers amongst various categories of total workers is given in Table-1.3.

**Table-1.3: Percentage share of Informal Sector Workers by Sector and Sex**

Sector	Percentage Share (Million)		
	Male	Female	Total
Rural	90.40	94.96	91.98
Urban	65.00	71.73	66.33
Total	83.26	91.38	85.77

Source: The data sets of NSS 55<sup>th</sup> round survey (July 1999 to June 2000) on employment-unemployment.

It is assumed that as the economy grows the gender gaps in health, socio-economic status and education automatically reduce to sufficient level. However women's economic participation can be mentioned in the field of production of goods and services accounted in the national income statistic, female work participation has always been low as compared to men. It is the problem of gender discrimination, that women do not let enjoy their economic rights in spite of their being always at work. Their contribution to the economy and the society has

never been considered, it has rather contributed largely to promote poverty level. They are without any social security and pension schemes. This is the large area, which has not attracted attention of the government. If a person from informal sector meets an accident, gets ill for long time, remains unemployed or when unable to work in old age etc., under these circumstances person has no alternative for food or shelter.

Different sectors of economy have different experiences about the impact of the reforms. In a country like India, productive employment is central to poverty reduction strategy and to bring about economic equality in the society. But the results of unregulated operation of market forces are not always equitable, where some groups are likely to be losers as a result of globalization. Women constitute one such vulnerable group.

An estimate by the World Bank shows that women usually go in for temporary and standby jobs because of the prevalent hesitancy to employ women in regular jobs and providing them with good working conditions. It is universally observed that in a society which is characterized by gender segregation and social stratification, certain sections unfortunately occupy a subordinate position. In the small production units number of women workers is far more than men that forces women to accept lower wages and longer hours of work. Indian constitution guarantees democracy and confers the right of equality to all strata. But the reality is that this guarantee and right of equality have not reached many lower sections of society. The case of the domestic workers is an evidence to the fact that despite the guaranteed constitutional rights, their struggle for equality and survival continues. Domestic workers as a major part of unorganized sector remain the most exploited ones as they constitute the most illiterate section, belonging to the lowest stratum of society and are often considered as cheap labour.

#### **Under-valuation of women's work**

Women work for longer hours than men. Of the total burden of work, women carry fifty three percent in developing countries and fifty one percent in industrial countries, roughly two third is spent in paid activities, for the women situation is reverse. In developing countries, more than three fourth of men's work is in market activities. So men receive the lion's share of income and recognition for their economic contribution, while most of women's work remains unpaid, unrecognized and undervalued which reduces women to non-entities in most economic transactions such as property ownership etc.

For the women the day starts at 6 am with their house hold cores. For all the workers the day ends at 6 pm, men proceed to rest but women begin their house hold tasks such as collection of wood, preparation of food for the family and washing clothes etc. Their day ends around 10 pm. Women bear the double burden of work- inside and outside the home.

Women workers suffer from the male-female wage gap. More than ninety percent of the women casual workers in all the industry groups on average receive wages below national uniform wage. Among the casual workers in rural and urban areas, women mostly receive half the male wage earnings.

#### **Inequality in labour market**

The greatest deterrent to women workers is that they are women. The difference to what they actually earn in the labour market is assigned to discrimination.

Women working in unorganized sector are living a life far below from satisfaction as they are unaware from the existing laws. They suffer from chronic diseases and get no medical aid even at the time of birth of their children. They have to play dual role working inside and outside the home yet they are denied access to resources such as education, health care services and job training etc. Women get less health care than men. In India maternal mortality rates in rural areas are highest in the world as they get poor quality of reproductive services. The tasks performed by women are usually those that require them to be in one position for longer hours which adversely affect their health e.g. sowing rice plants etc.

Patriarchic nature of the Indian society and domestic violence has kept women under subjugation. They face many social constraints and are not free to move outside home. Their place in social hierarchy being low does not entitle them to their legitimate share in family property. Their right to inheritance is limited and frequently violated. In case of poor women, they have only conditional access to basic essentials of life as food, shelter and education etc.

The increasing unemployment among men facilitates continuous supply of poor women as domestic workers and to seek employment in the unorganized sector.

The increasing demand of *domestic workers* has played a major role in migration of women along with their families from far flung rural or tribal areas. Most of the women who migrate to other states are from poor families and are illiterate. Due to lack of education, experience and skill they become easy victims of exploitation and face a lot of sexual harassment in the course of employment. Due to their inability to work for longer hours they are not employed in sensitive or crucial positions.

Women who work in highly risky areas e.g. in gold mines handle mercury and cyanide with their bare hands and have to work beyond working hours, even in advanced stages of pregnancy, and there is no leave facility, no maternity benefits and even no child care facilities and get unequal wages. In some areas women have to work at night and are sexually abused. HIV AIDS, other sexually transmitted diseases, respiratory problems, silicosis, tuberculosis, leukemia, arthritis and reproductive problems are more prevalent among women working in mines. Neither center government nor the state governments are bothered to protect the interests of such women. A recent report of the National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector reveals that 395 million Indians work in the unorganized sector. 79% of these workers live on an income of less than Rs 20 a day. Many of the workers in this vulnerable and impoverished sector are women, who face the additional inequalities of gender.

Numerous studies have pointed out the poor working conditions of women in the unorganized sector in India. Workers in leather industry work without footwear for long hours with their bare feet soaked in chemicals. In the fish processing unit in the export zones the floors are permanently wet and slippery, with open puddles of 'black ink.' Similarly, conditions of workers in the manufacturing of locks, beedi

rolling, diamond cutting, textiles including handlooms and power looms, artistic metal ware and so on are pathetic. Workers engage in production for long hours. In the unorganized manufacturing sector the regular women workers

are concentrated in the manufacturing of tobacco and textile products, while men are more diversified in other manufacturing industries. (Table-1.4)

**Table-1.4: Distribution of Unorganized Sector Casual and Regular Workers in Manufacturing 2004-05**

Industry group	Casual	Regular	Casual	Regular	Casual	Regular
	Male		Female		All	
Food products and beverages	10.1	11.4	10.8	8.7	10.3	11.1
Tobacco products	2.1	0.5	10.2	18.9	3.9	2.3
Textile products	18.6	14.5	36.7	26.4	22.7	15.0
Weaving apparel	7.5	11.5	5.3	10.9	7.0	11.4
Training and dressing of leather	2.5	3.3	6.3	3.9	2.0	3.4
Wood and the products	13.9	4.2	3.3	1.8	11.5	4.0
Chemical and chemical products	1.3	3.0	5.1	7.2	2.1	3.4
Other non metallic mineral products	18.6	2.3	17.8	1.4	18.4	2.2
Other manufacturing	25.4	49.3	10.4	26.8	22.0	47.1
All manufacturing	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: NSS 61<sup>st</sup> Round 2004-05, Employment-Unemployment Survey, Computed.

### Minimum physical working conditions

Factories Act specifies a minimum floor space of 36 square feet per worker and a minimum volume space of 500 cubic feet per worker. Proper lighting and minimum requirement of a first aid kit have to be provided. In fact, in industries such as carpet weaving, beedi rolling, marine fishing, and metal ware, the minimum physical working conditions such as space, volume (space and height of work place), ventilation, illumination, temperature and humidity are not taken into care. Large number of workers is confined in a tiny room or a work sheds which are very low, humid and stifling. Proper ventilation is very important for certain industries such as chemicals, metallurgy, leather tanning, pottery, brick-kilns, meat and fish processing, manufacturing of matches and fireworks. Poor ventilation causes respiratory diseases. Because workers work in inadequate place for long hours which are exposed to dust and fumes, they very easily become victims of respiratory diseases.

In case of injuries, the workers suffer from loss of pay and often loss of job. Absence of basic facilities like drinking water and health care contributes to their vulnerability to diseases. The women and children are equally exposed to such harsh conditions. The second national commission has pointed to the high incidence of lung diseases such as tuberculosis and pneumoconiosis among underground mine workers. There is a danger of workers in the glass bangle industry suffering from respiratory diseases and tuberculosis due to toxic fumes and smoke within the factories and high level of coal dust. Dyes and chemicals used in textiles and carpet weaving are health hazards to the workers. Migrant workers in silica mines suffer from TB and silicosis. In the fish processing units in the export zones 'lifting and carrying of 200 kg or even 400 kg packs packed with fish and ice' on wet and slippery floors often lead falls, injuries, strained muscles, hernia and slip discs. Health problems such as permanent damage to the uterus of the women workers, coughs and shivering occur due to continued exposure to freezing temperature.

There are many health hazards in the hand block printing textiles. The work requires a lot of stamina since the worker has to stand and work about eight hours a day. The dye creates the problems since the workers have to hit the block with their palms which causes hardened, dead and numb skin. They suffer from skin related problems caused by allergy to dyes. Health hazards and job insecurity are inter-related problems in the unorganized sector.

The building and other construction workers (Regulation & Employment and Conditions of Service Act, 1996) provided for the principal employer, contractor or sub contractor of construction workers to provide for facilities in the work place such as safe drinking water, urinals and toilets separately both for men and women, first aid and crèches for children of workers on sites where the number of women workers is greater than twenty. No such facilities, such as crèches, canteen and shelter for rest or recreation of workers are provided in unorganized sector where the workers generally work from ten to twelve hours a day.

A study conducted on construction industry found that only the male workers are registered as workers in the muster roll of the employer and the rest of the family remains invisible to statistics, policy and social protection provision. The industry where the workers are employed through contractors, don't even receive minimum employment protection and benefits. The employers are generally skeptical about the working abilities of women. For women's family obligations, primary responsibility for children, home and older dependent family members, few women can devote all their time and energies to their jobs. Indian women give more emphasis to family ties and relationships. Married women have to make a fine balance between job and home.

The male - female competition is another factor, which develop hurdles to women workers in the process of being a successful worker. Despite the fact that women are good in

keeping their service prompt, due to lack of organizational skills compared to male workers women have to face constraints from competition. This shows the low level freedom of expression and freedom of mobility of the women. High negotiation skills are the basic requirement to get a good job. Low-level negotiation and bargaining skills are the factors, which affect women's ability to get satisfactory jobs.

Knowledge of latest technological changes, know how, and education level of the person are significant factors that affect professional career. The literacy rate of women in India is found at low level compared to male population. Many women in developing nations lack the education required. They are ignorant of new technologies and are unskilled in their use and often unable to do research and gain the necessary training (UNIDO, 1995b, p.1). Although great advances are being made in technology, many women's illiteracy, structural difficulties, and lack of access to technical training prevent the technology from being beneficial or even available to females ("Women Entrepreneurs in Poorest Countries," 2001). Lack of knowledge and the continuing treatment of women as second-class citizens keep them in a pervasive cycle of poverty ("The Female Poverty Trap," 2001). The studies indicate that uneducated women don't have the knowledge of measurement and basic accounting, so low-level education provides low-level self-confidence and self-reliance. Low level of education and confidence leads to low level of participation among women.

### Legislative Measures

Several measures have been taken to protect the interests of the working class and uplift the working condition of workers. The very first legislation, the Minimum Wages Act, 1948 was applied to the agricultural sector also. Subsequently, the Plantation Labour Act, 1951 was enacted to provide certain basic facilities to plantation workers. Many other existing labour laws are applicable or have direct bearing on agricultural labour. The problems of agricultural labourers have been sought to be tackled through Multi-dimensional course of action viz., improvement of infrastructural facilities, diversification to non-farm activities, skill improvement programmes, financial assistance to promote self-employment, optimizing the use of land resources etc., through a variety of rural development, employment generation and poverty alleviation programmes. All these efforts have not been able to adequately protect the interests of agricultural workers. This is partly on account of lack of bargaining power. Keeping in view this broad perspective, the Ministry of Labour is contemplating to bring a comprehensive legislation to safe guard the interests of agricultural workers.

Existing labour laws provide negligible protection for the vast majority of women workers in the country. The Maternity Benefit Act, the Equal Remuneration for Equal Work Act, or the Protection from Sexual Harassment Act are the least implemented of all the labour laws. The Factories Act of 1948 covers working conditions, health and safety, basic amenities like toilets, crèches, working hours, etc, but does not apply to workplaces with fewer than 10 workers using power-driven machinery or to those with less than 20 workers without power. The Employees State Insurance Act, 1948, meant to provide for sickness, accident and maternity benefits, has not been

extended to the vast majority of women workers from the unorganized sector.

Ever since the enactment of the Contract Labour Act, 1971, employers have found it a convenient means to deprive workers of benefits, because by sub-contracting production or by dividing it into small units employers are able to evade all the existing laws. The government happens to be the biggest employer of contract workers and it also turns out to be the biggest violator of all contractor labour rules. It would be no exaggeration to say that the Contract Labour Act has been the biggest cause of the dwindling number of workers in the organized sector in general, and in pushing women workers out of the social security safety net in particular. The Factories Act, The Mines Act, The Dock Workers' Act etc are some of the laws, which contain provisions for regulating the health of the workers in an establishment. The Employees' State Insurance Act and the Workmen's Compensation Act provide health benefits and compensation to the workers in cases of ill-health and injuries etc. But in the unorganized sector where the majority of women workers are concentrated, no occupational safety and health safeguards are in place. Even in the organized sector, where these are applicable, safeguards are rarely provided for the workers, either male or female. Usually the safety devices are designed keeping the male workers in view and become unsuitable for women workers. Besides, the social aspects of work are not considered risk factors. As a result, more emphasis is given to work related accidents than to illnesses.

In 2005, for the first time, agriculture was no longer the main sector of employment for women and this trend continued in 2006. The service sector now provides most jobs for women. Of the total number of employed women in 2006, 40.4 per cent work in agriculture and 42.4 per cent in services

Given their vulnerable status at home and at work, income generation alone may not improve the socio-economic status of women attached to the informal sector. Their economic empowerment needs to go along with political empowerment, which could improve their bargaining power both in the household and at work. Unionizing women workers in the informal economy could have beneficial impacts on their work and their life if such organization combines voices, representation along with access to resources such as credit and information – a holistic strategy that provides political empowerment allied with economic empowerment. Methods of organizing have been tried in different parts of the country, through associations of self-employed women such as SEWA in Gujarat or organizations formed by women workers themselves, such as anganwadi workers or domestic workers in Maharashtra, and construction workers in Tamil Nadu. Women in these groups have even taken their demands up to Parliament.

Special provisions/welfare schemes for women workers prohibiting their employment after sunset, rest shelter with employment of 20 and above female agricultural workers for use of children under the age of six, ensuring payment of equal wages to men and women for same and similar nature of work as required under Equal Remuneration Act, maternity benefits etc. are also provided in the proposed legislation. To meet the

expenditure for various welfare measures there should be provision for constitution of Workers' Welfare Fund contributed by employer as well as employee.

### Right efforts required

Following efforts can be taken into account for effective development of women workers.

- Right efforts from all areas are required for the welfare of women workers.
- Women should be considered as specific target group for all developmental programme.
- Proper training programmes and adequate educational facilities to be provided to women.
- Self confidence and participation in decision-making should be encouraged among women.
- Vocational training and skill development to be extended to women.
- Continuous monitoring and improvement of training programmers.
- Women should be employed in specific jobs in which they have been trained.
- Gender sensitization programmers should be held to train employers to treat women with dignity and respect as persons in their own right.
- A Women Worker's Guidance Cell to be set up to handle the various problems of all women workers.
- Programmers to encourage the desirability to work among women are to be extended at local level.
- Training in participatory attitudes should start at the high school level through well-designed courses, which build confidence through various techniques.
- More governmental schemes to motivate women to work.
- Involvement of Non Governmental Organizations in women training programmes and counseling for women workers.
- Foremost is a need for changing the mindset towards women so as to give equal rights as enshrined in the constitution.

Women dominate those forms of work that are unregulated and unregistered, found most in the so-called 'informal economy. Many of these women workers are primary earners for their families. Their earnings are necessary for sheer survival. With economic reforms in full sway in India, many believe that informal work, characterized by low earnings, irregular employment and unsafe working conditions will intensify in the coming years. Low-income women workers - specially in the informal sector - form one of the most vulnerable groups in the Indian economy. The reasons for their vulnerability are – illiteracy; unawareness; poverty; dual responsibility; irregular work; low economic status; little or no bargaining power; lack of control over earnings; domestic violence; need to balance paid work with care for children and homework; little or no access to institutional credit, training and information; lack of assets. Unequal gender relations assume a very important role in defining their insecurities. In fact, according to the National Council of Labour, "the forces which control and sustain the vulnerability of women are institutionalized in society and in the economy."

Conditions of working women in India have improved considerably in the recent years. Ironically, despite the improvement in their status, they still find themselves dependent on men. It is because of the fact that man in patriarchal society has always wielded economic independence and power to take decision. Since the working woman earns an independent income in the same patriarchal set-up, where the basic infrastructure of society has hardly changed, though her own role within the same structure is passing through a transitional phase, it is but natural that she would remain vulnerable to exploitation even in her economically independent domain. Society perhaps yet needs to accord due recognition to women to take the lead role and women, at the same time; need to be oriented vigorously towards assuming this role in the society.

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