Women Workforce Participation

What is the issue?

- A key focus of many political parties in the election time has been women's employment.
- In this context, more than a 'more jobs' approach, addressing structural issues which keep women away from the workforce is a must.

How is women workforce participation?

- Currently, the participation of women in the workforce in India is one of the lowest globally.
- The female labour force participation rate (LFPR) in India fell from around 31% in 2011-2012 to close to 23% in 2017-2018.
- This decline has been sharper in rural areas, where the female LFPR fell by more than 11 percentage points.

What are the factors behind?

- The limitations to participation in work arise from a complex set of factors including -
    i. low social acceptability of women working outside the household
    ii. lack of access to safe and secure workspaces
    iii. widespread prevalence of poor and unequal wages
    iv. dearth of decent and suitable jobs
- So most women in India are engaged in subsistence-level work in agriculture in rural areas.
- In urban areas, it is the low-paying jobs such as domestic service and petty home-based manufacturing.

How does education-work interconnection work?

- Studies reveal a strong negative relationship between a woman's education level and her participation in agricultural and non-agricultural wage work and in family farms.
- With better education, women are refusing to do casual wage labour or work in family farms and enterprises.
- There is also a preference among women for salaried jobs as their

educational attainment increases.
- But the challenge is that such jobs remain extremely limited for women.
- E.g. Among people (25 to 59 years) working as farmers, farm labourers and service workers, nearly a third are women.
- On the other hand, proportion of women among professionals, managers and clerical workers is only about 15%.

Why does women's work go unnoticed?

- It is not that women are simply retreating from the world of work.
- In contrast, they devote their substantial time to work which is not considered as work, but an extension of their duties, and is hence largely unpaid.
- This includes unpaid care work such as childcare, elderly care, and household work such as collecting water.
- This burden falls disproportionately on women, especially due to inadequate availability and accessibility of public services.
- It also encompasses significant chunks of women's contribution to agriculture, animal husbandry, and non-timber forest produce.

What should the policy approach be?

- Efforts at women's economic empowerment and equal access to livelihoods must address the above challenges.
- The limitations exist along a highly gendered continuum of unpaid, underpaid and paid work.
- So on the one hand, the measure should -

    i. facilitate women's access to decent work by providing public services
    ii. eliminate discrimination in hiring
    iii. ensure equal and decent wages
    iv. improve women's security in public spaces

- On the other hand, it must also recognise, reduce, redistribute, and remunerate women's unpaid work.
- In this context, gender-responsive public services include

    i. free and accessible public toilets
    ii. household water connections
    iii. safe and secure public transport
    iv. adequate lighting and CCTV cameras to prevent violence against women in public spaces

- Furthermore, fair and decent living wages and social security such as maternity and sickness benefits, provident fund, pension should be the

priorities.

- Besides, policies should address the specific needs of migrant workers, dalits, tribals, Muslims, and other marginalised communities.
- E.g. migration facilitation and crisis centres (temporary shelter facility, helpline, legal aid, and medical and counselling facilities)
- Others include social housing spaces for women workers, spaces for women shopkeepers and hawkers in markets and vending zones.
- Besides these, recognising women as farmers in accordance with the National Policy for Farmers is a crucial priority.
- Their equal rights and entitlements over land, and access to inputs, credit, markets, and extension services must be ensured. Click here to know more on women in agriculture.
- In all, the need is to address the structural issues which keep women from entering and staying in the workforce.

Source: The Hindu

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