

Report on

National Workshop on

India's Declining Female Labour Force Participation *Implications for Policy and Action*

Venue: Mobility India, Bengaluru

Friday, September 27, 2019



September, 2019

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Introduction

As part of the [Southern Voice State of the SDGs Initiative](#), the [Public Affairs Centre](#) explored the barriers to and enablers for the participation of women in India's workforce. The study titled, "Will women be a part of India's future workforce? The quest for sustainable and inclusive development", presents a country case study, examining the causes for the declining female labour force participation rate (FLFPR) in the country and its policy implications. (Refer Annexures 1 and 2)

As part of the study's communication strategy, a dissemination National Workshop was held in Bengaluru.

Objectives

- Discuss the causes for the decline, in the light of India's flagship skilling programmes as well as the shifting development narratives towards the SDGs (#4, #5 and #8)
- Bring together diverse stakeholders from research and advocacy to discuss the way forward to bridge the gender gap in India's workforce.

Expected Outcomes

- Disseminate findings from PAC's India country case study on the barriers to and enablers of women's participation in the workforce in India
- Identify opportunities for new research in the areas of gender and work
- Explore and discuss the policy relevance of women's participation in the workforce in view of the SDG agenda.

The Workshop had over 25 participants who represented academics, government, NGOs, CSOs and other relevant institutions (Refer Annexure 3).

Opening Remarks

Gurucharan Gollerkeri, Director, Public Affairs Centre



Introduction to PAC

Mr. Gurucharan began with an introduction of Public Affairs Centre ([PAC](#)) a not for profit think tank, an insight into PAC's work which is primarily involved at the three tier level - federal, state and sub-national, towards strengthening governance. PAC's work lays special emphasis on last mile delivery with special focus on communities keeping Sustainable Development Goals at the core. School education, primary health, women and children, and gender are some of the broad themes on which PAC current works.

He added that this workshop focuses on bringing people from different fields who share a deep interest in the theme of gender. He welcomed the Chief Guest, Captain P. Manivannan, IAS – Secretary, Labour Department, Government of Karnataka, and the panelists [Antara Ganguli](#) - Gender and Development Specialist, UNICEF, Dr. Vinod Vyasulu - Founder, Centre for Budget and Policy Studies ([CBPS](#)) and [Dr. Sudeshna Mukherjee](#) - Coordinator, Centre for Women's Studies, Bangalore University.

Project Background

[Southern Voice](#) is an open platform for think tanks. It contributes to the global dialogue on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Its ultimate aim is to address the existing 'knowledge asymmetry' and 'participation deficit' in the dialogue on development. It does this by disseminating evidence-based policy analysis by researchers from Global South countries.

Through an open call for proposals for sustainable development goals, PAC opted for writing on a proposal on the theme of declining labour force participation in India, the focus of the project on the intersection of SDG 8 - Decent work for all, and SDG 5 - gender equality.

Thoughts on workshop's theme - Declining Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLPR)

There has been a decline in the participation in the last 10 years from 30 percent to 23 percent. Quoting Karl Popper, the decline in FLFPR can be described as the perfect conjecture from the point of view of research it would argue why so there are so many conjectures around FLFPR with as many refutations as well, our current state of knowledge on declining FLFPR.

Stylised facts as reasons dictate that apart from patriarchy, how rising incomes within families have also lead towards a decline. Feminisation of work with no good jobs available for women with a few outlined or defined set of jobs available for women is another factor.

India as country has studies that are still generating the knowledge that we have not progressed and that the status quo of FLFPR remains true to what it was 20 years ago. It is time to now focus on the current knowledge, and the approach towards the problem should be from the perspective of the problem as it is.

Three Questions to ponder during the Workshop

1. How is the problem of unpaid work going to be dealt with?

From a Post-Colonial theoretical perception do we need to follow a western model in counting the decline in FLPR in India, given that 65 percent of women in India are engaged in unpaid work? Several studies have shown that on an average, a woman in India does 6 hours of unpaid work relative to 1 hour by a man. Women do 5 hours of unpaid care work relative to half an hour by a man. From the perspective of women and the FLFPR, we are dealing with the problem of time poverty. From an economic perspective of opportunity cost, if in terms of wages unpaid work and unpaid care work can be valued and converted into days of women work relative to the percentage of 23 percent in India and 49 percent globally to measure the actual situation on ground. This argument will be in support of how unpaid work can be valued. The unpaid work/unpaid care work cannot be ignored and should be factored into the economic model.

2. What kind of social security system will be relative in the changing systems of work for the labour force in India?

Given the informalisation of employee-employer relationships, there is an increase in different kinds of work, different kinds of work spaces. The contractual agreements are becoming weaker in nature, with poorer working conditions, and with the rise in technological advancements the work environment for women is becoming extremely exploitative. Given the expectation that FLFPR should increase and reach a certain optimal level, could a delinked social security system or a universal social security system be the answer, especially building a stronger system for blue/brown collared workers?

3. How does one change the gender segregation of work?

The question which needs to be addressed is the stereotypical nature of why is that women are more suited for the role of school teacher, nurse etc. This also points towards the problem of skill development - the kind of job a woman wants to do and the needed skill sets.

Inaugural Address

Captain, P. Manivanan, Secretary, Labour Department, Government of Karnataka

The approach to bias against women in the workforce is inherent in nature, one of the reasons being the environment around us. Working women do not come naturally to a household in India and unless one is not surrounded by one, it is unnatural for one to understand everyday problems surrounding a working women. The difference can be seen in the approach in which a normal conversation takes place between men and women. History not only in India but globally has facts which have been female dominant. One of the classic cases being that of a judgment passed by a judge in North Carolina (USA), on a case of an abusive husband-wife relationship of where the judge claimed that women need to be physically beaten in order to be tamed. From the economic perspective, India as a country will not be able to have an increase in the GDP as much as it is expected until we focus on 50 percent of our population – women.



Keeping women in the centre and calculating the integration between the backward factors of support to working women and forward factors of environment issues for a working women, unfortunately none of them contribute to encouraging a woman to work. Even the government has not been comprehensively successful in addressing the fear both at home and at work. The core problem lies in the mindset of the people; more focus needs to be on gender issues. To make an effective change at the community level, change needs to be brought about at the levels of policymakers, elected representatives on the lines of gender sensitisation. There is no shortcut in dealing with the problem of gender issues unless they are faced as it is.

Karnataka is considered to be one of the better governed states in the country. Taking the instance of department of Labour, GoK – focus has been on the routine matters pertaining to fixing minimum wages, solving industrial disputes, insurance scheme related matters. But the focus on women in the department is lacking. There have been minor initiatives which have been towards encouraging women to work but they lack a roadmap on how one should proceed about the same. The garment workers in Bangalore are treated like cattle. Issue on sexual harassment still remain un-talked about. The situations are more complex on ground as they may not seem on paper, we need an innovative windmill approach on ground.

Presentation of the Case Study



Aparna Sivaraman, Programme Officer, Public Affairs Centre

Aparna presented the Case Study conducted by PAC. Following are the key highlights:

1. India as a country is poorer on the issues of FLFPR - among the Asian countries we stand at being lower than Nepal. The current 23 percent is a result of decline over the past 15-20 years and not an account over past recent years. The challenges that women face from the demand side in terms of lack of - support from household, access, support from society, cultural barriers, opportunities, infrastructure, mechanisms that lead to encouraging women to participate and become a part of labour workforce.

2. Policies such as Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojna (PMKVY) are unable to provide a holistic solution to the factors that cause a hindrance in female participation in the first place. Nearly 60 percent of women have not even heard of this scheme before. Around 56 percent of families of these women said that they would be willing for women from their families to participate in the skilling process but not at the cost of the women managing the domestic household work, thus putting the women in a position where as a consequence she will not be willing to be part of the skilling process. Even the way the courses are framed at the skilling centres, there are gender disparities where the roles are pre-defined for each gender.
3. Around 80 percent of women from our survey said that they were not working, 66 percent of them have never worked before, which leave us with 20 percent women being effectively part of the labour force. 68 percent women stated that they left work on account of marriage, motherhood and care. Surprisingly the most common perceptive reasons such lack of safety, unhealthy work environment were low on causes as expected. 52 percent of women spend more than 5 hours a day on unpaid domestic work. 56 percent of the working women comprised a part of the informal working sector. 10 percent more women from rural areas are willing to work in comparison to that of women from urban areas. 26 percent women from other backward class, 24 percent of women from SC/ST community stated that they were dissatisfied with their jobs, while 15 percent of women from other general category expressed that they were satisfied with their job. 70 percent of women had never received any formal on the job training. 60 percent of the women did not know how to use internet.
4. Interestingly rise in family income is a major cause for women to drop out of work, since social norms have dictated that women need to work only if the family income is inadequate, otherwise the same is not required. Factors like menstruation plays an indirect role in constraining women from stepping out of the house and work, this being so because if one is not treated well at home during the days of menstruation and has barriers and restriction, it seeps in an image of working outside to be difficult. Level of education does not impact women in labour force participation, since degree of education does not necessarily result in better participation by women in workforce. Women's education in some cases is actually being used as a measure to ensure getting a better prospective groom with lesser dowry to be paid for getting married.
5. A situation of a low equilibrium trap prevails - low wages, lack of social security, lesser resources available for support making the situation as it is. The entire feminisation of work is not relevant at the bottom level but the same is applicable at top management in every field of work, making it difficult for women to enter into managerial levels. Peer pressure and social groups can act as incentive for women to participate.
6. Recommendations were presented at three levels short-term, medium-term and long-term including formalisation of home based work, better skilling of women, gender sensitisation at different tiers of government.

Responses from Discussants

Discussants

- Dr. Sudeshna Mukherjee, Coordinator, Centre for Women's Studies, Bangalore University
- Antara Ganguli, Gender and Development Specialist, UNICEF
- Dr. Vinod Vyasulu, Founder, CBPS

Moderator: Dr. Meena Nair, Head of Research, Public Affairs Centre



The following 3 questions were posed to the Discussants by the Moderator:

1. As per your experience do you think we have represented ground reality?
2. How can various policies on skill development encourage women to work; how can they be made more effective for increasing women's participation in the workforce?
3. What suggestions can be made for the practical implementation of the research study at the three levels of market, state and community?

Responses

1. Representation of ground reality

Antara Ganguli - The framework of the study resonates with the recommendation of the study. The study also throws light on two dominant areas of economics and psychology. Approach to women's participation in workforce is very different from the perspective of – economy, politics and the individual, but integration of these perspectives is what is necessary. Where as the focus on gender is mainly through women being empowered it is about time that men and boys are sensitised about co-existing in the same spaces as women and as equals.

Dr. Vinod Vyasulu - The real challenge lies in two sectors one that women face, and the other which men and women both face who are trying to bring about a change. The categorisation of 'earning' women and 'working' women should be different, where the former are those with decent work and/or well-paid work.

Dr. Sudeshna Mukherjee – In a study on single mother headed families, a Nielsen survey states that 87 percent women in India are stressed. The question is why women are stressed to that extent, since the percentage is contributing to the highest in the world. In terms of work, why is that any work that has productive and reproductive forms, women are subjective to the reproductive side and men to productive, why does this disparity exist. There is a need to allow men to enter the house, since in the course of pushing women out there has been no effort to pull men in.

2. Relevance of various policies on skill development for women

Ms. Antara Ganguli – There need to be better policies for women entrepreneurs since it has a follow-on effect; for example, more working women hostels for women to join different sectors of work, child care which is one of the factors because of which women leave the work force, and therefore the need for child care as an industry through community management, safe mobility being another need, which basically means convergence among various relevant departments.

Dr. Vinod Vyasulu - State should show leadership; women should be employed in a formal structure in all spheres of work. Respect any job which is being done and not undermine the work in any way, which is why a formal structure for every work and work-space is necessary, especially with special reference to ASHA workers and Anganwadi Workers who handle critical reproductive and child care activities but are paid honorariums.

Dr. Sudeshna Mukherjee – There is an urgent need to including counting of women who are into informal arrangements. Training on the aspects of language - since English being the more accepted and useful language and technological knowledge given that it is the necessity of the hour. There is also a need for valuation of unpaid work in terms of monetary value to be attached to unpaid productive work, however without using that to advocate that women work at home only.

3. Suggestions for practical implementation of the research study

Ms. Antara Ganguli – Gender segregation is not a feasible solution at macro and micro level from the point of view of the economy. Women and men need to co-exist at the same time, in the same spaces. Community based organisations could help in the bridging the gaps between the community and the state/market. There is a need to present women role models such as women business owners, women sarpanches who other women can aspire to be. SHGs can play a more productive and economic role.

Dr. Vinod Vyasulu – Capacity building and training on making men/ boys familiar on gender issues. There is a need to unpack the word ‘community’ and if this is at the level of the Gram Panchayat, the elected representatives at that level need to play a more involving role. Role of CSOs and CBOs should to be build agency and positive masculinity.

Dr. Sudeshna Mukherjee – If social issues effecting women are resolved it will have a positive spillover effect on the economy. Technology is ‘gendered’, this needs to change. There needs to be inherent inclusion of women when they join the workforce but this should not be belittled by giving names such as second innings post marriage or childbirth. The ‘politics’ of measurement of unpaid work should be carefully looked into, since it also involves caste and class sensitivities.

Remarks from Participants

"The question on how much do we read about the role of women in technological advancements, if the ratio is less then why is it so. Another question why is that the natural life cycle of women has been seen as a barrier to her carrer growth and job performance".

Priyanka

Research Scholar Bangalore University



"Women's economic growth has always been identified through her family. Working from home is a fight in itself for women to find a space within the house for carrying out the tasks for the day".

Geetisha

Research Scholar, Azim Premji University

"What is the purpose of measurement of value of unproductive work, what does women in work force mean to women, needs to be addressed".

Anita Cheria

Open Space, Bengaluru



"At the policy level the gender lens is missing, at the state level caste lens is missing. Women need to be empowered at the SHG level, the same is applicable for women workers at Anganwadi centres. There are flaws in the way in which policies are framed for women and the way they are implemented as well".

Dr. Ruth Manorama
Activist, Bengaluru

"A real approach needs to implemented rather than the existing superficial approach on the issue of gender, 70 percent of women from agricultural economy should become the real focus rather along with the 30 percent women from the urban sector workforce".

Vimala

AIDWA, Bengaluru



Annexure 1: Concept Note

India's Declining Female Labour Force Participation Implications for Policy and Action

Background

As part of the [Southern Voice State of the SDGs Initiative](#), the [Public Affairs Centre](#) explored the barriers to and enablers for the participation of women in India's workforce. The study titled, "Will women be a part of India's future workforce? The quest for sustainable and inclusive development", presents an India case study, examining the causes for the declining female labour force participation rate (FLFPR) in the country and its policy implications.

This study assumes importance in India for the following reasons:

- India's FLFPR has witnessed a rapid decline and is among the lowest among its South Asian counterparts
- Women in India are for the most part employed in low paying jobs with little or no scope for labour mobility. These jobs are characterised by the absence of social security and decent working conditions, serving as a double jeopardy for women.
- As India moves towards achieving the targets of the Sustainable Development Agenda 2030, it is imperative that all measures and initiatives are representative and inclusive
- With the economy of the country posited to become a global super power, inclusive development will be key
- The gender discrimination both visible and invisible in the country cannot be addressed without understanding its deep-rooted societal underpinnings. Initiatives must recognise and address this bias to achieve real change.

Objectives

- Discuss the causes for the decline, in the light of India's flagship skilling programmes as well as the shifting development narratives towards the SDGs (#4, #5 and #8)
- Bring together diverse stakeholders from research and advocacy to discuss the way forward to bridge the gender gap in the workforce.

Expected Outcomes

- Disseminate findings from PAC's India country case study on the barriers to and enablers of women's participation in the workforce in India
- Identify opportunities for new research in the areas of gender and work
- Explore and discuss the policy relevance of women's participation in the workforce in view of the SDG agenda.

Annexure 2: Agenda

<p style="text-align: center;">India's Declining Female Labour Force Participation Implications for Policy and Action (National Workshop) Venue: Mobility India, Bengaluru No. 7812, 1st Cross, 1st A Cross Rd, Marenahalli, 2nd Phase, J. P. Nagar, Bengaluru, Karnataka 560078 Friday, September 27, 2019</p>		
Time	Description	Owner
9.00 to 9.30 a.m.	Registration	
9.30 to 9.40 a.m.	Opening Remarks	Mr. Gurucharan Gollerkeri , Director, Public Affairs Centre
9.40 to 10.00 a.m.	Inaugural Address	Shri. P Manivannan , Secretary, Labour Department, Government of Karnataka
10.00 to 10.45 a.m.	Presentation of Case Study	Ms. Aparna Sivaraman , Programme Officer
10.45 to 11.00 a.m.	Tea/Coffee Break	
11.00 a.m. to 12.30 p.m.	Discussants	Dr. Sudeshna Mukherjee , Coordinator, Centre for Women's Studies, Bangalore University Ms. Antara Ganguli , Gender and Development Specialist, UNICEF Dr. Vinod Vyasulu , Founder, CBPS
	Moderator	Dr. Meena Nair , Head-Research, Public Affairs Centre
12.30 to 1.00 p.m.	Interactive Session	Participants are welcome to share information, data and experiences
1.00 to 1.05 p.m.	Vote of Thanks	Dr. Annapoorna Ravichander , Head-Policy Engagement and Communication & Training
1.05 p.m. onwards	Lunch	

Annexure 3: List of Participants

No.	Participants	Organisation	Email IDs
1	Shri Mannivannan	Labour Department, GoK	secy-labour@karnataka.gov.in
2	Antara Ganguli	UNICEF	aganguli@unicef.org
3	Dr. Sudeshna Mukherjee	Centre for Women's Studies	sudeshna_socio@rediffmail.com
6	Geetisha Dasgupta	School of Development	geetisha.dasgupta@apu.edu.in
7	Neeraja Ganesh	Inroads Leadership	neeraja0307@yahoo.com
8	Dr Vinod Vyasulu	Co-Founder, CBPS	vinod@cbps.in
9	Anita Cheria	Open Space	anita@openspace.org.in
10	Vimala.k.s	AIDWA Karnataka	vimala.ks@gmail.com
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14	Dr. Pradip Mathew	Fortis Hospitals	pradipmathew@hotmail
15	Mahua Mukherjee	The Star in Me	mahua.mukherjee@thestarinme.com
16	RJ Radha	Radio Active 90.4	
17	RJ Asha	Radio Active 90.4	
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21	Aruna S	Bangalore University	arunasgdb@gmail.com
22	Dr. Ruth Manorama	NAWO Women's Voice	ruthu.manorama@gmailcom
23	Dr. Christina Kantharaj	ATI Mysore	christinakantharaj@yahoo.com
24	Gurucharan G	PAC	director@pacindia.org
25	Dr. Meena Nair	PAC	meena@pacinfia.org
26	Dr. Annapoorna Ravichander	PAC	annapoorna@pacindia.org
27	Aparna Sivaraman	PAC	aparna@pacindia.org
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32	Sheeba Das	PAC	sheeba@pacindia.org
33	Anil Kumar	PAC	anil@pacindia.org

34	Priyam Agarwalla	PAC	priyam@pacindia.org
35	Rakshan Kalmady	PAC	rskalmady@gmail.com

Annexure 4: Reading List

Here is a list of recommended readings that includes articles and studies on the topic of India's declining female labour force participation:

Shah, Kritika. (2018). *The myth surrounding urban India women*, Southern Voice. Available at:

<http://southernvoice.org/the-myth-surrounding-urban-indian-woman/>

Sivaraman, Aparna. (2019). *How society is at the root of India's female workforce woes*, Southern Voice.

Available at: <http://southernvoice.org/how-society-is-at-the-root-of-indias-female-workforce-woes/>

Ravichander, Annapoorna. (2019). *Research Case Study- A powerful communication tool*, Southern

Voice. Available at: <http://southernvoice.org/research-case-study-a-powerful-communications-tool/>

Andres, Luis A., Dasgupta, Basab., Jospeh, George., Abraham, Vinoj., Correia, Maria. (2017). *Precarious Drop: Reassessing Patterns of Female Labour Force Participation in India*, Policy Research Working Paper 8024, World Bank. Available at:

<http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/559511491319990632/Precarious-drop-reassessing-patterns-of-female-labor-force-participation-in-India>

Fletcher, Erin K., Pande, Rohini., Moore, Charity Troyer. (2018). *Women and Work in India: Descriptive*

Evidence and a Review of Potential Policies, Faculty Research Working Paper Series, Harvard Kennedy School. Available at: <https://www.hks.harvard.edu/publications/women-and-work-india-descriptive-evidence-and-review-potential-policies>

Menon, Sneha., Tomy, Dona., Kumar, Anita. (n.d). *Female Work and Labour Force Participation in India-*

A Meta Study, Sattva and UNDP. Available at: https://www.sattva.co.in/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Sattva_UNDP_Female-Work-And-Labour-Force-Participation-In-India.pdf

Annexure 5: Photographs



*Release of Summary Report by
Shri Manivannan*



*Gurucharan handing over a memento
to Shti. Manivannanse*





Chief Guest, Discussants and PAC Staff





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