

Participation of Women in Labour Force

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V.V. Giri National Labour Institute

Issue Paper
On
“Participation of Women
in Labour Force”

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61 percent of sectoral employment), 54 percent were in accommodation and food services and 42.1 percent in wholesale and retail sector (ILO,2020)³.The sectoral segregation of women around the world and in the BRICS particularly had pushed women to vulnerable situations of severe livelihood crisis as certain sectors with concentration of women was worst hit during the pandemic. Further, their concentration in informal employment, particularly in self-employment, piece-rated employment, casual employment etc deprives them from being covered under labour legislations and denies them access to social security provisions.

1.4 In this context, the present issue paper is drafted to provide a (i) brief review of the trends in participation of women in labour force in BRICS countries; (ii) identify the opportunities and challenges for promoting women's work; (iii) highlight some of the recent and innovative policy interventions introduced in all the BRICS countries for boosting women's employment and;(iv) identify the issues for discussion. This issue paper aims at providing some insights to engage in a meaningful discussion for contributing towards larger policy issues on improving female labour force participation.

II Trends in Female Labour Force Participation: BRICS

2.1 The global employment to population (EPR) ratio has declined by 4.4 percentage in last 25 years with notable decrease in upper middle- income countries (7.2%) and lower middle income countries (5.1%) as reported by the WESO (ILO, 2020)⁴. The gender inequalities in EPR are evident across various regions of the world. The labour force participation rate (LFPR) includes people who are in employment, are looking for a job or available to take up employment. This section analyses the trends in labour force participation of women in BRICS alongwith their status in employment. It also reflects on sectoral employment of women and tries to understand the impact of Covid 19 on sectoral employment of women. Further, the issues of occupational segregation and upward mobility of women workers are discussed in the later part of this section.

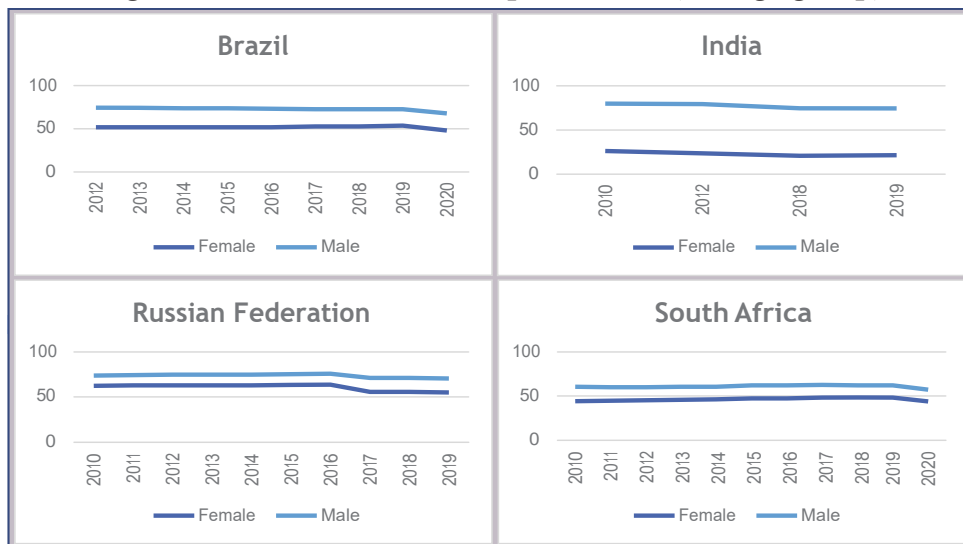
³ A Gender Responsive Employment Recovery : Building Back Fairer, Policy Brief, Geneva: International Labour Organisation

⁴ Op cit ILO (2020)



2.2 The gender gaps in labour market participation of women have remained persistent across the world and the BRICS nations are not an exception. The LFPR for women has been low in comparison to men in all BRICS countries. Also, as reflected in the Figure below (**Figure 1**) there has been a decline in labour force participation (LFPR) of women in countries like India, Russia, South Africa and Brazil. However, India has reported the highest gap in LFPR in the South Asian region with 52 percentage points. The participation of women in the labour market in China has been the highest in the Asian context at 63.7 percent as reported in 2010 by the Population Census of China. However, the Covid 19 pandemic had significantly affected the employment of women in China in the sectors like (accommodation, wholesale and retail, manufacturing, domestic service, including the micro, small and medium enterprises which have been hit the hardest (ILO, 2020b).

Figure 1 : Labour Force Participation Rate (15+ age group)



Source: ILO Stat

2.3 In India, the LFPR of women has declined over the years from 26.2 percent in 2010 to 20.8 in 2017-18. However, in 2018-19 there was a marginal increase in female LFPR to 21.5 percent, as reported by the employment and unemployment surveys and the Periodic Labour Force Surveys of the country. As the declining trends are also visible in other BRICS nations, a concern on the issue of sustenance of women in the labour market remains prominent, particularly in the wake of the pandemic COVID 19. In this

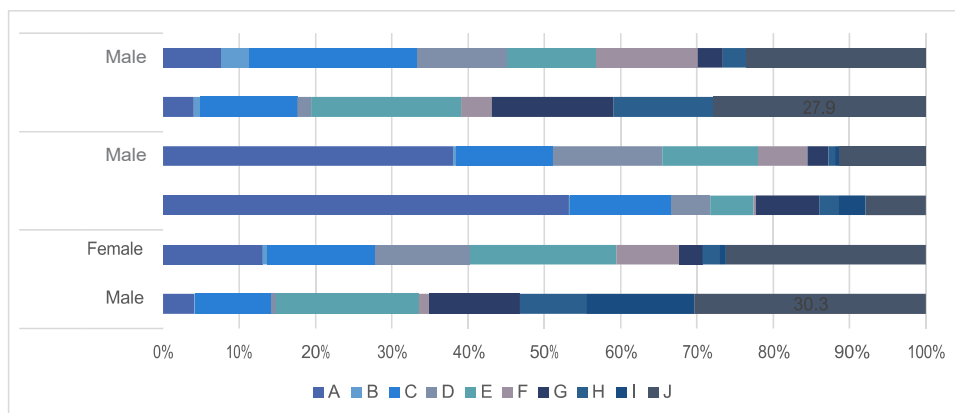


context, there is a need to understand the quality of employment available for women alongwith an analysis of their concentration in certain sectors and their status in employment in order to have a more nuanced understanding about their situation.

2.4 It is observed that the LFPR for women has been lower across all income groups in comparison to men. There are pronounced gender gaps between men and women in the labour market in BRICS countries. In some countries like India, in spite of economic growth and improvement in education, female labour force participation has not increased. Also, the occupational segregation of women in female dominated sectors had pushed women to low paying jobs with limited access to social security. Available evidence in literature suggests that there has been a worldwide segregation regime with women dominating lower nonmanual occupations and men dominating craft and management occupations (Charles and Grusky, 2004). Such segregation of the labour markets perpetuates gender inequality and restricts occupational mobility of women.

2.5 In BRICS countries, there has been sectoral shifts in employment from agriculture to other sectors particularly in Brazil, India and Russian Federation though in South Africa it remained constant. In these countries, share of women's employment is between 22 and 26 percentage points higher than that of men. However, agriculture remains the predominant sector for both genders in India which is followed by manufacturing (ILO, 2018a). The share of women in *other services* has been very high in Brazil (30.3 percent) and Russian Federation (27.9 percent) as compared to other sectors (**Figure 2**). The other services (real estate, financial and insurance services, accommodation and food, arts, entertainment, recreation, etc.) were worst hit during the pandemic with severe loss of livelihoods. Such a situation reiterates the need for policy measures on employment recovery in these sectors.

2.6 Apart from the employment distribution and issues of sectoral segregation, it is also important to understand the quality of employment in BRICS countries as informality remains a persistent problem. The share of informal employment for women has been higher in almost all BRICS nations with India reporting the highest. The share of informal

Figure 2 Employment distribution by economic activity (%)


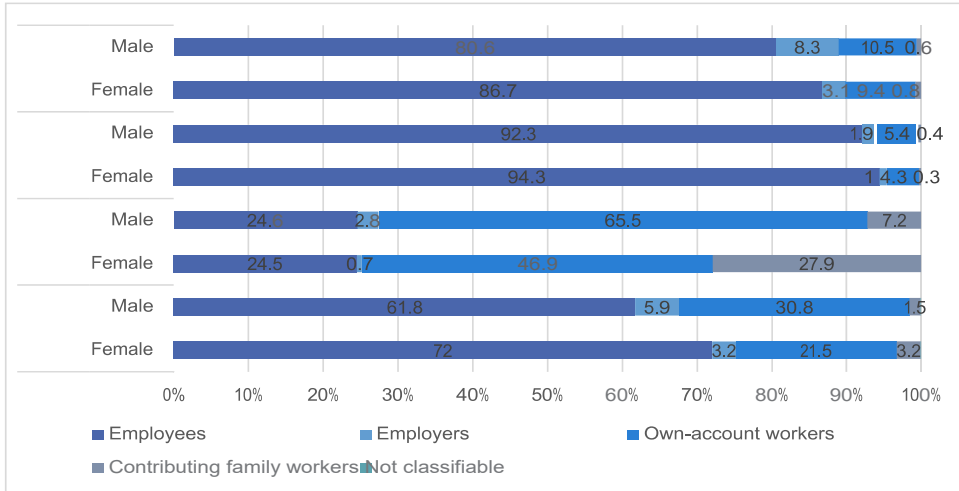
Source: ILO Stat; **A** - Agriculture; forestry and fishing, **B** - Mining and quarrying, **C** - Manufacturing, **D** - Construction, **E** - Wholesale and retail trade; repair, **F** - Transportation and storage, **G** - Education, **H** - Human health and social work activities, **I** - Activities of households as employers; undifferentiated goods- and services-producing activities of households for own use, **J** - Other services. Other services include real estate activities, professional, scientific and technical activities, administrative and support service activities, arts, entertainment and recreation, accommodation and food service activities, information and communication, financial and insurance activities, public administration and defence; compulsory social security activities of extraterritorial organizations and bodies, and activities not elsewhere classified.

employment for women in India was 88.5 percent while for males it was reported as 87.9 percent. Similarly, in Brazil it was 47.7 percent for females and 46.7 percent for males. While in South Africa, informal employment for females was reported as 32.3 percent and 30.8 percent for males.⁵ The nature of informal employment as reflected in women's concentration in own account work and contributing family work has remained one of the major challenges with regard to extension of social security benefits. The ILO estimates that contributing family work accounts for 42.3% of female employment in developing countries, compared to 20.2% of male employment (Verick, 2014). As reflected in the Figure below (**Figure 3**), the share of women as contributing family workers (27.9 percent) and own account workers (46.9 percent) is higher in countries like India and gender differentials were evident as men participate less in contributing family work (7.2 percent). Similarly, the other BRICS nations like the Brazil, South Africa and the Russian Federation have also reported to have a greater share of women in contributing family work in comparison to males. Also, the

⁵ As calculated by ILOstat in 2019 and 2020.

share of women as ‘employers’ is very low as compared to men in almost all the BRICS nations.

Figure 3 Percentage Distribution of Employment by Status Across Gender



Source: ILO Stat; Note: Data not available for China

Text Box 1 :

In all BRICS countries, the share of employers is systematically larger for men than for women, and the female share of employment in management is always smaller than the female share in total employment, although important variations exist by country. This shows that women still face a glass ceiling hindering their access to top-level managerial positions in the BRICS labour markets (ILO,2018).

III Major challenges for Women in the Labour market in BRICS nations

3.1 With regard to major challenges for women in the labour market, the concentration of women in informal employment in BRICS nations has been a prominent one. Informal or vulnerable employment often restricts their access to social protection and coverage of labour legislations. Informal employment amounts to well over a third under non-agricultural employment in Brazil and South Africa, and close to three-quarters of non-agricultural employment in India, but, when including also agriculture, informal employment amounted to almost 87 per cent of total employment. As discussed above, informal employment for women coupled with lack of skills and education and other vulnerabilities often restricts women from transitioning into formal or regular employment. Such situations further



perpetuate the deeply entrenched structures of labour market inequality. In Brazil and South Africa, women have higher informal employment shares and shares of employment outside the formal sector than men, whereas in the Russian Federation, it is men who have the highest share of employment outside the formal sector. While in India, women have the highest informality shares when looking at the economy as a whole (ILO, 2018).

3.2 Another prominent challenge with women in BRICS countries has been the issue of gender pay gap. In Brazil, the gender wage gap was widest among workers with the lowest income. The gender pay gap in the Russian Federation is considerable with the median earnings of men being more than 30% higher in comparison to women.⁶

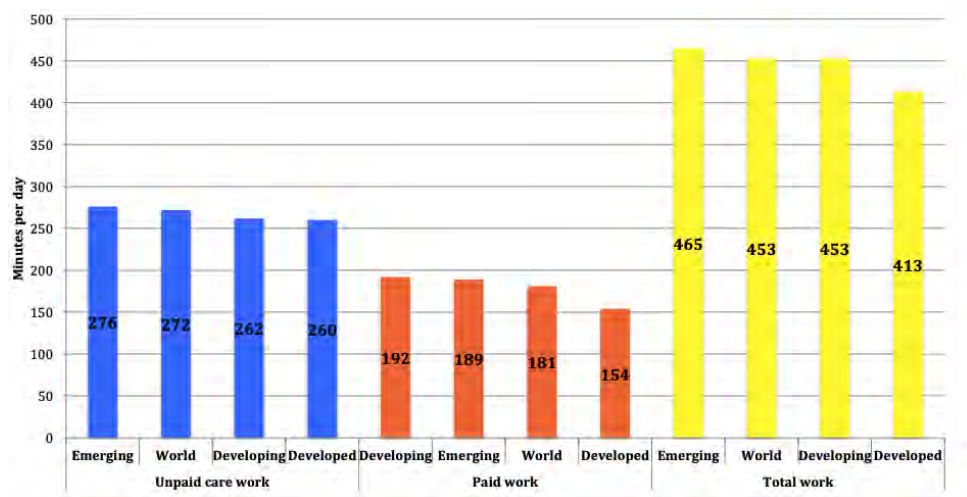
3.3 Further, the participation of women in unpaid and care work across the world often constraints them from seeking paid employment. Unpaid work is essentially work that does not receive direct remuneration. It includes unpaid work that falls within production boundary of UN system of National Accounts (SNA) as well as unpaid work that falls within general production boundary. Unpaid SNA work includes unpaid family work in family enterprises, subsistence production of goods by household and free collection of products (water, fuel wood, fruits etc.) for own consumption and collection of free goods for use of production purposes such as fodder, wood, etc. Unpaid Non-SNA work includes daily activities of the household ranging from cooking, cleaning, washing to pet care, child care, care of elderly and disabled and voluntary services (Hirway, 2017). Women tend to spend more time in unpaid and care work which remains unrecognized in national accounts statistics.

3.4 A recent report of the ILO on “Care Work and Care Jobs : For the Future of Decent Work” reported that women dedicate on an average 3.2 times more time than men on unpaid work across the world which is 4 hours 25 minutes per day against 1 hour 23 minutes for men. About 606 million women across the world declared themselves to be unavailable for work due to their participation in unpaid work while only 41 million men reported the same reason (ILO,2018b). The recently released Indian Time Use Survey (TUS) 2019 estimated that women in the 15-59 age group spend

⁶ <https://www.oecd.org/russia/Employment-Outlook-Russia-EN.pdf>

337 minutes in unpaid work⁷ while men spend only 41 minutes in both rural and urban areas. (GoI, 2019). The gender distribution of domestic chores remains overwhelmingly unequal. Women are responsible for 80 per cent of domestic tasks, which limits their effective labour force participation (ILO, 2020). There is no denying the fact that excessive participation of women in unpaid and care work restricts their participation in paid employment and pushes them to informal low paying employment.

Figure 4 Regions by Income Group Ranked by Decreasing Order of Women’s Burden of Unpaid Care Work, Paid Work and Total Work, 75 Countries



Source: Charmes (2019), The Unpaid Work and the Labour Market: An analysis of Time Use Data based on the Latest world compilation of Time Use Surveys

3.5 It is evident that the share of unpaid work among women is higher in emerging and developing economies (**Figure 4**). With regard to paid work, the participation of women is lesser in comparison to their participation in unpaid work while the share of women in paid work is also higher in developing and emerging economies. This clearly reflects on excessive burden of unpaid and care work on women requiring appropriate policy interventions in the form of public provisioning of

⁷ Unpaid work as captured in the TUS 2019 includes unpaid domestic services for household members, unpaid caregiving services for household members, unpaid direct volunteering for other households for production of services for the households, unpaid community and organization-based volunteering for production of services for the households.



crèche facilities, community intervention strategies etc. Flexible work arrangements can also be promoted by employers for better work and family life reconciliation, particularly in countries where women spend a considerable amount of their time in unpaid and care work. The promotion of parental leave policies, elderly care policies, public provisioning of care services will be extremely important.

Text Box 2 :

Age constitutes another feature of labour market inequalities. A staggering 267 million young people aged 15 to 24 worldwide (or 22 per cent of that age group) are not in employment, education or training. Moreover, many of the young people who are in paid jobs face barriers to decent work.

Young women in BRICS countries are moving into non-traditional sectors. In most BRICS countries, educated young women are establishing their presence in traditionally male dominated sectors. In China, for example, the share of young female workers employed in construction increased from 14.4 to 28.9 per cent, mostly in semi-skilled employment. In India, young women are increasing their employment share in communications, mostly at the professional level. The health sector in Brazil, following the global pattern, is female dominated: seven out of every ten young workers in the sector are women. More and more of these women are now highly-skilled professional workers. In South Africa, young women's share in the finance sector has remained somewhat stable in the past decade, but their make-up has shifted towards skilled and professional workers, although semi-skilled employment remains strong. In Russia, there has been a sizeable increase in women's share in business activities and this rise has been strongest for higher-skilled young women at the skilled and professional levels (ILO,2018).

3.6 With technological changes there has been rise in non-standard employment viz as part- time, temporary or self-employment. This is particularly true for women, who often end up in the most pervasive forms of non-standard employment, characterized by informality, low wages, and lack of social status. Extending social protection to workers engaged in part-time and non-standard forms of employment is also essential for promoting women to participate in the labour market. The recent World Social Protection Report of the ILO had highlighted that several people in the working age who are in part-time or self-employment are not covered or are insufficiently covered by contributory or non-contributory social protection programmes (ILO,2021).

3.7 Further, there has been rise in platform economy with the onslaught of new digital technology which has brought in new challenges. Most workers participate in the platform economy to supplement incomes



from other paid work and to balance family responsibilities which are still taken on predominantly by women (OECD, 2017). Though women will be increasingly engaged in such jobs due to the nature of job flexibility, a question that arises is whether the quality of these jobs allow women for occupational mobility? In countries like India, women's access to digital technology has been disproportionate with a gendered digital divide appearing prominently. Also, the lack of adequate skills and access to social protection remains another challenge that needs to be addressed through adequate policy interventions. A recent report of the IWWAGE in India informed that the creation of new opportunities as a result of the proliferation of platforms has been highly gendered, allowing women to 'professionally' take up work that is either highly stigmatised (beauty services, massage services, etc.) or formalised care work (nannies, nursing, etc) (Chaudhary, 2020). From a policy perspective, there is a need for reducing the digital divide and promote improved financial inclusion which can help women to participate in the labour market. The platform economy can facilitate women's employment, hence there is a need to provide access to social protection with flexible arrangements. For women, adult learning can also help during family-related absences from work (such as maternity leave or eldercare) which, given the speed of technological change, may make the return to work difficult (OECD, 2017).

IV Good Practices in BRICS

4.1 With regard to improving female labour force participation and addressing the issues of gender inequality in the labour market, the BRICS nations have made several concerted efforts. BRICS nations have adopted some women-specific policies, plans or programmes like the China National Program for Women's Development (2011–2020); the Indian National Policy for Women (2016), which outlines the Government's action plan in the coming 15 to 20 years; and the recently-established Brazilian Women's Network – or have set out national development plans, e.g. South Africa's Vision 2030 or Russia's National Strategy 2017–2020, in which the promotion of gender equality in employment figures prominently. All these plans acknowledge the need for addressing gender-based discrimination and gender inequalities (ILO, 2018).



4.2 The Indian Government has undertaken the process of labour reforms for simplification of various labour laws under four labour codes (Industrial Relations Code, Wage Code, Social Security Code and the Occupational, Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code) and extending coverage to majority of the workforce including the informal sector. In the context of workers of Gig and Platform economy, the provision of social security for these workers was recently introduced in the Social Security Code of India 2020 which is a significant achievement amongst all BRICS countries. Also, night work for consenting women in India is now permitted under the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code 2020. India has also recently amended its Maternity legislation and increased maternity leave entitlements from 12 to 26 weeks under the Maternity Benefit Amendment Act 2017 which mandates a creche facility for women workers in establishments having more than 50 employees. The legislation also covers surrogate mothers. This is aimed at encouraging women's participation in the labour market.

4.3 The discussion on women's economic empowerment in BRICS has considered women **entrepreneurship** as extremely important. Some of the BRICS countries have introduced several policy measures for encouraging entrepreneurship like fast track support to women for establishing entrepreneurship in South Africa, supporting women's start-ups (India and China), training, technical support and financial support in Brazil. **The Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY)** of the **Government of India** is a revolutionary financial inclusion scheme launched in 2014 for providing universal banking facilities with at least one basic banking account for every household, financial literacy, access to credit, insurance and pension⁸.

Text Box 3: Promotion of Self Help Groups in India

In order to improve women's economic participation, 10 million women are linked with banks drawing membership from over 120 million households. Under the financial inclusion programme, Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) for expanding access to bank accounts, out of 380 million accounts opened, 54 percent were owned by women. 381 Bank accounts were opened in between 2014 and 2020 with 203 million being women (GoI, 2020).

⁸ For details please see [https:// pmjdy.gov.in](https://pmjdy.gov.in)



4.4 All BRICS countries have enacted legislation to curb gender discrimination at the workplace including reducing gender pay gap in adherence to international labour standards. Also, several BRICS countries have enacted legislation on sexual harassment at workplace and they recognize that workplace harassment is also an important impediment for women to participate in the labour market. Though enforcement has been an issue with some of the BRICS countries, it is important to revisit the legislations in the wake of the new ILO Convention C 190 on Violence and Harassment, 2019⁹ which provides a very clear role of the labour departments for ensuring enforcement of legislations on workplace harassment.

4.5 The Covid 19 pandemic has opened up new challenges for women in employment and to address these challenges, some of the BRICS countries have introduced several initiatives including investments in the care economy which is crucial for promoting women's employment. Some of these good practices on entrepreneurship, insurance schemes, health protection, skilling etc are working as strategies on employment recovery and employment protection (see **Text Box 4**).

4.6 With regard to addressing the challenges associated with unpaid and care work, the government of India had introduced the **First National Time Use Survey in 2019**. The Time Use Surveys (TUS) are quantitative summaries of time spent by men and women in a population on various activities. One distinguishing feature of Time Use Survey from other household surveys is that, it can capture time disposition on different aspects of human activities, be it paid, unpaid or other activities with such details which is otherwise not possible in other surveys (GoI, 2019). The Time Use Surveys have the potential to capture all kinds of unpaid and care work and help in identifying women's constraints to paid employment. These surveys have gained momentum over the years and have played a prominent role in policy discourses on encouraging women's economic empowerment and redistribution of unpaid work.

4.7 The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 1995 had identified the need to develop a more comprehensive knowledge of work and

⁹ https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C190



work related to unpaid care and dissemination of such statistics¹⁰. Several countries across the world had initiated regular time use surveys for providing full visibility to both market and non-market activities. These developments were prominently visible in developed countries which had histories of time use tradition. With regard to the BRICS nations, India is the only country to have announced a national TUS on a regular basis at an interval of three years.¹¹ The other nations in BRICS like Brazil had the first pilot time use survey in 2009, South Africa had two national surveys in 2000 and 2010 and China had a survey in 2008 but not at the national level. There is no evidence with regard to national time use surveys in the Russian Federation.

Text Box 5: Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana in India

The Government of India launched a social welfare scheme, Ujjwala Yojana on 1st May 2016. The scheme aims to benefit rural women living below poverty line (BPL) by providing concessional domestic Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) connections to the entire nation by 2019. The scheme would increase the usage of LPG and also help in reducing air pollution and deforestation. The scheme would also reduce the time spent in firewood collection for women and help in redistributing their unpaid work (GoI, 2016)

V Issues for Discussion

In spite of several efforts undertaken by BRICS countries, there has not been significant improvement in female labour force participation. Women's participation in the labour market, particularly in the wake of global commitments on sustainable development goals and issues of larger well-being demands further deliberation on the following issues:

Issues for discussion:

5.1 Strategies to promote participation of women in remunerative, productive and decent work.

- To promote productive employment in line with SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 8 (Decent work and economic growth). It is

¹⁰ https://www.un.org/en/events/pastevents/pdfs/Beijing_Declaration_and_Platform_for_Action.pdf

¹¹ It is proposed to conduct the survey at an interval of every three years <https://mospi.gov.in/documents/213904/0/ATR+on+61st+Report+%28English%29+.pdf/dcbe3d7c-8440-c637-48b6-2ca7aa14be5e?t=1594125316245>



important to deliberate on the constraints and barriers which women face to participate in the labour market. The need to discuss on good practices within the broader macroeconomic development approach.

- Promoting educational attainment beyond secondary schooling along with vocational training which has synergy with market requirements.
- The need to provide recognition to women engaged in new forms of employment like the platform economy and the need to cover them under a legal framework viz. sharing of good practices in countries like India where the new labour codes have protected gig and platform workers.

5.2 Enhancing inclusivity to promote occupational mobility of women and leading to quality employment

- To address the issue of occupational segregation which is prominent among the BRICS nations.
- To deliberate on promoting aspirational livelihood opportunities for girls and young women by promoting corporate social responsibility in order to improve access and better opportunities for them and addressing the issue of occupational segregation.

5.3 Impact of COVID 19 pandemic on sectoral employment

- COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected women workers in many ways in BRICS countries further accentuating gender inequalities in the labour market. In low and middle-income countries, the pandemic has increased the risk of poverty followed by livelihood crisis.
- Globally, almost 510 million, or 40 per cent of all employed women, work in hard-hit sectors, including accommodation and food services; wholesale and retail trade; real estate, business and administrative activities; and manufacturing. The gender gap in the proportion of informal workers in hard-hit sectors is far greater, with 42 per cent of women working informally in these sectors at the onset of the crisis, compared with 32 per cent of men¹².

¹² ILO (2020), ILO Monitor: COVID 19 and the World of Work https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_749399.pdf



- In this context, it is important to discuss on specific targeted measures for promoting supporting jobs in small and medium enterprises promoting entrepreneurship, protecting self-employment and providing access to social protection for women engaged in such sectors in BRICS countries.

5.4 Extending Social Security coverage to women workers engaged in informal sector/work and ensuring their income & employment protection.

Envisioning social protection through an inclusive approach by extending social protection to all workers. The need to focus more on informal sector women workers particularly, own account workers and contributing family workers and discuss on the ways to cover them under social security coverage in BRICS nations. This inclusive approach could also address the issues of life-cycle risks of women duly protecting the well-being of women workers as envisaged in the global SDGs.

5.5 Effective capturing of women's work through regular Time Use Surveys

- India has made significant progress in this direction by conducting the First National Time Use Survey in 2019. Since most of the BRICS nations do not have regular time use surveys, it is important to discuss on regularisation of time use surveys and designing gender sensitive labour force surveys.
- The time use surveys have larger policy implications, particularly to understand the different experiences of men and women and uncovers household division of labour.
- These surveys help in recognising unpaid work in official statistics for enabling appropriate policy making in the direction of reduction and redistribution of unpaid work. It is important to discuss on how policies informed by the time use surveys in BRICS can contribute in designing better employment and social protection policies for women workers and encouraging them to sustain in the labour market.



5.6 Addressing the issue of unpaid work and identifying mechanisms to reduce & redistribute unpaid work

- The disproportionate share of unpaid work done by women in BRICS countries in comparison to men has contributed to low participation of women in the labour market and increasing gender gaps in the labour market. The Covid 19 pandemic has further aggravated the situation and some women may be forced to quit labour market or take up part-time jobs as juggling between unpaid and care work and paid work commitments becomes challenging.¹³
- The issue of improvement in basic infrastructure, such as energy, water (close to home), sanitation which would contribute significantly in making available more quality time for women's paid work and help in reducing unpaid work. It is important to deliberate on how can various Stakeholders converge on this issue? Studies have reported that investments in infrastructure boosts labour market participation of women by reducing unpaid work¹⁴.
- Enabling services such as transport facilities, public safety, availability of child care (and elderly care) services need to be put in place. To examine how far these facilities are available and what can be done to facilitate and provide more access in BRICS countries?

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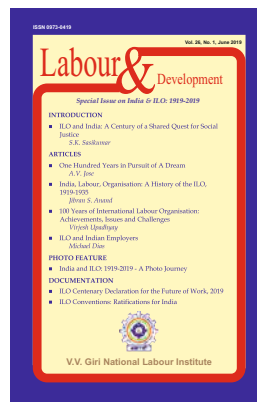
¹⁴ <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/a3436c8e-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/a3436c8e-en&mimeType=text/html>



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