



Enhancing Female Workforce Participation: A Strategic Framework for Economic Inclusion

Background

The Bengal Chamber of Commerce and Industry, in collaboration with Nikore Associates, is hosting an Economic Roundtable focused on enhancing female workforce participation in India. Despite progress, women's workforce participation remains a critical challenge for India's economic growth.

India's female labour force participation rate (FLFPR) has seen significant fluctuations, from 24.1% in 1955 to a low of 23% in 2017, before rising to 37% in 2022-23. Recent improvements show the overall labour force participation rate for women increased from 23.3% in 2017-18 to 41.7% in 2023-24, with a notable urban-rural divide. Rural participation has grown by 14 percentage points, while urban rates have only increased from 20.4% to 25.4%.

Key challenges persist:

- Women's educational gains have not translated into proportional formal sector employment
- Socio-cultural norms and safety concerns restrict participation
- Lack of flexible work policies and childcare support limit opportunities
- Women spend 5.6 hours daily on unpaid domestic work versus 30 minutes for men
- Declining representation in senior corporate positions
- Wage disparities across sectors

A promising trend is the rise in women's self-employment (67.4% in 2023-24), supported by government initiatives. However, many remain unpaid helpers in family businesses, blurring distinctions between entrepreneurship and unpaid labour.

Objective

To develop actionable strategies that enhance female workforce participation by addressing challenges limiting women's entry and advancement in the workforce. The goal is to foster gender equality, boost women's leadership roles, and drive inclusive economic growth.

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Key Themes for Discussion

1. **Gender-Inclusive Policies:** Creating and implementing policies ensuring equal opportunities for women
2. **Women's Empowerment and Economic Participation:** Addressing barriers to women's economic engagement
3. **Training and Skill Development:** Designing effective programs to equip women with necessary qualifications
4. **Supportive Ecosystems for Women Entrepreneurs:** Ensuring access to funding, mentorship, and resources
5. **Collaboration Among Key Stakeholders:** Building partnerships between government, industry, and educational institutions

Expected Outcomes

The primary outcome of this economic roundtable collaboration between The Bengal Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Nikore Associates will be a comprehensive short report featuring evidence-based recommendations for the Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE) and the Ministry of Women and Child Development (WCD) at both central and state levels.

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