

EDITORIAL

DATE :23rd January

Driving Women's Empowerment for Sustainable Economic Growth

GS Paper 2: Issues Related to Women | Inclusive Growth

Context

Recent **Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2023-24** data reveals significant growth in women's FLFP, especially in rural India, where it surged from **18.2% to 35.5% over six years**. However, this growth often reflects **economic necessity**, not empowerment. The structural barriers preventing gender equality demand urgent attention for sustainable and inclusive growth.

Key Drivers of Improved Female Labour Force Participation

1. Reduced Domestic Workload through Welfare Schemes

- Initiatives like **Ujjwala Yojana** (free LPG connections) and **Har Ghar Jal** (tap water supply) have reduced women's time spent on domestic chores, enabling economic participation.
- **Data Highlights:**
 - **Ujjwala Yojana beneficiaries' LPG refills rose from 159.9 million in 2018-19 to 344.8 million in 2022-23.**
 - **78% of rural homes now have tap water connections under Jal Jeevan Mission (October 2024).**

2. Employment through Government Schemes

- Programs like **MGNREGA** ensure equal wages for women, creating rural job opportunities.
- **Key Figures:**
 - Women comprised **54.54% of the MGNREGA workforce** in 2021-22.
 - **National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM)** empowered **9.89 crore women** through self-help groups (SHGs) by 2023.

3. Declining Fertility Rates

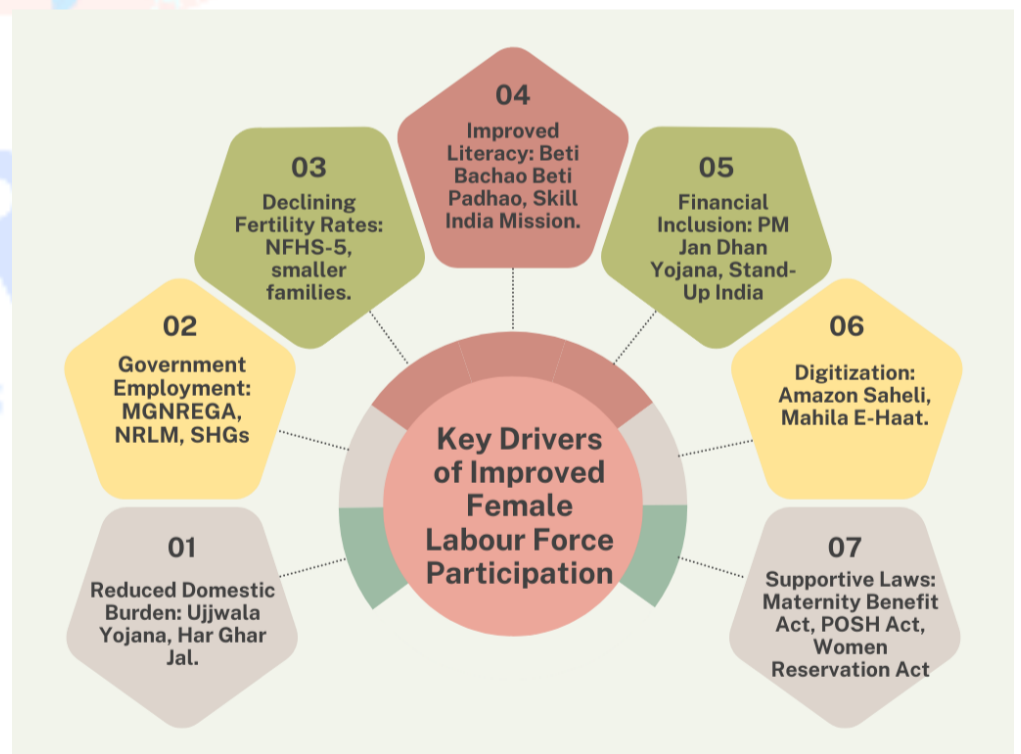
- India's fertility rate is now **2.0 (NFHS-5, 2021)**, reducing caregiving burdens on women and enabling participation in paid work.

4. Increased Literacy and Skill Development

- **Female literacy** has risen to **77%**, supported by schemes like **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao** and **Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan**.
- Programs like **Skill India Mission** and **Digital Saksharta Abhiyan** are preparing women for e-commerce, gig work, and other emerging sectors.

5. Financial Inclusion and Entrepreneurship

- Initiatives like **PM Jan Dhan Yojana** and **Stand-Up India Scheme** provide women access to credit and financial independence.
- **Key Data:**
 - Women own **55% of Jan Dhan accounts**.
 - Loans worth ₹40,710 crore were sanctioned under Stand-Up India (March 2023), with **80% for women entrepreneurs**.



6. Digitization and Technology

- The **expansion of internet access** (53% rural penetration) enables women to engage in remote and gig work via platforms like **Amazon Saheli** and **Mahila E-Haat**.

7. Supportive Legal Frameworks

- Laws like the **Maternity Benefit Act (2017)** and **POSH Act (2013)** promote gender-sensitive workplaces.
- The **Women Reservation Act, 2023**, is a significant step towards improving women's representation and participation.

Challenges Hindering Women's Workforce Participation

1. Deeply Entrenched Social Norms

- **Traditional gender roles** restrict women to caregiving and domestic responsibilities, limiting access to paid work.
- India ranks **127th out of 146 countries** in economic participation (Global Gender Gap Report 2023).

2. Limited Access to Education and Vocational Training

- Women's participation in **STEM fields** and vocational training remains low: Only **18.6%** of women aged 18-59 received vocational training in 2022-23.

3. Unpaid Care Work

- Women perform **85% of unpaid domestic work** (NFHS 2019-21), leaving little room for economic participation.

4. Gender Wage Gap and Informal Employment

- **90% of women workers** are in informal jobs, earning just **18% of labor income** (World Inequality Report 2022).

5. Weak Workplace Policies

- **93.5% of women workers** lack maternity benefits (OP Jindal Global University report).
- Poor enforcement of **POSH Act** discourages women from pursuing formal employment.

6. Safety and Mobility Concerns

- Crime against women rose by **12.9% (2018-2022)**, limiting their mobility and workplace access (NCRB 2022).

Strategies for Effective Economic Empowerment of Women

1. **Gender-Specific Skill Development:** Focus on emerging fields like **IT, renewable energy, and healthcare**, while strengthening traditional sectors like **textiles**.
2. **Affordable Childcare:** Establish nationwide **childcare support programs** linked with workplace policies under the **Maternity Benefit Act**.
3. **Financial Inclusion for Women Entrepreneurs:** Enhance access to affordable credit through **PM Jan Dhan Yojana, Mudra Yojana**, and SHGs under **NRLM**.
4. **Safe and Inclusive Infrastructure:** Build **gender-sensitive transport, sanitation, and urban safety** infrastructure under the **Smart Cities Mission**.
5. **Workplace Reforms:** Mandate **gender audits**, hybrid work policies, and enforce maternity benefits to retain women in the workforce.
6. **Increase Representation in Leadership:** Encourage **women's leadership roles** in politics, governance, and private sectors through capacity-building programs like **Mission Shakti**.
7. **Bridging the Digital Divide:** Scale up **Digital Saksharta Abhiyan** and initiatives like **Amazon Saheli** to connect women with larger markets.
8. **Regional and Sectoral Interventions:** Target state-specific barriers to boost FLFP, focusing on northern states with lower participation rates.

Conclusion

While the rise in women's FLFP in rural India is promising, economic necessity continues to drive participation, especially among teenage girls and elderly women. Addressing **systemic barriers** like unpaid care work, low literacy, wage gaps, and safety concerns is essential. Aligning with **SDG 5 (Gender Equality)** and **SDG 8 (Decent Work)**, comprehensive reforms can unlock women's full potential, fostering a truly inclusive and sustainable economy.

MAINS QUESTION

General Studies Paper 1: Society

Traditional social norms and unpaid care work continue to hinder women's participation in the workforce." Discuss in the context of India's rural economy.

General Studies Paper 2: Governance and Social Justice

Discuss the significance of legal frameworks like the Maternity Benefit Act, 2017, and POSH Act, 2013, in creating gender-sensitive workplaces in India

General Studies Paper 3: Economy and Development

The rapid rise in women-led entrepreneurship is reshaping India's economy. Examine the role of financial inclusion initiatives like PM Jan Dhan Yojana and Stand-Up India in fostering this trend.

Essay

Balancing tradition and modernity: Challenges and opportunities for women in India's workforce.



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Wisdom leads to success