

Chapter 16

Women Labour Force Participation in India and Sustainable Development Goals: A Legal Framework

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ABSTRACT

Women, constituting nearly half of India's population, are crucial for the nation's economic growth. Gender equality as a core global agenda, is encapsulated in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5, which focuses on gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. Despite educational advancements, women in India continue to face significant barriers in other areas. Therefore, it is imperative to implement relevant legal instruments and policies to support environment-friendly agricultural practices, benefiting both ecological sustainability and women's economic participation. Judicial pronouncements related to women also contribute to sustainability and women's participation in labour.

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INTRODUCTION

In India, women make up nearly half of the population. Their active participation in economic activities is crucial for the nation's growth. However, India's proportion of economically active women is the lowest globally, a pressing issue that needs immediate attention. The World Economic Forum's Global Gap Report 2022 further emphasises this urgency, ranking India 135th among 146 participant countries in terms of gender gap parity. In the economic participation and opportunity pillar, India ranks a staggering 143rd out of 146 countries.

In contrast, in the educational achievement pillar, India has closed the primary and secondary education gender gap. It is remarkably close to meeting the tertiary education gender gap, with scores of 0.961. Though educational achievement is an important pillar, women in India face other challenges, such as access to healthcare facilities, decent employment opportunities, etc. There is also a huge gender disparity in shouldering domestic and care work, too. Indian women spend significantly more time on unpaid caregiving and domestic work for family members than men (Mitra & Mehta, 2021).

Women's economic participation in India is of paramount importance, with the Female Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) serving as a crucial indicator of the country's development.

Women's empowerment through education is a global issue. To address such global issues, the UN Women was formed in 2010. It is the entity of the United Nations specifically for empowering women. Going towards gender equality is a core agenda not only in India but in many other countries as well. So, in September 2015, Member States of the United Nations Committed to working towards 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDG 5 is Gender Equality and Empowerment of all women and girls. Member countries of the United Nations set Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000. It aimed to achieve eight goals, which were decided to be accomplished by 2015. MDGs needed to be more effective in addressing all global issues, but these were more of a politically inclined agenda for developing countries (Pedersen, 2018). Therefore, the idea of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) came as progress to MDGs in 2015, where 193 member countries agreed to achieve the goals under SDGs by 2030. All the member countries of the United Nations organised a summit on Sustainable Development in September 2015 at the United Nations headquarters in New York. They decided on 17 sustainable goals to 'make the planet a better place'. SDGs are not only for developing countries; developed countries are also part of this ambitious project. Each country's government declared these 17 goals and 169 targets to achieve under these goals. Gender indicators to ensure gender equality under SDG 5 were declared in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPFA) in 2015.

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