




TRADE AS A TOOL FOR ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN: AN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE



The central graphic features a large orange circle set against a background of stylized orange buildings. Inside the circle is a circular arrangement of numerous small blue line-art icons. These icons represent a wide range of concepts related to trade and economics, including: a factory, a truck, a clock showing 2:47, a magnifying glass over a bar chart, a handshake, a globe with a location pin, a train, a person at a computer, a document with checkmarks, a shopping cart, a person holding a bag, a person standing, a person sitting, a person walking, a person running, a person jumping, a person playing sports, a person working, a person thinking, a person sleeping, a person eating, a person drinking, a person talking, a person listening, a person reading, a person writing, a person drawing, a person painting, a person singing, a person dancing, a person exercising, a person relaxing, a person socializing, a person networking, a person collaborating, a person competing, a person cooperating, a person compromising, a person negotiating, a person mediating, a person arbitrating, a person litigating, a person settling, a person resolving, a person reconciling, a person restoring, a person repairing, a person replacing, a person removing, a person reducing, a person reusing, a person recycling, a person recovering, a person regaining, a person regrowing, a person regenerating, a person rejuvenating, a person refreshing, a person revitalizing, a person reviving, a person resuscitating, a person resurrecting, a person restoring, a person repairing, a person replacing, a person removing, a person reducing, a person reusing, a person recycling, a person recovering, a person regaining, a person regrowing, a person regenerating, a person rejuvenating, a person refreshing, a person revitalizing, a person reviving, a person resuscitating, a person resurrecting.



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Trade as a Tool for Economic Empowerment of Women: An Indian Perspective

India Exim Bank's Occasional Paper Series is an attempt to disseminate the findings of research studies carried out in the Bank. The results of research studies can interest exporters, policy makers, industrialists, export promotion agencies as well as researchers. However, views expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the Bank. While reasonable care has been taken to ensure authenticity of information and data, India Exim Bank accepts no responsibility for authenticity, accuracy or completeness of such items.

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Executive Summary

Introduction

Gender equality is one of the sustainable development goals (SDG) that governments, businesses, civil society, and other international communities around the world are committed to achieve. The SDG 5 of the UN 2030 Agenda specifically focuses on advancing gender equality.

Free and open trade is an important catalyst for achieving the SDGs, including gender equality. The UN's Addis Ababa Action Agenda of 2015, which is an integral part of the 2030 Agenda, establishes a specific link between trade and gender equality, recognising the crucial role of women as producers and traders, and emphasising the need to address their specific challenges in order to facilitate women's equal and active participation in domestic, regional and international trade.

The Gender and Trade Nexus

International trade and gender are intricately linked, with trade having varying effects on gender equality. Depending on a variety of social, economic, and cultural factors as well as the broader policy framework, trade can have a favourable or negative impact on women's economic empowerment.

A recent report by the IMF suggests that enterprises engaged in international trade employ more women. As per the report, in developing economies, women constitute 33 percent of the workforce in exporting firms, compared with a share of just 24 percent in non-exporting firms. Likewise, women employees account for 33 percent of total employees in importing firms, as compared to 28 percent in non-importing firms. Women see similar advantages in businesses that are part of global value chains or have foreign investors, which on average employ 11 to 12 percent more women compared with other firms.

Besides, greater trade openness is also associated with a relatively higher incidence of paid employment for women workers. As per Exim Bank research, based on data for 147 countries, there is a positive relationship between trade openness and women's paid employment. In several Asian countries with high trade openness, such as Singapore, Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, and Philippines etc., salaried female workers comprise more than two-thirds of the total female employment in the respective countries. This could be attributable to improved quality of employment and labour conditions owing to greater internationalisation of businesses.

Evidence from several developing economies in Asia corroborates that women have benefited from trade liberalisation and participation in global value chains, particularly in export-oriented manufacturing and service industries. Trade liberalisation encourages companies to formalise employment and adopt better labour standards¹. The formalisation of employment through labour laws and adherence to international labour standards also leads to increased bargaining power among women.

Notwithstanding its positive impacts, trade can also have negative effects which can disproportionately affect women. Trade liberalisation can disrupt economic sectors and markets, and can lead to a contraction in comparative disadvantage sectors. Where women are active in these sectors with comparative disadvantage, there are risks of job displacements and losses, and in some cases, relocation from the formal to the informal sector.

Since international trade can have far-reaching consequences for gender equality, trade policy and related interventions should be specifically tailored for promoting greater economic participation and empowerment of women. This would entail gauging the gender impact of trade. However, measuring the specific gender impacts of trade has been challenging due to the lack of gender-disaggregated data on entrepreneurship, employment, income and other economic indicators. Particularly in the case of women's export entrepreneurship there is an almost complete lack of data. While there

¹ Shepherd, B. and S. Stone (2017), "Trade and Women", ADBI Working Paper Series. No. 648

has been some progress in the data disaggregation by gender, at both the national and international levels, there is currently a dearth of information and research on the impact of trade and trade policy on women in India.

Against this backdrop, the study attempts to analyse the impact of trade on women's economic empowerment in India. The study discusses the challenges for women as entrepreneurs and workers in India's export-oriented sectors, and delves into the policy options and strategies for enhancing the gains from trade for women in India.

Scenario of Women's Participation in the Indian Economy and Trade

Women's Participation in the Indian Economy

The female labour force participation in India is substantially below that of males. According to the Periodic Labor Force Survey (PLFS) data, in 2022-23, the female labour force participation in India in usual status² stood at 27.8 percent, which is nearly half that of the male labour force participation of 56.2 percent. Over the decade between 2001 to 2021, the average female labour force participation in India has declined steadily from an average of 30 percent during 2001-2007, to an average of 23 percent in 2015-2021. Among G20 countries, the average female labour force participation during 2015-2021 is the lowest in India. In fact, several developing countries such as China, Brazil, Indonesia, South Africa, Mexico, Argentina, and Turkey, among others, had much higher female labour force participation during the same period. Over the recent years, there has been some improvement in female labour force participation, which has increased from 25.1 percent in 2020-21 to 27.8 percent in 2022-23. However, despite the recent progress, the gender gap in labour force participation has persisted.

² The labour force according to the usual status is obtained by considering the usual principal status (ps) and the subsidiary status (ss) together. The estimate of the labour force in the usual status (ps+ss) includes (a) the persons who either worked or were seeking/available for work for a relatively long part of the 365 days preceding the date of survey and also (b) those persons from among the remaining population who had worked at least for 30 days during the reference period of 365 days preceding the date of survey.

Data from the PLFS also suggests that women labour force in the formal sector is still very low as compared to men. Majority of the female workforce in India is essentially engaged in the informal sector through self-employment (including own account worker and employer, and unpaid helper in household enterprises³) and casual labour. A substantial 37.5 percent of female workers in India (rural and urban combined) are engaged as unpaid helpers in household enterprises, which is significantly higher when compared to 9.3 percent of male workers engaged as unpaid helpers in household enterprises. Meanwhile, only 15.9 percent of female workers in the country (rural and urban combined) are engaged in regular wage/ salaried employment, which is lower when compared to 23.2 percent of male workers engaged in regular wage/ salaried employment. Besides, nearly 27.8 percent of females are own account workers/ employers, as against 44.3 percent of own account workers/employers among males during the same period. This signals a critical gap in women's economic agency and ownership, underscoring the imperative for initiatives aimed at fostering women-led businesses and entrepreneurial ventures.

An estimated 20.4 percent of all the MSMEs in India are owned by women, as per the NSS 73rd Round of NSSO. Besides, the women-led businesses are playing increasingly important roles in the startup ecosystem of the country. As per recent research, the share of women founders/ CEOs in the Indian startup segment in 2022 stood at nearly 18 percent, as opposed to a share of only 5 percent women founders/ CEOs in the corporate⁴ segment during the same period⁵. Startups in India are also playing a crucial role in female employment, with women representing nearly 35 percent of the total employment in startup segment in 2022⁶. Research also suggests that startups with a female founder have 2.5 times more women employed across senior roles, as compared to startups with only male founders. Going

³ Section: 2.2.4 Distribution of workers in usual status (ps+ss) by status in employment, Annual Report of PLFS, 2022-23

⁴ Corporates are defined as proprietorship and partnership firms and public and private limited companies with over 20 employees

⁵ Women in India's Startup Ecosystem Report 2023

⁶ Ibid.

forward, startups in India have the potential to create over 2 million new jobs for women by 2030⁷.

In terms of broad sectors, more than two-third of the female workers in the country are engaged in the agriculture and allied sector, followed by manufacturing sector wherein 11.1 percent of female workers were engaged during 2022-23. In contrast, nearly 37.1 percent male workers in the country are engaged in the agriculture and allied sector, although the share of male workforce in the manufacturing sector is nearly the same as that of female, at 11.6 percent in 2022-23. Meanwhile, in the services sector, the participation of female workers is higher than male workers in sectors such as education, human health and social work, as well as activities of household as employer.

At the State-level as well, female labour force participation rate for 2022-23 was below that of males across all states and UTs. Nevertheless, when compared to all-India level, 25 out of the 37 states/UTs had a higher female labour force participation rate. Among all states/UTs, female labour force participation was the highest in Himachal Pradesh at 57.9 percent, followed by Sikkim (56.1 percent), Ladakh (46.2 percent), Chhattisgarh (44.9 percent), and Arunachal Pradesh (41.9 percent), among others. Meanwhile, states/UTs with the lowest female labour force participation included Delhi (11.3 percent), Lakshadweep (13.5 percent), Assam (13.9 percent), Bihar (14.7 percent) and Haryana (15.9 percent).

Female Labour Force Participation in Export-Intensive Sectors

The Study attempts to map the female employment scenario across export intensive sectors. For this purpose, an 'Employment Intensity Index' has been developed to gauge the female employment intensity in export-intensive sectors in India, using data sourced from the PLFS for 2022-23. Employment Intensity Index has been obtained by calculating the proportion of the 'number of males in a sector as percentage of total male workforce' to 'number of female workforce in that sector as a percentage of total female workforce'.

⁷ Ibid.

Analysis of the index along with export intensity of the sectors indicates that there are only five sectors that have both a higher proportion of female employment compared to the all-India level as well as a higher export intensity compared to all-India level. These export-intensive sectors include segments where India's exports have traditionally been competitive, including wearing apparel, textiles, pharmaceuticals, and leather products. Out of the five export-intensive sectors with relatively better proportion of female employment than the all-India level, only two sectors exhibit a higher employment intensity for females compared to males. These sectors include wearing apparel and textiles. The proportion of females working in these two sectors relative to the total female workforce across all sectors is higher than the proportion of males working in these sectors relative to the total male workforce.

It is noteworthy that, majority of these sectors are resource-intensive or low value-added exports sectors. Low value-added and resource-intensive exports sectors are highly susceptible to external shocks. Higher concentration of female employment in these sectors, therefore, makes them more vulnerable to commodity cycles. In contrast, the share of female employees engaged in several high technology intensive industries such as transport equipment, machinery and equipment, electrical equipment and computer, electronic and optical products, etc., as compared to the total of female employment is substantially lower compared to the proportion of male employment.

There are 12 sectors that have a better Female Employment Intensity Index compared to the all-India level. It is noteworthy that exports in several of these sectors have recorded double-digit CAGR during the recent years. This includes sectors like food products, which recorded a CAGR of 27.0 percent during FY18 to FY23, followed by paper and paper products (CAGR of 19.5 percent), wood and wood products (CAGR of 15.5 percent) and chemical and chemical products (CAGR of 13.3 percent), among others.

Analysis by Comparative Advantage in Exports & Global Import Demand

The study also analyses India's comparative advantage in exports across 24 sectors and the global import demand in these sectors, to identify the

sectors that can be targeted for boosting exports from the country and the relative importance of these sectors for female employment. Based on the analysis, 3 out of the total 12 sectors that are relatively more important for female employment compared to the all-India level have been categorised as champion sectors, where India has comparative advantage in exports and the global import demand is increasing. There is a need to leverage the opportunities arising in these champion sectors, as these are low hanging fruits. These sectors could be targeted for encouraging greater participation of females and also for improving market access for exports from these sectors. On the other hand, there are 3 sectors that are categorised as underachievers, wherein the global import demand is increasing but India does not have a comparative advantage in exports. In these 3 sectors, the share of female employees in total female workforce is substantially lower when compared to that of male employees. As the import demand for these products has been witnessing robust growth, there is a need for encouraging development of productive capacities in these sectors, as also for enhancing female participation in these sectors, particularly in the technology-intensive sectors such as electrical equipment, and computer, electronics and optical products. This could be done through focussing on sector-specific skill development and capacity building initiatives for female workforce in these sectors.

State-level Analysis

The Study also undertakes comparison of female employment intensity across different States/UTs. For this purpose, a state-level employment intensity index has been calculated using the ratio of labour force participation rate of males to that of females in the states/UTs. Comparison of the index and export orientation at the state level indicates that 21 out of the 33 states/UTs considered for this analysis have relatively favourable employment intensity of females as compared to the all-India level. These 21 states/UTs jointly accounted for nearly 80.6 percent of India's merchandise exports in 2022-23. This includes top exporting states of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Odisha, among others. These states with high exports and a relatively higher female participation in the workforce could implement policy measures focussing on sustaining and further improving

female participation across export sectors, particularly in technology-oriented sectors where the female employment intensity is relatively lower at an all-India level. Meanwhile, among top 10 exporting states, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, West Bengal have relatively low employment intensity of females when compared to all-India level. This indicates that while these states have enabling policies for enhancing exports, there is a need for such policies to have a gendered lens to enhance female participation in export sectors.

Besides, states such as Kerala, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand that have relatively higher female participation in the workforce only represent a meagre share of 1 percent or lesser in India's merchandise exports. These states could focus on policy measures aimed at improving export competitiveness and encouraging greater exports from women-led/women-owned enterprises, as well as improving export market access in female employment intensive sectors.

Meanwhile, in states/UTs such as Bihar, Assam, Chandigarh, Tripura and Manipur, where female employment intensity, export orientation and share in India's exports are low, the focus of policy measures could be on enhancing export competitiveness, as well as improving women's participation in export-oriented industries and their access to export markets.

Gender-Wage Gap Across Major Sectors

According to the estimates of the World Inequality Report 2022, the share of income accruing to female in total labour income in India stood at only 18.3 percent in 2020, as against 81.7 percent share of males in the total labour income in the country. As per the report, the share of female labour income in India has steadily improved over the past three decades, rising from 10.6 percent in 1990 to 15.4 percent in 2010, and further increasing to 18.3 percent in 2020. Nevertheless, the share remains substantially below the required levels for attaining wage parity. Besides, the share is also lower when compared to Asian average of 21 percent⁸.

⁸ Average excludes China. Source: World Inequality Report 2022.

Sector-wise average wage data for males and females in India highlights that the wages are significantly lower for women in almost all sectors, except real estate and education services. Even in sectors such as agriculture and allied sector, wherein the relative participation of female in the workforce is large, the average wages earned by females is nearly three-fourth that of the wages earned by males.

Women's Access to Resources in India

One of the reasons for low participation of women in workforce and businesses is their limited access to essential resources, such as ownership of land and house, access to financial resources and access to digital tools, including e-commerce resources.

Access to Finance

The study highlights the challenge for women entrepreneurs in accessing capital from formal financial institutions in India. Analysis indicates that the share of females (aged 15+) in India having an account with a financial institution stood at 77.5 percent in 2021, which is low compared to several Asian countries such as Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, China and Sri Lanka. Further, the percentage of females that have borrowed from any formal financial institution or mobile money account stood at a meagre 10.5 percent in 2021, which is also substantially lower when compared to the aforementioned countries.

Some of the major barriers for women include lack of collateral, lack of ecosystem support, lack of understanding of financial profile and credit needs, and unconscious gender bias by the financial institutions, among others. Financial institutions in India hesitate to view women enterprises, particularly very small enterprises, as an addressable market segment. Over the recent period, crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic have further exacerbated the challenge of lack of access to finance for women entrepreneurs⁹.

Recent research also suggests that women-owned SMEs face considerable difficulties in accessing trade finance. As per the Asian Development Bank's

⁹ IFC (2022), Opportunities and Constraints of Women Owned Very Small Enterprises in India

Trade Finance Gaps, Growth, and Jobs Survey Report 2021, globally, trade finance applications of nearly 70 percent of surveyed women-owned firms were totally or partially rejected. Lack of collateral was among the topmost reasons for rejection of trade finance applications¹⁰.

Ownership of Property

In India, as per a report by IFC, factors such as lack of collateral and weak property rights of women act as major hindrances for women's access to finance¹¹. As per the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) 2019-21, in India, the share of females aged 15-49 with ownership of land (alone or jointly) stood at 31.7 percent, as compared to 42.3 percent of males aged 15-49 with land ownership (alone or jointly) during the same period. Likewise, while 42.3 percent of females aged 15-49 have ownership of house (alone or jointly), it is still lower when compared to males. The gap in access to collateral acts as a major hinderance for women-owned enterprises to expand their businesses, both domestically and for exports.

Access to Digital Tools (incl. e-Commerce tools)

Gender gaps in internet use have been nearly eliminated in high income countries with 93.8 percent of males and 92.6 percent of females using the internet in 2023. However, large gaps persist in developing countries. In India, as per latest data available from NFHS 2019-21, around 33 percent females used internet, as compared to 51 percent males using internet. Further, data suggests that only 28 percent of females aged 15+ in India made or received digital payments in 2021, which is much lower than the proportion of males who made or received digital payments. Even as consumers, females' use of e-commerce in India is less than half that of males in India.

Nevertheless, recent research suggests that notwithstanding the relatively lower share of females using internet in the country, women-owned enterprises are not far behind those owned by men in terms of the use of e-commerce as a sales channel. As per a recent survey of MSMEs in India by

¹⁰ ADB (2021), Trade Finance Gaps, Growth, and Jobs Survey Report

¹¹ IFC (2022), Opportunities and Constraints of Women Owned Very Small Enterprises in India

ICRIER, nearly 45.1 percent of the women-owned enterprises surveyed were integrated with e-commerce platforms, as compared to 50.3 percent of male-owned enterprises reported to be integrated with e-commerce platforms. Recent research also suggests that women may be able to generate higher sales when selling through e-commerce platforms. The study by ICRIER notes that women-led small and medium enterprises, with 50 to 75 percent of their sales made digitally, reported a 5 percentage points higher digital sales compared to those led by men (in the 30 days preceding the date of the survey)¹².

Strategies for Utilising Trade as a Tool for Women's Economic Empowerment

In order to enhance women's participation in trade and utilise trade as a tool for enhancing women's economic empowerment, the study suggests several actionable strategies.

Mainstreaming Gender Considerations in India's Trade Agreement

Gender issues have been increasingly integrated into regional trade agreements (RTAs) over the recent decades. The WTO's database on gender provisions in RTAs highlights that, as of September 2022, out of the 353 RTAs in force around the world, 101 RTAs include at least one explicit provision to address gender issues. This means that almost one-third of RTAs currently in force contain gender-related provisions. On a country level, it is noteworthy that 153 countries have at least one gender-specific provisions in their RTAs¹³. However, India is not one among these countries. As per the WTO database, none of India's 13 Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) and 6 Preferential Trade Agreements (PTAs) have even one gender-specific provision or gender chapter¹⁴.

¹² ICRIER (2023), Annual Survey of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in India

¹³ WTO (2022), Trade and Gender-Related Provisions In Regional Trade Agreements

¹⁴ WTO Database on Gender Provisions in Regional Trade Agreements, data updated in September 2022

Making Gender-Inclusive Provisions in FTAs

Recent analysis indicates that gender provisions in FTAs should be more impactful. A recent assessment by the WTO suggests that several of the current trade agreements with gender provisions do not adequately address the distributional issues that are central to more inclusive trade¹⁵. Moreover, many of the gender-provisions in FTAs also lack a focus on tailoring, implementing, enforcing or applying the gender-related commitments.

India needs to consider renegotiating existing FTAs for including gender provisions or gender chapter in its FTAs. For making India's trade agreements more gender inclusive, the study discusses select best practices and examples of gender inclusive trade agreements, such as gender-explicit preamble in trade agreements; provisions for training and capacity-building programmes; minimum legal gender-related standards; formation of gender committees as monitoring mechanism; ex-ante and ex-post gender focused analysis of trade agreements; and joining international gender and trade cooperation arrangements.

Seeking Tariff Relaxation in Women-Intensive Sectors

Recent analysis by the IMF highlights that sectors that are female-intensive, such as food and beverages, and textiles and apparel, on average face higher tariffs on inputs¹⁶. In India as well, products produced largely by women face on an average 6 percentage-points higher tariffs than products produced largely by men in export markets¹⁷. Further, women in lower-income groups faced higher tariffs in India. It is noteworthy that women consistently face higher tariffs than men across all income deciles, except for the highest income decile.

Analysis of the effectively applied tariff faced by India in its top 10 export destinations also corroborates this finding. Out of the top 20 products facing highest average applied tariff across India's top 10 export destinations, 7

¹⁵ WTO (2023), Gender Mainstreaming in Trade Agreements

¹⁶ IMF (2023), Trade Drives Gender Equality and Development

¹⁷ WTO, World Bank (2020), Women and Trade Report

products belong to the food processing sector, whereas another 6 product categories are from the textile sector-both these sectors being important for female employment. There is a need for policymakers to negotiate tariff relaxation in these sectors that are relatively more important for female employment.

In order to understand the impact of tariff relaxation in female employment intensive sectors on India's economy and employment, a computable general equilibrium analysis has been undertaken in the study, based on a dynamic GTAP model. Exim Bank's analysis suggests that a 1 percent reduction in tariffs faced by India's exports in these sectors that are relatively more important for female workforce could lead to a 0.363 percent increase in labour supply in India and a 0.136 percent increase in India's GDP. The overall welfare gains from such a tariff reduction are estimated to be nearly 3.6 percent. Thus, India needs to consider this gendered perspective while negotiating its trade agreements, to enhance female workforce participation and welfare gains from trade.

Promoting Women as Suppliers Through Public Procurement Channels

Governments around the world are increasingly seeking to negotiate public procurement chapters in trade agreements. Recently, India and the UAE entered into a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement, which has a dedicated chapter on government procurement. India is also negotiating a similar chapter in its upcoming FTAs with countries like the UK. In the wake of these developments, India could undertake targeted measures for women-led enterprises to tap the procurement opportunities arising from such FTAs, as also to remain competitive in the wake of rising international competition in domestic procurements.

An essential step for women businesses to leverage the public procurement opportunities in FTA partner countries would be to build capacities and experience in domestic procurements. The Government of India has been taking measures to enhance participation of women-led enterprises in public procurement. The Ministry of MSME has mandated that 3 percent of procurements by Central Ministries should be sourced from women-led

MSMEs. However, despite the mandate, procurement from women MSMEs accounted for only 1.33 percent of total public procurement done by the Central Ministries and Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs) in 2022-23. Ministry-wise procurement data suggests that out of the 29 ministries that have set targets for procurement from women MSMEs, only 8 have achieved/exceeded their procurement target in 2022-23.

The barriers to participation of women-led MSMEs in public procurement could be related to lack of scale, lack of administrative, financial and technical capacity to be a supplier, and relatively limited access to finance. To bolster the capabilities of women-led MSMEs and enhance their participation in public procurement, both domestically and in FTA partner countries, the Government of India could consider creating a Gender Opportunity Fund. Towards this, funds could be pooled by the Central Ministries and CPSEs from the shortfall in their procurement from women-led MSMEs. In 2022-23 alone, the shortfall amounted to nearly Rs. 3,300 crore. The Government could utilise this Fund for investing in capacity building, training, and certification of women-led MSMEs. Training could cover areas such as procurement policies, leadership development, expansion of business opportunities especially in the high skill and technology-intensive sectors, procedures for tapping public procurement opportunities in FTA partner countries, international standards requirements and compliance norms for international public procurements, among others. Additionally, the fund could also be utilised for training on prequalification certifications like ISO 9001, etc. which can enable women-led MSMEs to clear the prequalification rounds in international procurements.

Besides this, it would also be important for India to ensure that international participation in domestic procurement through FTAs does not negatively impact sectors with relatively greater female participation, which include sensitive sectors such as agriculture, textiles, etc.

Enhancing Implementation of Women-Centric Measures in India's Trade Facilitation

Research suggests that the hassles and costs of border crossings lead women to opt out of cross-border trade activities or choose informal over formal

practices¹⁸. Even though trade facilitation interventions are commonly devised in a gender-neutral manner, in practice, trade facilitation affects men and women differently. Gender-sensitive implementation of trade facilitation contributes to women's economic empowerment by addressing barriers that affect women exporters' participation in cross-border trade. It helps increase their profit from exports, lowers their vulnerability and encourages new business opportunities in cross-border trade.

Globally, one of the key trade facilitation initiatives has been the WTO's Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) 2017, which aims at implementing measures to "expedite the movement, release, and clearance of goods being traded across borders". India has also adopted the WTO TFA to implement measures to expedite the movement, release, and clearance of goods being traded across borders. As per the Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, which assesses the implementation of TFA measures, India's trade facilitation implementation scores have substantially improved, from 63.4 percent in 2015 to 93.5 percent in 2023. However, the implementation of "women in trade facilitation" measures are only partially completed. As a result, the scores for India in the measures for "women in trade facilitation" is much lower when compared to India's implementation scores for several other trade facilitation measures under the TFA.

There is a need for India to work towards enhancing the implementation of measures related to "women in trade facilitation". In addition to these measures, some other trade facilitation measures with a gender-sensitive approach that could be implemented in India include simplifying administrative procedures and establishing support services tailored to women traders, such as gender-responsive trade facilitation centres and capacity-building programmes. India could consider implementing some of the global best practices such as the SheTrades South America project, under which women entrepreneurs are provided with customised training programmes; access to critical market intelligence, trade opportunities and trade-related regulations; and networking opportunities; etc¹⁹.

¹⁸ WTO, World Bank (2020), Women and Trade Report

¹⁹ United Nations (2023) Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation Report

Devising Distinct Support Measures for Women in India's Foreign Trade Policy

India's Foreign Trade Policy 2023 recognises the need for focussed interventions for MSMEs and e-commerce exporters, with distinct provisions/ chapters dedicated to enhancing exports from these systems. However, there are currently no such distinct provisions/ support measures for women exporters. Given the importance of trade in women's economic empowerment, there is need for distinct measures to encourage women entrepreneurs to enhance participation in international trade.

The Government of India could consider introducing specific provisions to support women in existing schemes. For example, under the Government of India's (GOI) Interest Equalisation Scheme for Pre and Post Shipment Rupee Export Credit, higher rate of interest subvention could be considered for women-owned enterprises, which could encourage women exporters and improve their export competitiveness.

The GOI could also consider lower thresholds for women in export promotion schemes that are based on annual turnover categorisation. For instance, the GOI could consider relaxing the 'Export Performance Threshold' for grant of status holder certificate to women-owned enterprises across all categories. The GOI could also consider extending a higher percentage of financial support to women entrepreneurs in schemes such as the Market Access Initiative scheme.

State governments could also bring in policy measures to encourage exports from women-owned enterprises and enhance participation of female workers in export-oriented sectors. Some of the measures that could be considered by states include i) additional capital investment subsidy for women entrepreneurs engaged in export business; ii) additional interest subsidy for women exporters on total loan availed from public financial institutions / banks; iii) reimbursement of the guarantee fee charged under the Credit Guarantee Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises (CGTMSE) scheme; iv) establishment of exclusive zones in industrial park for exporting women entrepreneurs, among others.

In addition to these, State Governments could also consider additional payroll incentives for employment of women in export-oriented sectors. For example, the Government of Jharkhand, under its Industrial and Investment Promotion Policy 2021, extends additional employment generation subsidy of Rs. 1,000 per month per worker for Women/ SC/ ST workers in the export-oriented sector of textiles and apparels.

State governments could also consider extending additional subsidies/ reimbursement of certification costs related to exports. The Government of Andhra Pradesh is providing such a support under the Andhra Pradesh Export Promotion Policy 2022-27. Under the policy, up to 50 percent of the expenses on compulsory certification are being reimbursed to exporters, subject to a ceiling of ₹ 2 lakh per exporting unit, and an additional 5 percent subsidy is extended to MSME exporting units run by women and individuals of reserved communities.

Supporting Exports through e-Commerce

e-Commerce can be a strong and effective tool for women's economic empowerment, with digital platforms enabling improved market access, allowing sellers to reach a broader pool of potential customers. The GOI could partner with e-commerce platforms for organising training programmes aimed at providing women entrepreneurs with the necessary skills to export through the e-commerce mode. The GOI has already signed a memorandum of understanding with Amazon India to undertake capacity-building and outreach activities for e-commerce exports across 20 districts in India, on a pilot basis. Similar collaborations with other e-commerce players are also underway. The GOI could consider engaging these platforms for specific outreach and training activities aimed at women entrepreneurs. This would help build capacity of aspiring women e-commerce exporters, onboard them on e-commerce platforms and facilitate greater exports.

Enhancing Women's Access to Finance for Exports

As per estimates by IFC, nearly US\$ 1.5 trillion of credit demanded by women-owned MSMEs in emerging markets remain unmet by financial institutions²⁰.

²⁰ IFC (2020), Banking On Women Global Trade Finance Program

Moreover, as noted earlier, women-owned firms also face considerable difficulties in accessing trade finance.

Analysis of sector-wise share in outstanding export credit in India reveals an interesting trend. A few manufacturing segments that are relatively more important for female employment have a larger share in outstanding export credit as compared to their contribution to overall exports from the country. This includes segments like food manufacturing, textiles and chemicals. However, in some other segments such as agriculture and allied sector, and information and communication sector, which are also relatively more important for female employment, the share in outstanding export credit is below the share of the sectors in total exports from the country.

One way to address the gap in trade finance for women could be to enhance participation of banks in women-centric trade finance programmes of multilateral development banks (MDBs) such as the International Finance Corporation (IFC). With a view to increase trade financing for businesses owned and led by women in developing countries, the IFC, in partnership with Goldman Sachs, launched the Banking on Women (BOW) - Global Trade Finance Program (GTFP) initiative. The programme aims to close gender gaps in trade financing by creating incentives for more than 240 partner banks in more than 80 emerging markets to increase financing to exporting and importing women entrepreneurs. Since its inception in 2019 till 2022, the IFC has issued US\$ 120 million in loans and loan guarantees under the BOW-GTFP initiative²¹. However, currently only 3 Indian banks are participating under the IFC initiative. More Indian banks need to partner with MDBs in such initiatives and actively engage in their women-centric programmes to enhance the credit flow to women enterprises.

Besides, a tailored financing programme for women-owned/led enterprises in India could be developed, particularly focussed on export finance. In this context, the Study discusses some of the initiatives and best practices in other developed and developing countries that can be referred. For instance, the

²¹ WTO (2022), Aid for Trade Global Review

Export Development Canada (EDC)'s Inclusive Trade Investments programme invests in women, indigenous and minority-owned/-led export businesses, either as a co-investor or as a syndicate partner, alongside other venture funds. Since launching its first national strategy specific to women in trade in 2018, EDC has served almost 3,000 women entrepreneurs, facilitating CAD 6.8 billion (approximately US\$ 4.96 billion) in business. Similarly, the US Export-Import Bank (US Exim) provides hands-on guidance to minorities and women-owned businesses on how to qualify for and access financing from the US Exim, in order to grow their exports. As per the US Exim Annual Report 2023, in FY 2023, the US Exim had approved US\$ 349.3 million in support of minority- and women-owned businesses, which constituted more than 30 percent of the US Exim's total direct small business support for the fiscal year. These best practices could provide a template for development of similar tailored export financing programmes for women exporters in India.

In addition to these, the Government of India could also create a fund for improving access to finance, particularly for exports, for women entrepreneurs. Examples of similar initiatives in other countries include South Africa's Women's Fund, which provides affordable, usable and responsive finance to enterprises with more than 50 percent ownership by women entrepreneurs. Similar funds also exist in Tunisia and Zambia for extending financial support to exporters, with a special preference to women entrepreneurs.

Addressing Gaps in Gender-Disaggregated Data

Policymakers need to use gender-disaggregated data to better assess and monitor the impact of trade facilitation for women traders. Collection and availability of meaningful gender-disaggregated data for trade facilitation are sparse, irregular and inconsistent. Formal trade statistics published by national statistics offices and international agencies such as UNCTAD's COMTRADE database capture directional trade flows. However, these data are not typically disaggregated by gender. Furthermore, while labour force data are more frequently disaggregated by gender and are available in the public domain, there is no coverage of trade aspects in these data in India. Further, in India, comprehensive data on business registration disaggregated by gender is also not available in the public domain. The Ministry of Corporate

Affairs (MCA), Government of India collects details of registered, active, non-active, closed companies/ limited liability partnership (LLP) firms and publishes the same in the form of a monthly information bulletin. However, gender-disaggregated data is not included in these statistics²². The MCA could consider making available such data in the public domain.

The Government of India could consider focussing on estimation and publishing of gender-related trade data. To that end, tax administration and customs records could act as an important source for identifying women enterprises involved in international trade. Presently, the Central Bureau of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) provides limited information on gender-disaggregated data at firm level²³. For informed policy making and impact assessment, the CBIC could collect national gender-disaggregated data as part of its existing GST and Customs data collection. The same could also be made accessible to the public for research and policy analysis. Similar approach is also being used by New Zealand, where the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade uses Customs data and firm- and individual-level data from Stats New Zealand's Longitudinal Business Database and Integrated Data Infrastructure to generate gender-disaggregated data on New Zealand's goods exporting and non-exporting firms²⁴.

Conclusion

The female labour force participation in India is substantially below that of males. Analysis in the study indicates that export-intensive sectors with relatively more female employment, predominantly comprise resource-intensive exports such as crop and animal production, and low-value added exports such as tobacco products, textiles and apparel. These sectors are highly susceptible to external demand and price shocks. Meanwhile, in case of several high technology intensive industries such as transport equipment,

²² <https://www.mca.gov.in/content/mca/global/en/data-and-reports/reports/monthly-information-bulletin.html>

²³ The Asia Foundation (2023), The US Department of State funded Project on "Women's Inclusion in India's Trade Ecosystem: From Talk to Action"

²⁴ SheTrades Outlook, Good Practices

machinery and equipment, electrical equipment and computer, electronic and optical products, etc., the proportion of female employees engaged in these sectors is low compared to proportion of male employees.

Looking ahead, there is a need for India to utilise trade as a means to boost women's participation in the economy. To that end, the study proposes several strategies including integrating gender considerations into India's trade agreements through measures such as incorporating gender-provisions in FTAs, negotiating tariff concessions in female-intensive sectors and empowering women as suppliers in public procurement; improving the implementation of gender-related measures in trade facilitation; introducing specific measures for women in export promotion policies; leveraging e-commerce to expand market access for women-owned businesses; enhancing women's access to trade finance; and addressing the gaps in gender-disaggregated data.

1. Introduction

Gender equality is one of the sustainable development goals (SDG) that governments, businesses, civil society, and other international communities around the world are committed to achieve. The SDG 5 of the UN 2030 Agenda specifically focuses on advancing gender equality. In addition, several objectives within the other 16 SDGs also include gender as a cross-cutting theme²⁵.

Free and open trade is an important catalyst for achieving the SDGs, including gender equality. Trade enables access to new markets and increased production, and trade liberalisation leads to higher productivity, transfer of technologies, skills upgradation, creation of new knowledge and innovation, and institutional growth and development. Complemented by appropriate and efficient trade policies, these gains from trade can contribute to other development-friendly outcomes and support the SDGs, including gender equality and women's economic empowerment. The UN's Addis Ababa Action Agenda of 2015, which is an integral part of the 2030 Agenda, also establishes a specific link between trade and gender equality, recognising the crucial role of women as producers and traders, and emphasising the need to address their specific challenges in order to facilitate women's equal and active participation in domestic, regional and international trade.

The Gender and Trade Nexus

International trade and gender are intricately linked, with trade having varying effects on gender equality. Depending on a variety of social, economic, and cultural factors as well as the broader policy framework, trade can have a favourable or negative impact on women's economic empowerment. Even when trade increases women's empowerment, there are several transmission

²⁵ ADB (2019), Leveraging Trade for Women's Economic Empowerment In The Pacific

channels for its impact, such as through favourable labour reforms, improved economic prospects, skill enhancement, technological upgradation, and socioeconomic empowerment. The discrete role that men and women play across different economic activities also influences the different impacts of international trade.

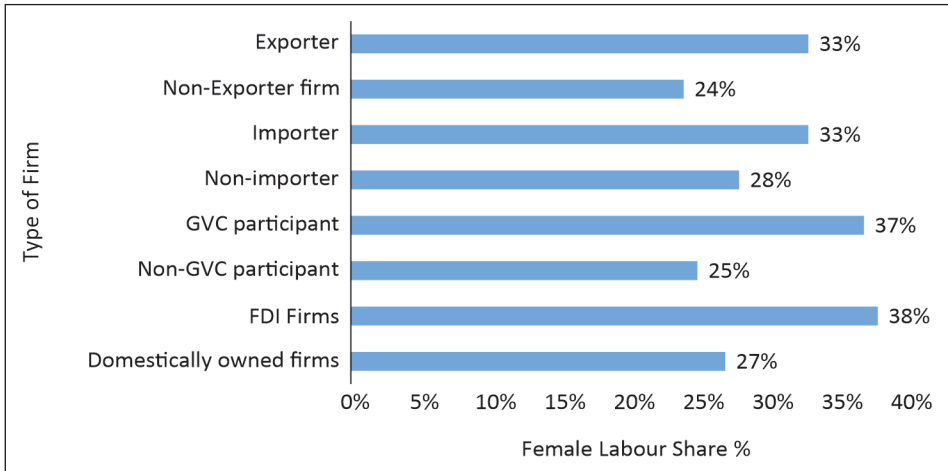
Women may have more economic opportunities as a result of trade and global value chains, due to the strengthening of economic activity specialisation, compartmentalisation, and agglomeration²⁶. These opportunities stem from the growth of sectors with comparative advantage, where women are likely to be more concentrated. As these sectors expand, there will be a greater relative demand for female labour, potentially leading to increased employment and income for women. Similarly, trade tends to benefit female entrepreneurs if they and their capital holdings are concentrated in sectors with comparative advantage, in addition to providing them with access to profitable export prospects that typically emerge from greater market access brought about by trade liberalisation²⁷.

International trade creates employment opportunities in developing countries through the expansion of export and import sectors, and by bringing in structural changes that increase employment of lower-skilled workers, who would otherwise not find work or be confined to the informal economy. In fact, a recent report by the IMF suggests that enterprises engaged in international trade employ more women. As per the report, in developing economies, women constitute 33 percent of the workforce in exporting firms, compared with just 24 percent in non-exporting firms. Likewise, women employees account for 33 percent of total employees in importing firms, as compared to 28 percent in non-importing firms. Women see similar advantages in businesses that are part of global value chains or have foreign investors, which on average employ 11 to 12 percent more women compared with other firms (Exhibit 1.1).

²⁶ Shepherd, B. and S. Stone (2017), "Trade and Women", ADBI Working Paper Series. No. 648.

²⁷ Ibid.

Exhibit 1.1: Share of Females in Labour Employed by Type of Firm in Developing Countries

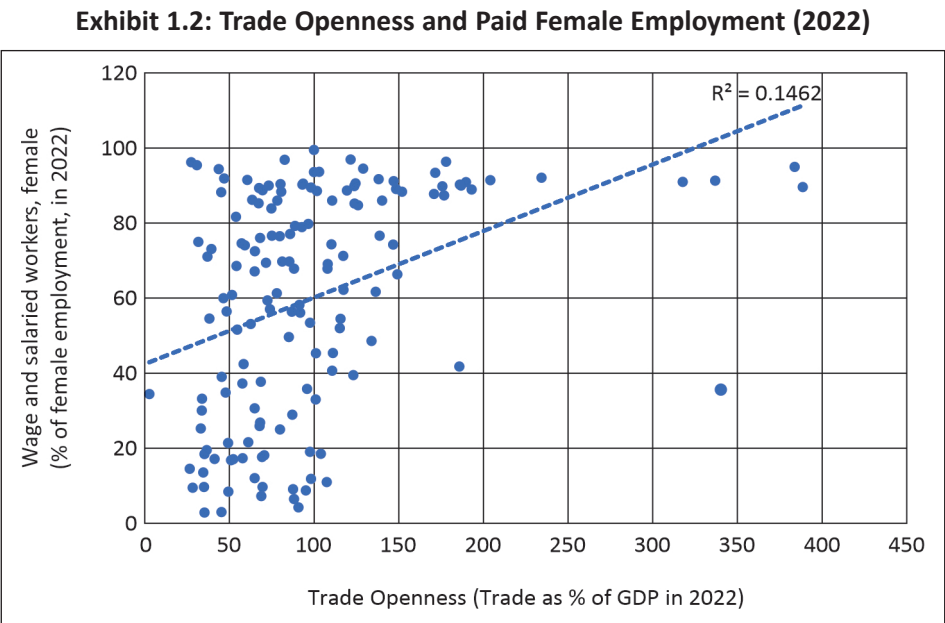


Source: IMF (2023), *Trade Drives Gender Equality & Development*; Exim Bank Research

Besides, greater trade openness is also associated with a relatively higher incidence of paid employment for women workers. As per Exim Bank research, based on data for 147 countries, both developed and developing countries, there is a positive relationship between trade openness and women's paid employment (Exhibit 1.2). In several Asian countries with high trade openness such as Singapore, Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, and Philippines etc., wage and salaried female workers comprise more than two-thirds of the total female employment in the respective countries. This could be attributable to improved quality of employment and labour conditions owing to greater internationalisation of businesses. Evidence from several developing economies in Asia also corroborates that women have benefited from trade liberalisation and participation in global value chains, particularly in export-oriented manufacturing and service industries. Increased international competition because of trade liberalisation encourages companies to formalise employment and adopt better labour standards²⁸. The formalisation of employment through labour laws and adherence to international labour standards also leads to increased bargaining power among women, thereby opening up opportunities for women to engage in formal employment.

²⁸ Shepherd, B. and S. Stone (2017), "Trade and Women", ADBI Working Paper Series. No. 648

For instance, in Bangladesh, there was additional job creation in the export-oriented garment industry of nearly 4 million workers, of which, more than 75 percent were women. Majority of these women belonged to poor families and were entering the labour force for the first time. Similarly, in the Philippines, women constitute majority of the 1.3 million employees in the business process outsourcing industry. Likewise, in Indonesia, reduced import tariffs on locally relevant inputs led to greater workforce participation and increased work hours for women, especially those less educated²⁹.



Note: The Scatter Plot is based on data for 147 countries for which 2022 data was available.

Source: Gender Statistics, World Bank; World Development Indicators, World Bank; Exim Bank Research

Scope of the Study

Notwithstanding its positive impacts, trade can also have negative effects which can disproportionately accrue to women. Trade liberalisation can also disrupt economic sectors and markets and can lead to a contraction in

²⁹ ADB (2019), How the Right Trade Policies Can Empower Women

comparative disadvantage sectors. Where women are active in these sectors with comparative disadvantage, there are risks of job displacements and losses, and in some cases, relocation from the formal to the informal sector.

Since international trade can have far-reaching consequences for gender equality, trade policy and related interventions should be specifically tailored for promoting greater economic participation and empowerment of women. This would entail gauging the gender impact of trade. However, measuring the specific gender impacts of trade has been challenging due to the lack of gender-disaggregated data on entrepreneurship, employment, income and other economic indicators. Particularly in the case of women's export entrepreneurship there is an almost complete lack of data³⁰. While there has been some progress in the data disaggregation by gender, at both the national and international levels, there is currently a dearth of information and research on the impact of trade and trade policy on women in India.

Against this backdrop, the study attempts to analyse the impact of trade on women's economic empowerment in India. The study discusses the challenges for women as entrepreneurs and workers in India's export-oriented sector and delves into the policy options and strategies for enhancing the gains from trade for women in India.

³⁰ ADB (2019), *Leveraging Trade for Women's Economic Empowerment In The Pacific*

2. Scenario of Women's Participation in the Indian Economy and Trade

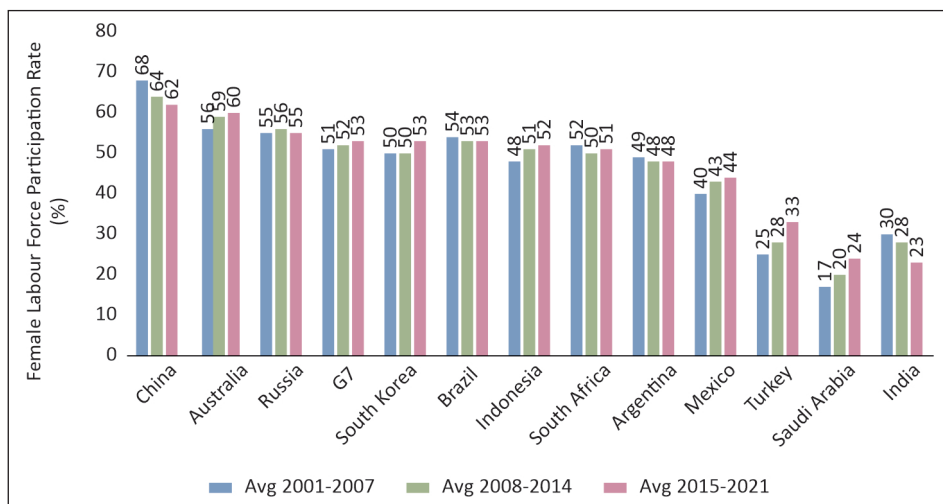
Women's Participation in the Indian Economy

The female labour force participation in India is substantially below that of males. According to the Periodic Labor Force Survey (PLFS) data, in 2022-23, the female labour force participation in India in usual status³¹ stood at 27.8 percent, which is nearly half the male labour force participation of 56.2 percent. Over the decade between 2001 to 2021, the average female labour force participation in India has declined steadily from an average of 30 percent during 2001-2007, to an average of 23 percent in 2015-2021. Among G20 countries, the average female labour force participation during 2015-2021 is the lowest in India. In fact, several developing countries such as China, Brazil, Indonesia, South Africa, Mexico, Argentina, and Turkey, among others had much higher female labour force participation during the same period (Exhibit 2.1).

Over the recent years, there has been some improvement in female labour force participation, which has increased from 25.1 percent in 2020-21 to 27.8 percent in 2022-23 (Exhibit 2.2). However, despite the recent progress, the gender gap in labour force participation has persisted.

³¹ The labour force according to the usual status is obtained by considering the usual principal status (ps) and the subsidiary status (ss) together. The estimate of the labour force in the usual status (ps+ss) includes (a) the persons who either worked or were seeking/available for work for a relatively long part of the 365 days preceding the date of survey and also (b) those persons from among the remaining population who had worked at least for 30 days during the reference period of 365 days preceding the date of survey.

Exhibit 2.1: Average Female Labor Force Participation Rate across G20 Countries (2001-2021)



Note: G7 average includes the European Union

Source: ADB (2023) Statistical Portrait of the Indian Female Labor Force; Exim Bank Research

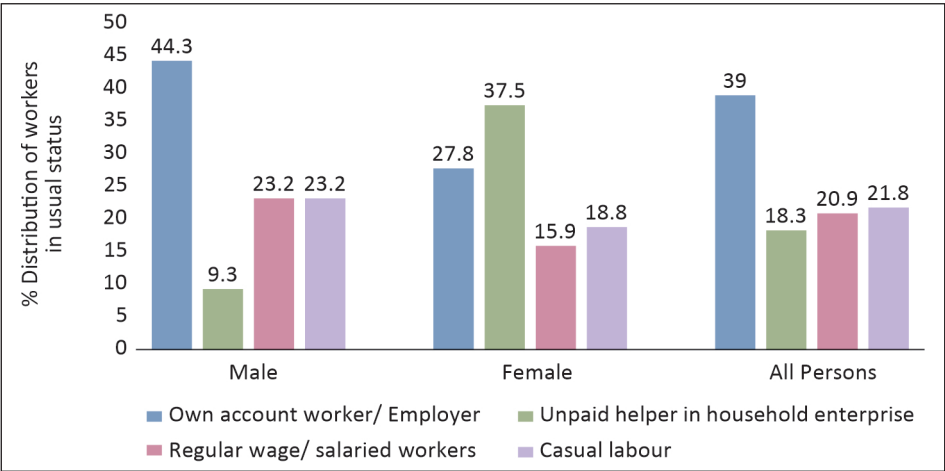
Exhibit 2.2: Labour Force Participation Rates in Usual Status in India (Rural + Urban: All Age Groups)



Source: Annual Period Labour Force Survey (PLFS) Report 2022-23, Exim Bank Research

Data from the PLFS also suggests that women labour force in the formal sector is still very low as compared to men. Majority of the female workforce in India is essentially engaged in the informal sector through self-employment (including own account worker and employer, and unpaid helper in household enterprises³²) and casual labour. A substantial 37.5 percent of female workers in India (rural and urban combined) are engaged as unpaid helpers in household enterprises, which is significantly higher when compared to 9.3 percent of male workers engaged as unpaid helpers in household enterprises. Meanwhile, only 15.9 percent of female workers in the country (rural and urban combined) are engaged in regular wage/salaried employment, which is lower when compared to 23.2 percent of male workers engaged in regular wage/salaried employment. Besides, nearly 27.8 percent of females are own account workers/employers, as against 44.3 percent of own account workers/employers among males during the same period. This signals a critical gap in women’s economic agency and ownership, underscoring the imperative for initiatives aimed at fostering women-led businesses and entrepreneurial ventures.

Exhibit 2.3: Gender-wise Share of Workers in Usual Status (Rural + Urban) by Category of Employment (2022-23)



Source: Annual Period Labour Force Survey (PLFS) Report 2022-23, Exim Bank Research

³² Section: 2.2.4 Distribution of workers in usual status (ps+ss) by status in employment, Annual Report of PLFS, 2022-23

An estimated 20.4 percent of all the Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in India are owned by women, as per the NSS 73rd Round of NSSO. Besides, the women-led businesses are playing increasingly important roles in the startup ecosystem of the country. As per recent research, the share of women founders/CEOs in the Indian startup segment in 2022 stood at nearly 18 percent, as opposed to a share of only 5 percent women founders/CEOs in the corporate³³ segment during the same period³⁴. Startups in India are also playing a crucial role in female employment, with women representing nearly 35 percent share of the total employment in startup segment in 2022³⁵. Research also suggests that startups with a female founder have 2.5 times more women employed across senior roles, as compared to startups with only male founders. Going forward, startups in India have the potential to create over 2 million new jobs for women by 2030³⁶.

In terms of broad sectors, more than two-third of the female workers in the country are engaged in the agriculture and allied sector, followed by manufacturing sector wherein 11.1 percent of female workers were engaged during 2022-23 (Exhibit 2.4). In contrast, nearly 37.1 percent male workers in the country are engaged in the agriculture and allied sector, although the share of male workforce in the manufacturing sector is nearly the same as that of female, at 11.6 percent in 2022-23. Meanwhile, in the services sector, the participation of female workers is higher than male workers in sectors such as education, human health and social work, as well as activities of household as employer.

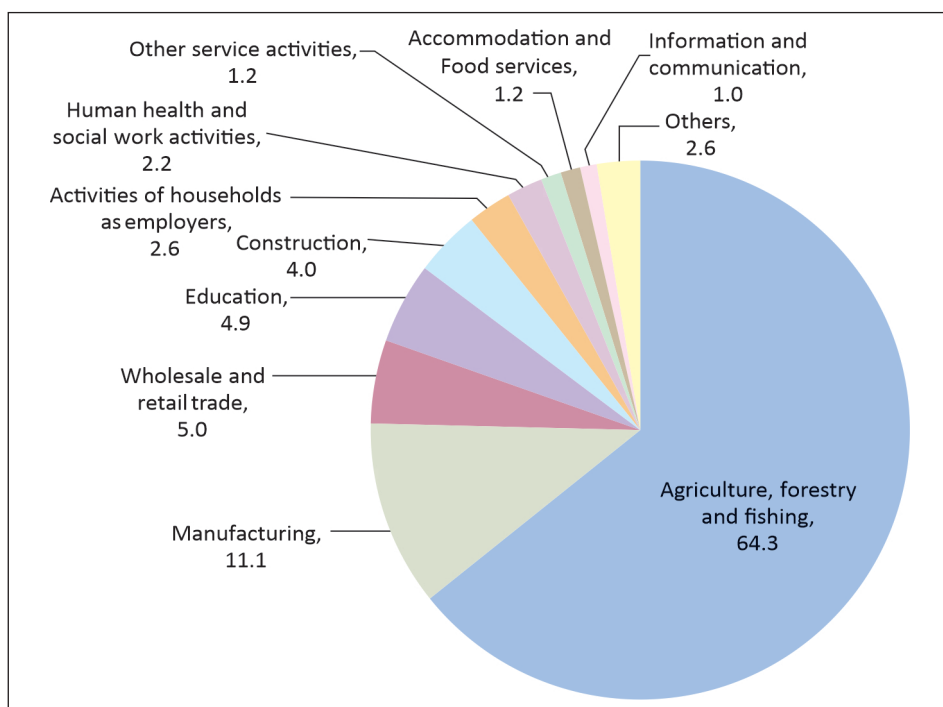
³³ Corporates defined as proprietorship and partnership firms and public and private limited companies with over 20 employees

³⁴ Women in India's Startup Ecosystem Report 2023

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

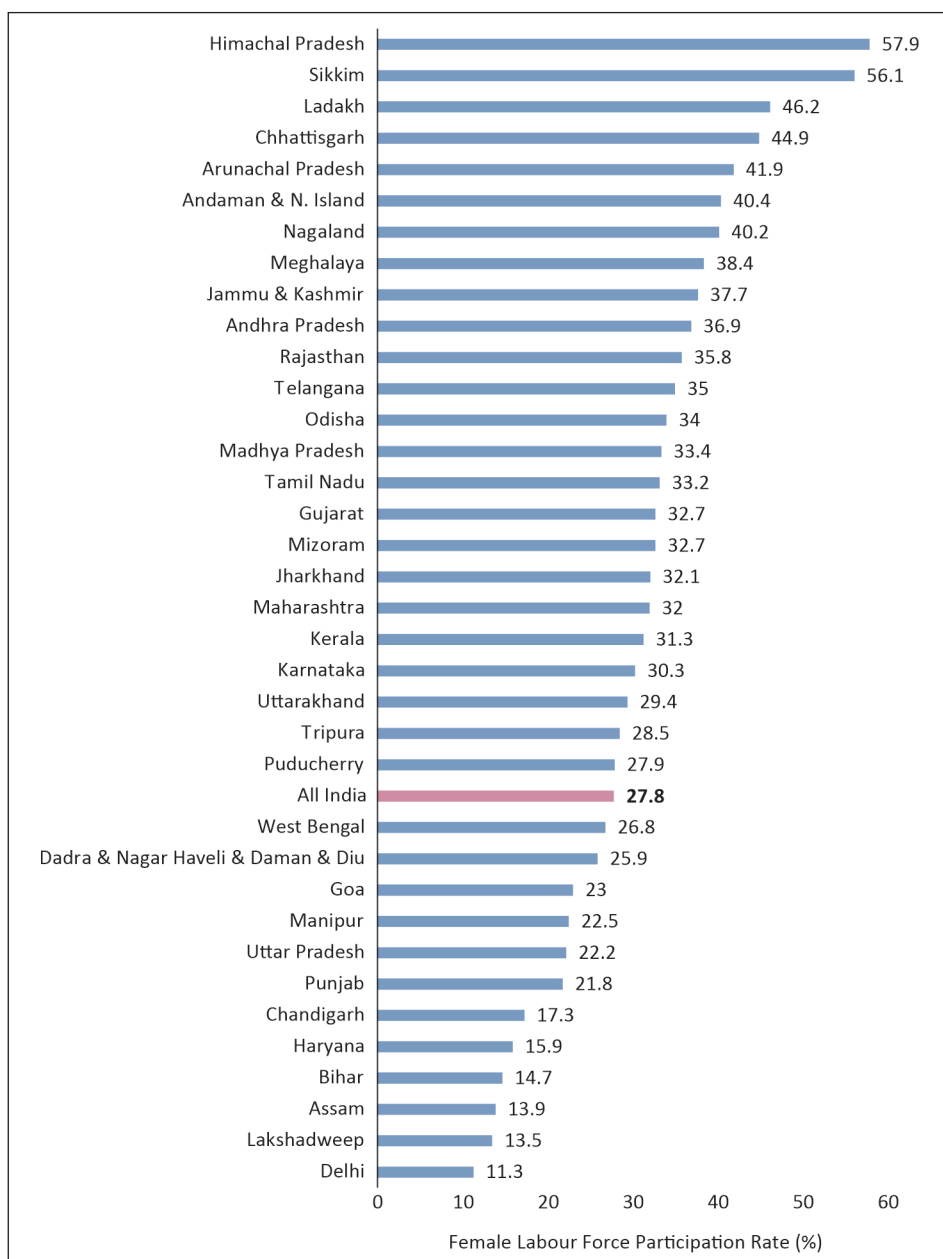
**Exhibit 2.4: Broad Sector-wise Female Employment in Usual Status
(Rural + Urban) in 2022-23**



Source: Annual Period Labour Force Survey (PLFS) Report 2022-23, Exim Bank Research

At the state-level as well, female labour force participation rate for 2022-23 was below that of males across all states and UTs. Nevertheless, when compared to all-India level, 25 out of the 37 states/UTs had a higher female labour force participation rate. Among all states/UTs, female labour force participation was the highest in Himachal Pradesh at 57.9 percent, followed by Sikkim (56.1 percent), Ladakh (46.2 percent), Chhattisgarh (44.9 percent), and Arunachal Pradesh (41.9 percent), among others (Exhibit 2.5). Meanwhile, states/UTs with the lowest female labour force participation included Delhi (11.3 percent), Lakshadweep (13.5 percent), Assam (13.9 percent), Bihar (14.7 percent) and Haryana (15.9 percent).

Exhibit 2.5: Female Labour Force Participation Rate across Indian States/UTs in 2022-23



Source: Annual Period Labour Force Survey (PLFS) Report 2022-23, Exim Bank Research

Female Labour Force Participation in Export-Intensive Sectors

This section attempts to map the female employment scenario across export intensive sectors. For this purpose, merchandise export data has been sourced from Directorate General of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics (DGCI&S) and mapped as per 2-digit NIC-2008 code-wise sectors, using a concordance table from the World Integrated Trade Solution (WITS) Portal. Sector-wise export intensity has been calculated as follows, using export data from DGCI&S and gross output data from National Accounts Statistics, Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation:

$$\text{Export Intensity} = \frac{\text{Total Exports of the Sector}}{\text{Gross Output of the Sector}} \times 100$$

Thereafter, an index has been developed to gauge the female employment intensity in these export-intensive sectors using the NIC-2008 code-wise male-female employment data sourced from the Periodic Labour Force Survey for 2022-23. The Employment Intensity Index was obtained by calculating the proportion of the 'number of male workforce in a sector as percentage of total males' to 'number of females in that sector as a percentage of total female workforce'.

$$\text{Employment Intensity Index} = \frac{(\text{Number of Males in a Sector} / \text{Total Male Workforce})}{(\text{Number of Females in a Sector} / \text{Total Female Workforce})}$$

The value of the index has the following interpretation:

- Values ranging from 0-1 indicate that the sector is relatively more important for female employment;
- Values equal to 1 indicate that the sector is equally important for male and female employment;

- Values greater than one indicate that the sector is relatively more important for male employment (as a corollary, less important for female employment).

Table 2.1 presents the employment intensity index for the various sectors, along with the export intensity of the sectors. Analysis indicates that there are only five sectors that have both a higher proportion of female employment compared to the all-India level as well as a higher export intensity compared to all-India level. These export-intensive sectors include segments where India's exports have traditionally been competitive, including wearing apparel, textiles, pharmaceuticals, and leather products. Out of the five export-intensive sectors with relatively better proportion of female employment than the all-India level, only two sectors exhibit a higher employment intensity for females compared to males. These sectors include wearing apparel and textiles. The proportion of females working in these two sectors relative to the total female workforce across all sectors is higher than the proportion of males working in these sectors relative to the total male workforce.

It is noteworthy that, majority of these sectors are resource-intensive or low value-added exports sectors. Low value-added and resource-intensive exports sectors are highly susceptible to external shocks. Higher concentration of female employment in these sectors, therefore, makes them more vulnerable to commodity cycles. In contrast, the share of female employees engaged in several high technology intensive industries such as transport equipment, machinery and equipment, electrical equipment and computer, electronic and optical products, etc., as compared to the total of female employment is substantially lower compared to the proportion of male employment.

Table 2.1: Sector-wise Export Intensity and Employment Intensity in India (2022-23)

NIC Sector Name	Export Intensity (%)	Employment Intensity Index (2022-23)
Other manufacturing	69.6%	1.08
Manufacture of computer, electronic & optical products	46.8%	3.00
Manufacture of wearing apparel, except custom tailoring	45.5%	0.39
Manufacture of coke & refined petroleum products	42.2%	4.00

NIC Sector Name	Export Intensity (%)	Employment Intensity Index (2022-23)
Manufacture of leather and related products	33.2%	1.80
Manufacture of pharmaceutical; medicinal chemicals and botanical products	29.8%	1.86
Manufacture of machinery and equipment	25.3%	6.25
Manufacture of fabricated metal products, except machinery and equipment	18.0%	8.36
Manufacture of textiles	16.9%	0.60
Manufacture of rubber & plastic products	13.5%	2.45
Manufacture of transport equipment	12.8%	7.83
Manufacture of basic metal	12.8%	13.00
Manufacture of food products	12.4%	1.56
Mining and quarrying	10.8%	6.00
Manufacture of paper and paper products	10.4%	1.36
Manufacture of chemical and chemical products except pharmaceuticals, medicinal and botanical products	7.8%	1.59
Manufacture of other non-metallic mineral products	6.1%	2.16
Manufacture of furniture	5.0%	42.00
Manufacture of wood and of products of wood and cork, except furniture; manufacture of articles of straw and plaiting material	3.9%	1.79
Fisheries and aquaculture	3.2%	5.00
Manufacture of electrical equipment	3.2%	5.33
Manufacture of tobacco products	2.6%	0.05
Crop and animal production	2.6%	0.57
Manufacture of beverages	1.7%	1.67
All India level	13.1%	2.02

Note: Note: Cells highlighted in green indicate sectors where female employment intensity is higher than the all-India level (i.e., sectors where employment intensity index value is lower than all India level) and the sector's export intensity is greater than India's export orientation in merchandise exports; Only agriculture and allied sectors, as well as manufacturing sectors have been considered for this analysis.

Source: Exim Bank Calculation based on data from DGCI&S and MOSPI

There are 12 sectors that have a better Female Employment Intensity Index compared to the all-India level. It is noteworthy that exports in several of these sectors have recorded double-digit CAGR during the recent years. This includes sectors like food products, which recorded a CAGR of 27.0 percent during FY18 to FY23, followed by paper and paper products (CAGR of 19.5 percent), wood and wood products (CAGR of 15.5 percent) and chemical and chemical products (CAGR of 13.3 percent), among others (Table 2.2).

Table 2.2: Export Trends in Sectors with Better Female Employment Intensity Index Compared to All-India Level

Sectors Important for Female Employment	CAGR of India's Export Growth in the Sector during FY18-FY23 (%)	Employment Intensity Index (2022-23)
Manufacture of food products	27.0%	1.56
Manufacture of paper and paper products	19.5%	1.36
Manufacture of wood and of products of wood and cork, except furniture; manufacture of articles of straw and plaiting material	15.5%	1.79
Manufacture of chemical and chemical products except pharmaceuticals, medicinal and botanical products	13.6%	1.59
Manufacture of pharmaceutical; medicinal chemicals and botanical products	13.3%	1.86
Crop and animal production	10.8%	0.57
Manufacture of tobacco products	10.1%	0.05
Manufacture of beverages	6.2%	1.67
Manufacture of leather and related products	4.1%	1.80
Manufacture of wearing apparel, except custom tailoring	3.9%	0.39
Manufacture of textiles	3.9%	0.60
Other manufacturing	3.0%	1.08

Source: Exim Bank Calculation based on data from DGCI&S

Analysis by Comparative Advantage in Exports & Global Import Demand

This section analyses India's comparative advantage in exports across sectors and the global import demand in these sectors, to identify the sectors that can be targeted for boosting exports from the country and the relative importance of these sectors for female employment. For analysing the export competitiveness across sectors, the concept of Revealed Comparative Advantage (RCA) is used. RCA indices are used to identify categories of exports in which an economy has a comparative advantage by way of comparison of the country's trade scenario with the world trade scenario. The basic assumption underlying the concept of revealed comparative advantage is that trade profile reflects the inter-country differences in terms of relative costs as well as non-price aspects.

As per Balassa's (1965) measure, RCA index for country i , commodity j is

$$RCA_{ij} = \frac{(X_{ji}/X_i)}{(X_{jw}/X_w)}$$

Where,

X_{ji} : exports of commodity j from country i

X_i : total exports from country i

X_{jw} : total exports of commodity j from world

X_w : total exports from world

The RCA index ranges from zero to infinity, with 1 as the break-even point. That is, an RCA value of less than 1 means that the country does not have comparative advantage in the product, while a value above 1 indicates that the country has a comparative advantage in the product. For calculating the RCA, HS-2 digit level export data sourced from ITC trademap has been mapped with the 2-digit NIC-2008 code-wise sectors.

The normalised revealed comparative advantage (NRCA) index has been demonstrated capable of revealing the extent of comparative advantage more precisely and consistently than other alternative RCA indices in the literature. NRCA can be defined in the following manner –

$$NRCA_{ij} = \frac{RCA_{ij}-1}{RCA_{ij}+1}$$

Where,

NRCA > 0 indicates that country i has comparative advantage in exporting commodity j; and

NRCA < 0 indicates that country i has comparative disadvantage in exporting commodity j.

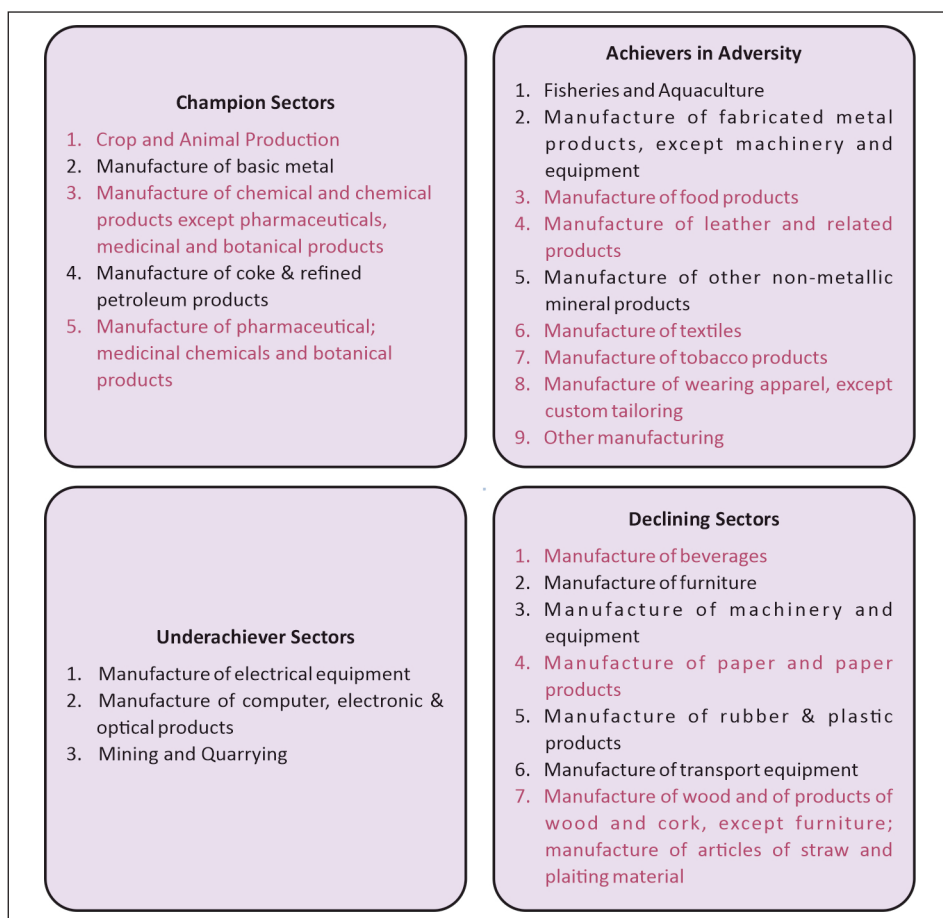
The export competitiveness of sectors, as reflected in the NRCA, has been mapped with global demand for the products. Based on this mapping, four categories of products have been identified:

- **Champion Sectors – Competitive Exports (NRCA > 0); Robust Import Demand (Product Import AAGR > Total World Import AAGR):** These sectors have the maximum potential, as India has comparative advantage in exports of these products and the world demand for these products during 2018 to 2022 has recorded higher growth than the overall world import demand during this period.
- **Underachiever Sectors – Exports Not Competitive (NRCA < 0); Growing Import Demand (Product Import AAGR > Total World Import AAGR):** India does not have comparative advantage in exports of these products, while the sector has witnessed higher growth in import demand than overall world import demand during the period under consideration. Export competitiveness in these products could be improved by enhancing the production capacity.
- **Declining Sectors – Exports Not Competitive (NRCA < 0); Weak Import Demand (Product Import AAGR < Total World Import AAGR):** India does not have comparative advantage in these products, and the sector has

also registered slower global import demand growth as compared to the overall world import demand during 2018-2022.

- **Achievers in Adversity – Competitive Exports (NRCA > 0); Weak Import Demand (Product Import AAGR < Total World Import AAGR):** India has comparative advantage in exports in these products, but the sector registered slower global import demand growth as compared to the overall world import demand during the period under consideration.

Exhibit 2.6: Mapping of Sector-wise Export Competitiveness in India (2022)



Note: Sectors highlighted in pink represent sectors that are relatively more important for female employment in India

Source: Exim Bank Calculation using data from ITC Trademap

Analysis of the export competitiveness across sectors indicates that 3 out of the total 12 sectors with relatively higher proportion of female employment than all-India level are champion sectors, where India has comparative advantage in exports and the global import demand is increasing. There is a need to leverage the opportunities arising in these champion sectors, as these are low hanging fruits. These sectors could be targeted for encouraging greater participation of females in these sectors and also for improving market access for exports from these sectors. On the other hand, there are 3 sectors that are categorised as underachievers, wherein the global import demand is increasing but India does not have a comparative advantage in exports. In these 3 sectors, the share of female employees in total female workforce is substantially lower when compared to that of male employees. As the import demand for these products has been witnessing robust growth, there is a need for encouraging development of productive capacities in these sectors, as also for enhancing female participation in the workforce in these sectors, particularly in the technology-intensive sectors such as electrical equipment, and computer, electronics and optical products. This could be done through focus on sector-specific skill development and capacity building initiatives for female workforce in these sectors.

State-level Analysis

Comparison of female employment intensity across different states/UTs has been undertaken in this section. For this purpose, a state-level employment intensity index has been calculated as follows:

$$\text{State/UT-level Employment Intensity Index} = \frac{\text{Labour Force Participation Rate of Males in the State/UT}}{\text{Labour Force Participation Rate of Females in the State/UT}}$$

The value of the index has the following interpretation:

- Values ranging from 0-1 indicate that the state/UT has relatively higher labour force participation for females than that for males;

- Values equal to 1 indicate that males and females have equal labour force participation rate;
- Values greater than one indicate that the state/UT has relatively greater labour force participation rate of males than females (i.e., lower employment intensity of females)

Comparison of the index and export orientation at the state level indicates that 21 out of the 33 States/UTs considered for this analysis have relatively favourable employment intensity of females as compared to the all-India level. These 21 states/UTs jointly accounted for nearly 80.6 percent of India's merchandise exports in 2022-23. This includes top exporting states of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Odisha, among others (Table 2.3). These states/UTs with high exports and a relatively higher female participation in the workforce could implement policy measures focussing on sustaining and further improving female participation across export sectors, particularly in technology-oriented sectors where the female employment intensity is relatively lower at an all-India level. Meanwhile, among top 10 exporting states, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, West Bengal have relatively low employment intensity of females when compared to all-India level. This indicates that while these states have in place enabling policies for enhancing exports, there is a need for such policies to have a gendered lens to enhance female participation in export sectors.

Besides, states such as Kerala, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand that have relatively higher female participation in the workforce only represent a meagre share of 1 percent or lesser in India's merchandise exports. These states could focus on policy measures aimed at improving export competitiveness and encouraging greater exports from women-led/ women-owned enterprises, as well as improving export market access in female employment intensive sectors.

Meanwhile, in states/UTs such as Bihar, Assam, Chandigarh, Tripura and Manipur, where female employment intensity, export orientation and share in India's exports are low, the focus of policy measures could be on enhancing export competitiveness, as well as improving women's participation in export-oriented industries and their access to export markets.

Table 2.3: State-level Employment Intensity Index and Export Performance

States/UTs	State-level Employment Intensity Index	Export Orientation (Merchandise Exports as % of GSDP FY22)	Share in India's Merchandise Exports in FY23
Gujarat	1.91	49.0%	33.1%
Maharashtra	1.90	17.5%	16.1%
Tamil Nadu	1.77	12.7%	9.0%
Karnataka	1.95	9.8%	6.2%
Uttar Pradesh	2.47	7.9%	4.8%
Andhra Pradesh	1.64	12.5%	4.4%
Odisha	1.72	19.2%	2.5%
Haryana	3.45	13.4%	3.5%
West Bengal	2.35	7.8%	2.8%
Telangana	1.69	7.3%	2.5%
Rajasthan	1.52	6.0%	2.1%
Delhi	5.05	7.0%	1.8%
Madhya Pradesh	1.87	5.3%	1.8%
Punjab	2.84	8.6%	1.5%
Kerala	1.87	3.7%	1.0%
Chhattisgarh	1.39	6.2%	0.6%
Jharkhand	1.65	5.1%	0.3%
Goa	2.58	21.5%	0.5%
Bihar	3.20	2.7%	0.6%
Himachal Pradesh	1.12	9.3%	0.5%
Uttarakhand	1.89	5.4%	0.4%
Puducherry	2.10	8.4%	0.1%
Assam	3.02	0.8%	0.1%
Jammu & Kashmir	1.49	1.0%	0.0%
Chandigarh	3.35	1.6%	0.0%
Sikkim	1.21	0.4%	0.0%
Tripura	2.13	0.1%	0.0%

States/UTs	State-level Employment Intensity Index	Export Orientation (Merchandise Exports as % of GSDP FY22)	Share in India's Merchandise Exports in FY23
Meghalaya	1.29	0.2%	0.0%
Mizoram	1.55	0.1%	0.0%
Arunachal Pradesh	1.37	0.04%	0.0%
Andaman & Nicobar	1.65	0.1%	0.0%
Nagaland	1.39	0.03%	0.0%
Manipur	2.32	0.02%	0.0%
All India level Employment Intensity Index	2.02		

Note: Cells highlighted in green indicate states/UTs where female employment intensity is higher than all-India level i.e., states where the employment intensity index value is lower than all-India level.

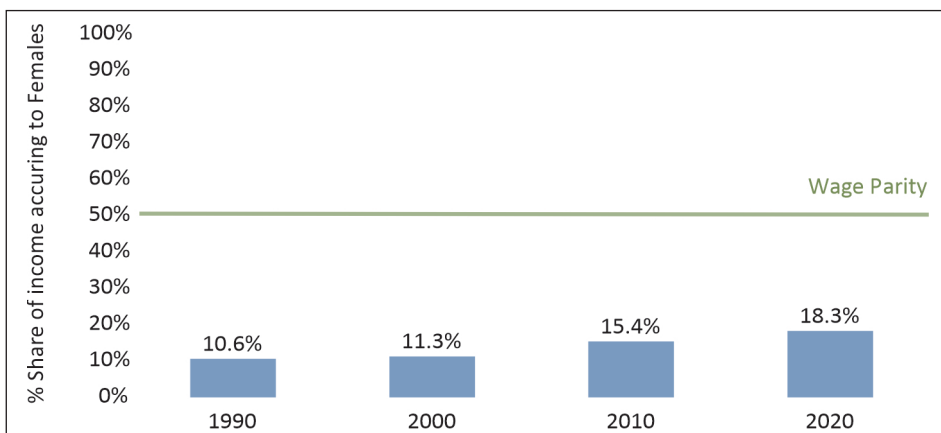
Source: Exim Bank Calculation based on data from DGCI&S and MOSPI

Gender-Wage Gap Across Major Sectors

According to the estimates of the World Inequality Report 2022, the share of income accruing to females in total labour income in India stood at only 18.3 percent in 2020, as against 81.7 percent share of males in the total labour income in the country. As per the report, the share of female labour income in India has steadily improved over the past three decades, rising from 10.6 percent in 1990 to 15.4 percent in 2010, and further increasing to 18.3 percent in 2020 (Exhibit 2.7). Nevertheless, the share remains substantially below the required levels for attaining wage parity. Besides, the share is also lower when compared to Asian average of 21 percent³⁷.

³⁷ Average excludes China. Source: World Inequality Report 2022.

Exhibit 2.7: Share of Females in Total Labour Income in India (1990-2020)



Source: World Inequality Report 2022; Exim Bank Research

Sector-wise average wage data for males and females in India also highlights that the wages are significantly lower for women in almost all sectors, except real estate and education services. Even in sectors such as agriculture and allied sector, where the relative participation of female in the workforce is large, the average wages earned by female is nearly three-fourth of the wages earned by males (Table 2.4).

Table 2.4: Broad Sector-wise Average Wage Earnings of Males and Females in India

Broad Sectors	Average Wage Earnings (₹) Per Day from Casual Labour		
	Male	Female	Wage Gap
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	350	263	87
Mining and quarrying	444	344	100
Manufacturing	435	304	131
Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply	497	0	497
Water supply; sewerage, waste management and remediation activities	466	382	84
Construction	459	283	176
Wholesale and retail trade	433	274	159
Transportation and storage	501	429	72

Broad Sectors	Average Wage Earnings (₹) Per Day from Casual Labour		
	Male	Female	Wage Gap
Accommodation and food services	532	342	190
Information and communication	460	200	260
Financial and insurance activities	300	0	300
Real estate activities	0	550	-550
Professional, scientific and technical activities	557	370	187
Administrative and support service activities	426	290	136
Public administration and defence; compulsory social security	333	329	4
Education	393	406	-13
Human health and social work activities	501	112	389
Arts, entertainment and recreation	493	265	228
Other service activities	404	253	151
Activities of households as employers	428	300	128

Source: Annual Period Labour Force Survey Report 2022-23, Exim Bank Research

Women's Access to Resources in India

One of the reasons for low participation of women in workforce and businesses is their limited access to essential resources, such as ownership of land and house, access to financial resources and access to digital tools, including e-commerce resources.

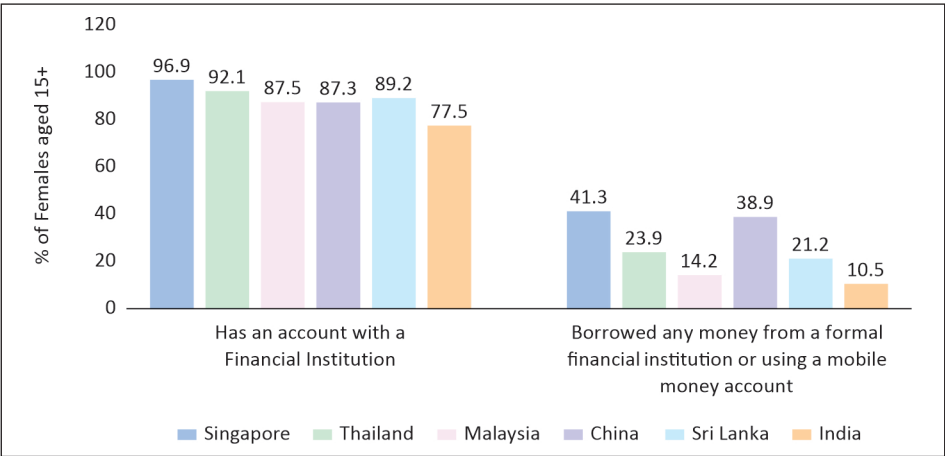
Access to Finance

Business enterprises, particularly MSMEs in India, face a variety of challenges that constrain their growth prospects, of which access to finance has been a key challenge. The challenge in accessing capital from formal financial institutions (FIs) is even higher for women entrepreneurs. As per a recent report by the IFC, more than 90 percent of the women entrepreneurs in India have not availed finance from formal FIs.

Cross country data from the World Bank’s Global Findex database also corroborates this finding. Analysis indicates that the share of females (aged 15+) in India having an account with a financial institution stood at 77.5 percent in 2021, which is low compared to several Asian countries such as Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, China and Sri Lanka (Exhibit 2.8). Further, the percentage of females that have borrowed from any formal financial institution or mobile money account stood at a meagre 10.5 percent in 2021, which is also substantially lower when compared to the aforementioned countries. This is also lower when compared the percentage of males (aged 15+) in India that have borrowed formally, which stood at 15 percent during the same period.

Some of the major barriers for access to finance for women include lack of collateral, lack of ecosystem support, lack of understanding of financial profile and credit needs, and unconscious gender bias by the financial institutions, among others. As per a recent report by the IFC, financial institutions in India hesitate to view women enterprises, particularly very small enterprises, as an addressable market segment. Over the recent period, crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic have further exacerbated the challenge of lack of access to finance for women entrepreneurs³⁸.

Exhibit 2.8: Women’s Access to Finance – Cross-Country Comparison



Source: The World Bank Global Findex Database; Exim Bank Research

³⁸ IFC (2022), Opportunities and Constraints of Women Owned Very Small Enterprises in India

Moreover, recent research suggests that women-owned SMEs face considerable difficulties in accessing trade finance. As per the Asian Development Bank's Trade Finance Gaps, Growth, and Jobs Survey Report 2021, women-led businesses are likely to face higher rejection rates and therefore greater financing gaps than businesses led by well-represented groups. As per the Survey findings, globally, trade finance applications of nearly 70 percent of surveyed women-owned firms were totally or partially rejected. Lack of collateral was among the topmost reasons for rejection of trade finance applications³⁹.

Ownership of Property

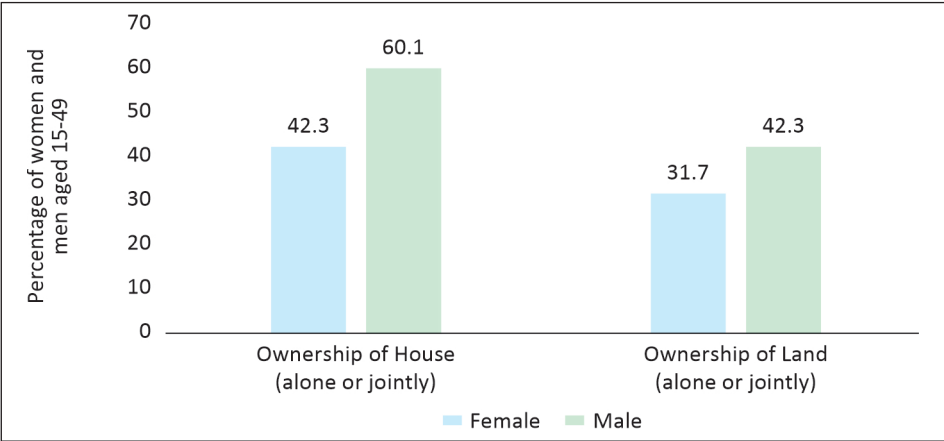
Properties such as land and house are important resources, as it can generate rental income as also serve as collateral for availing credit for financing business activities including exports. Land ownership is in fact considered the single most critical entry point for women's empowerment in India. In India, as per a report by IFC, factors such as lack of collateral and weak property rights of women act as major hindrances for women's access to finance⁴⁰.

As per the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) 2019-21, in India, the share of females aged 15-49 with ownership of land (alone or jointly) stood at 31.7 percent, as compared to 42.3 percent of males aged 15-49 with land ownership (alone or jointly) during the same period. Likewise, while 42.3 percent of females aged 15-49 have ownership of house (alone or jointly), it is still lower when compared to males (Exhibit 2.9). The gap in access to collateral acts as a major hinderance for women-owned enterprises to expand their businesses, both domestically and for exports.

³⁹ ADB (2021), Trade Finance Gaps, Growth, and Jobs Survey Report

⁴⁰ IFC (2022), Opportunities and Constraints of Women Owned Very Small Enterprises in India

Exhibit 2.9: Ownership of Property by Females and Males in India



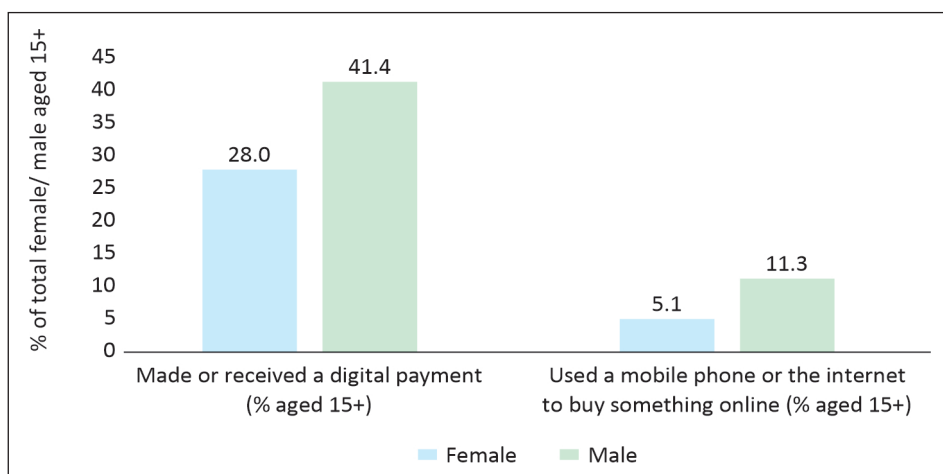
Source: National Family Health Survey 2019-21; Exim Bank Research

Access to Digital Tools (incl. e-Commerce tools)

Globally, in 2023, 70.1 percent of males used the internet, as compared to 64.7 percent of females using the internet. Gender gaps in internet use have nearly been eliminated in high income countries with 93.8 percent of males and 92.6 percent of females using the internet in 2023. However, large gaps persist in least developed countries (LDCs) and developing countries. In the LDCs, 41.3 percent of males and only 29.5 percent of females used the internet in 2023. Meanwhile, in low income and lower middle-income countries, 70.9 percent of females used the internet, as compared to 93.5 percent of males using the internet in 2023⁴¹. In India, as per latest data available from NFHS 2019-21, around 33 percent females used internet, as compared to 51 percent males using internet. Further, data suggests that only 28 percent of females aged 15+ in India made or received digital payments in 2021, which is much lower than the proportion of males who made or received digital payments. Even as consumers, females’ use of e-commerce in India is less than half that of males in India (Exhibit 2.10). Addressing these gaps would be important as equitable access to the digital tools can empower women, enhance their participation in the digital economy, and open up e-commerce opportunities for women-owned businesses.

⁴¹ Based on data sourced from the ITU 2023 Statistics on Use of Internet

Exhibit 2.10: Gender-wise Digital Payments and e-Commerce Activity in India (2021)



Source: The World Bank Gender Statistics Database; Exim Bank Research

e-Commerce presents considerable opportunities for women's economic empowerment and can have a positive impact on women's livelihoods by supporting business diversification and expansion, including for exports. It is increasingly being considered by women-owned small and medium-sized businesses for enhancing their market access. A recent study by ICRIER on MSMEs in India notes that 45.1 percent of the women-owned enterprises surveyed were integrated with e-commerce platforms, as compared to 50.3 percent of male-owned enterprises reported to be integrated with e-commerce platforms. This suggests that notwithstanding the relatively lower share of females using internet in the country, women-owned enterprises are not far behind those owned by men in terms of the use of e-commerce as a sales channel. This may be because women business owners face greater difficulty in accessing traditional markets compared to male business owners due to social and cultural norms that constrain their ability to travel or negotiate with buyers. As a result, women may be able to generate higher sales when selling through e-commerce platforms. In fact, the aforementioned study by ICRIER also highlights that women-led small and medium enterprises, with 50 to 75 percent of their sales made digitally,

reported a 5 percentage points higher digital sales compared to those led by men (in the 30 days preceding the date of the survey)⁴².

Conclusion

Analysis in this chapter highlights that the average female labour force participation during 2015-2021 is the lowest in India vis-à-vis other G20 countries. Nevertheless, at the state-level, 25 out the 37 states/UTs had a higher female labour force participation rate than the all-India level. In terms of activity, female workers in the country are primarily engaged in the agriculture and allied sector, followed by manufacturing sector.

Analysis of female employment intensity across sectors indicates that there are 12 sectors with relatively higher level of female employment compared to all India level. However, majority of these sectors are in the resource-intensive and low-value added export sectors. Analysis in the chapter also highlights the gaps in female's access to essential resources in India, such as ownership of land and house, access to financial resources. While lack of access to property and finance have constrained female participation in the economy, it is promising to note that the gender gap in access to digital tools, particularly e-commerce resources, is much lower in India.

⁴² ICRIER (2023), Annual Survey of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in India

3. Strategies for Utilising Trade as a Tool for Women's Economic Empowerment

International trade plays a vital role in achieving gender equality. As noted earlier in the study, female labour force participation in India is lowest among the G20 countries. Moreover, women's participation in high value added and technology intensive exports sector in India is limited. To enhance women's participation in trade and utilise trade as a tool for enhancing women's economic empowerment, the present chapter suggests some actionable strategies.

Mainstreaming Gender Considerations in India's Trade Agreement

Mainstreaming gender considerations across trade agreements involves integrating gender perspectives across all stages of trade agreement negotiation, trade policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation. This approach aims to address the specific needs and constraints, and create opportunities for women in trade, thereby promoting gender equality and women's economic empowerment.

Gender issues have been increasingly integrated into regional trade agreements (RTAs) over the recent decades. The first chapter on trade and gender issues was included in the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) in the early 1990s. The WTO's database on gender provisions in RTAs highlights that, as of September 2022, out of the 353 RTAs in force around the world, 101 RTAs include at least one explicit provision to address gender issues. This means that almost one-third of RTAs currently in force contain gender-related provisions. Region-wise analysis indicates that nearly 78 percent of Europe's RTAs contain at least one gender-specific provision, followed by 38 percent of North America's RTAs, 32 percent of Africa's RTAs, 20 percent of South America's RTAs, and 14 percent of RTAs involving the

Asia-Pacific region⁴³. On a country level, it is noteworthy that 153 countries have at least one gender-specific provisions in their RTAs⁴⁴. However, India is not one among these countries. As per the WTO database, none of India's 13 Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) and 6 Preferential Trade Agreements (PTAs) have even one gender-specific provision or gender chapter⁴⁵.

Recent analysis indicates that gender provisions in FTAs should be more impactful. An assessment by the WTO suggests that several of the current trade agreements with gender provisions do not adequately address the distributional issues that are central to more inclusive trade⁴⁶. Moreover, many of the gender-provisions in FTAs also lack a focus on tailoring, implementing, enforcing or applying the gender-related commitments.

India needs to consider renegotiating existing FTAs for including gender provisions or gender chapter in its FTAs. The inclusion of such provisions in trade agreements can encourage positive changes at the domestic level and help women access economic opportunities once put into action. India could consider the following aspects for making its trade agreements more gender inclusive.

Gender-explicit Preamble in Trade Agreements

Mainstreaming a gender viewpoint can be fostered by providing gender commitments in the preamble or general objectives of an agreement. Preambles and general objectives are helpful in setting the tone for an agreement, even though they do not contain any specific or tangible commitments and are not legally binding. The preamble is a vital part of any international instrument or agreement, as it can be instrumental in ascertaining the intentions of the drafters or negotiators at the time of conclusion of the agreement. In disputes arising out of a given agreement, decision-makers can consider the wording used in the preamble to identify the parties' underlying objectives and intentions.

⁴³ WTO (2022), Trade and Gender-Related Provisions in Regional Trade Agreements

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ WTO Database on Gender Provisions in Regional Trade Agreements, data updated in September 2022

⁴⁶ WTO (2023), Gender Mainstreaming in Trade Agreements

One recent example is the Preamble to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), which stresses “the importance of promoting ... gender equality...”, alongside environmental protection, labour rights, sustainable development and indigenous rights⁴⁷. Likewise, the Chile-Uruguay FTA (2016) also has gender explicit phrase in its preamble viz. “TO PROMOTE gender mainstreaming in international trade, encouraging equal rights, treatment and opportunities between men and women”. India could also consider the inclusion of such gender-explicit wordings in its existing and upcoming FTAs.

Training and Capacity-building Programmes

Many FTAs include provisions for enhancing women’s access to education and skill development. For instance, in the EU-Algeria Association Agreement Article 78, the parties seek to cooperate by placing a special emphasis on “giving the female population access to education, including technical training, higher education and vocational training”. This agreement includes commitments on enhancing women’s access to education though it does not elaborate on the type of education and skill development opportunities that the involved parties should address⁴⁸. Likewise, Article 22.4 of the Peru-Australia FTA also provides for “undertaking cooperative activities aimed at enhancing the ability of women, including workers and business owners, to fully access and benefit from the opportunities created by this Agreement. These activities may include providing advice or training, such as through the exchange of officials, and exchanging information and experience on i) programmes aimed at helping women build their skills and capacity, and enhancing their access to markets, science and technology, and financing; ii) developing women’s leadership networks; and iii) identifying best practices related to workplace flexibility”⁴⁹. India can consider such provisions for improving women’s access to skill upgradation for inclusion in its FTAs.

⁴⁷ WTO (2023), Gender mainstreaming in trade agreements

⁴⁸ Bahri, A. (2021). Gender Mainstreaming in Free Trade Agreements: A Regional Analysis and Good Practice Examples. Gender, Social Inclusion and Trade Knowledge Product Series

⁴⁹ WTO (2022), Trade and Gender-Related Provisions In Regional Trade Agreements

In case of India, as noted in the previous chapter, women's employment remains low in export-intensive sectors with high skill and technology orientation. Training and capacity building for skill development of women in sectors like high-tech manufacturing as well as services sectors like information and communication technology, business services, financial services, and other professional services like law and medicine, etc. could help improve their employability in these sectors.

Minimum Legal Standards

Trade agreements typically contain legal standards, however, not many of those standards address gender issues. Certain agreements do have such gender-related standards, but the strictness of the obligation is affected by bylaws and clauses. In the EU–Albania Stabilisation and Association Agreement, for example, the EU member states seek to cooperate on supporting Albania in adjusting its legislation concerning working conditions and equal opportunities for women, so as to align it with the existing level of protection in the EU member states⁵⁰. This provision seems to be a minimum legal standard, but the inclusion of the expression “seek to cooperate” liberates the parties from any such legal obligation to cooperate and makes it look like a best endeavour provision⁵¹. The provisions of international agreements such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW 1979), and the International Labour Organisation's primarily Convention No. 111 on discrimination and/or Convention No. 100 on equal remuneration can serve as models for trade agreements, including for India's FTAs.

Gender Committees

Gender committees serve as a necessary monitoring mechanism once trade agreements have included fundamental gender-related elements.

⁵⁰ Article 99 of the EU–Albania Stabilisation and Association Agreement

⁵¹ Bahri, A. (2021). Gender Mainstreaming in Free Trade Agreements: A Regional Analysis and Good Practice Examples. Gender, Social Inclusion and Trade Knowledge Product Series

The signatory parties should typically provide equal representation to the committee from the public sector, non-public sector, and other pertinent stakeholders, with a gender balance. In order to maximise the benefits of the agreement, these committees deliberate over coordination for the initiation and execution of trade and gender-related policies. One example of such an approach is the Chile–Uruguay FTA (2016), which provides for the creation of a gender committee to monitor and implement the envisaged commitments as also to solve issues regarding application and interpretation of gender commitments through consultations and dialogue. Likewise, the Chile–Canada FTA (2019) sets a high benchmark for other agreements by providing operation requirements and functions for its trade and gender committee, as well as a mechanism of parties to engage in consultation to resolve disputes. Similarly, the Chile–Ecuador FTA (2020) defines contact points and responsibilities as well as a dedicated bilateral consultation mechanism to solve differences that may arise from provisions in the trade and gender chapter. This mechanism is based on mutually acceptable resolution⁵². India could consider including similar provisions while revisiting its current agreements and negotiating new ones. This would help in creating a gender-balanced decision and monitoring mechanism for India under its FTAs.

Research and Impact Assessment

India could also consider provisions that include ex-ante and ex-post gender focused analysis of trade agreements. Towards this, collection and exchange of gender disaggregated data on all trade variables could enhance the impact assessment. Such provisions already exist in FTAs like the Chile-Uruguay FTA and the Canada-Chile FTA. In fact, Canada has come up with Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA Plus), which covers pre and post trade impact of trade agreement on various cross sections such as gender, region, culture, income, education, ethnicity, etc. India could also consider impact assessment of existing trade agreement from gender perspective, and add provisions for such assessment in its future negotiations to enable equitable benefit for women from trade agreements.

⁵² WTO (2023), Gender Mainstreaming in Trade Agreements

Joining International Gender and Trade Arrangements

In August 2020, Canada, Chile and New Zealand negotiated the first-ever freestanding international cooperation agreement on trade and gender – the Global Trade and Gender Arrangement (GTAGA) – which was later joined by Mexico, Colombia and Peru as well. The Arrangement aims to “promote mutually supportive trade and gender policies and unlock new opportunities to increase women’s participation in trade as part of broader efforts to improve gender equality and women’s economic empowerment.” The GTAGA includes commitments on non-discrimination, cooperation, exchange of good practices, and non-derogation from gender protections to promote trade and investment, using a legal construct increasingly common in the labour and environmental areas. India could also consider joining similar arrangements to support women’s economic empowerment through trade with the help of multilateral cooperation.

Promoting Women as Suppliers through Public Procurement Channels

Public procurement is the process by which governments purchase goods, services and works from the private sector. The size of procurement expenditure in a country reflects the level of engagement by the government in providing public goods, services and construction works. As per recent estimates, India’s expenditure on public procurement was more than 20 percent of its GDP, which is substantially higher when compared to the global average of 12 percent as also higher than the average of middle-income countries at 13.2 percent⁵³.

Governments around the world are increasingly seeking to negotiate public procurement chapters in trade agreements. This could also be used as a tool to promote women’s economic empowerment as suppliers. Recently, India and UAE entered into a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), which has a dedicated chapter on government procurement. India is also negotiating similar chapter in its upcoming FTAs with countries like the UK. In the wake of these developments, India could undertake targeted

⁵³ ERICA BOSIO, SIMEON DJANKOV (2020), “How large is public procurement?”, World Bank

measures for women-led enterprises to tap the procurement opportunities arising from such FTAs, as also to remain competitive in the wake of rising international competition in domestic procurements.

An essential step for women businesses to leverage the public procurement opportunities in FTA partner countries would be to build capacities and experience in domestic procurements. The Government of India has been taking measures to enhance participation of women-led enterprises in public procurement. The Ministry of MSME has mandated that 3 percent of procurements by Central Ministries should be sourced from women-led MSMEs. Currently, a women-led enterprise in India is defined as a “small-scale industrial unit/industry related service or business enterprise managed by one or more women entrepreneurs in proprietary concerns in which she/they individually or jointly have a share of capital of not less than 51 percent as partners/shareholders/directors of private limited companies/members of cooperative societies”. However, despite the mandate, procurement from women MSMEs accounted for only 1.33 percent of the total public procurement done by the Central Ministries and Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs) in 2022-23. Ministry-wise procurement data suggests that out of the 29 ministries that have set targets for procurement from women MSMEs, only 8 have achieved/exceeded their procurement target in 2022-23 (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1: Ministry Wise-Procurement from Women MSMEs in 2022-23

Ministry Name	Target for Procurement from Women MSEs (in ₹ Crore)	Actual Procurement From Women MSEs (in ₹ Crore)	Achieved %
Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare	2.3	0.2	10.0%
Ministry of Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy (AYUSH)	3.5	0.0	0.3%
Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers	172.0	38.3	22.3%

Ministry Name	Target for Procurement from Women MSEs (in ₹ Crore)	Actual Procurement From Women MSEs (in ₹ Crore)	Achieved %
Ministry of Civil Aviation	39.2	21.5	54.8%
Ministry of Coal	922.2	203.9	22.1%
Ministry of Commerce and Industry and Industry	0.1	0.1	63.1%
Ministry of Communications	32.4	45.0	139.0%
Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution	127.1	150.0	118.0%
Ministry of Defence	453.5	359.4	79.2%
Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region	1.1	0.0	0.0%
Ministry of Finance	63.8	3.6	5.7%
Ministry of Health and Family Welfare	6.2	9.2	149.0%
Ministry of Heavy Industries and Public Enterprises	299.0	23.2	7.8%
Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs	0.5	0.6	126.2%
Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises	2.4	0.8	33.3%
Ministry of Mines	105.3	45.9	43.6%
Ministry of New and Renewable Energy	0.5	2.9	562.7%
Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas	1753.7	384.7	21.9%
Ministry of Power	391.3	191.5	48.9%
Ministry of Railways	16.7	36.3	217.5%
Ministry of Science and Technology	0.3	0.02	7.0%
Ministry of Shipping	36.6	32.4	88.4%
Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment	10.6	4.7	44.4%
Ministry of Steel	419.6	159.6	38.0%

Ministry Name	Target for Procurement from Women MSEs (in ₹ Crore)	Actual Procurement From Women MSEs (in ₹ Crore)	Achieved %
Ministry of Textiles	39.1	3.1	8.0%
Ministry of Tribal Affairs	0.1	0.2	334.3%
Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation	7.5	1.0	13.6%
Ministry of Atomic Energy	168.6	55.0	32.6%
Ministry of Space	0.04	0.05	115.0%

Note: Cells highlighted in green indicate ministries that have met/exceeded their procurement target

Source: MSME Sambandh and Exim Bank Research

The barriers to participation of women-led MSMEs in public procurement could be related to lack of scale, lack of administrative, financial and technical capacity to be a supplier, and relatively limited access to finance. To bolster the capabilities of women-led MSMEs and enhance their participation in public procurement, both domestically and in FTA partner countries, the Government of India could consider creating a Gender Opportunity Fund. Towards this, funds could be pooled by the Central Ministries and CPSEs from the shortfall in their procurement from women-led MSMEs. In 2022-23 alone, the shortfall amounted to nearly ₹ 3,300 crore. The Government could utilise this fund for investing in capacity building, training, and certification of women-led MSMEs. A similar capacity building approach has been adopted in Chile wherein the Chilean Public Procurement Agency 'ChileCompra', in partnership with the Asociación de Mujeres Empresarias Proveedores del Estado (AMEPE), established a six-month mentorship programme for women organisations in the first year of their incorporation. The programme includes entrepreneurship coaching to help the participants expand their business capabilities to tap procurement opportunities. Similarly in India, training and workshops for women-led MSMEs can be facilitated through the fund, which could cover areas such as procurement policies, leadership development, expansion of business opportunities especially in the high skill

and technology-intensive sectors, procedures for tapping public procurement opportunities in FTA partner countries, international standards requirements and compliance norms for international public procurements, among others. Additionally, the fund could also be utilised for training on prequalification certifications like ISO 9001, etc., which can enable women-led MSMEs to clear the prequalification rounds in international procurements.

Besides this, it would also be important for India to ensure that international participation in domestic procurement through FTAs does not negatively impact sectors with relatively greater female participation including sensitive sectors such as agriculture, textiles, etc.

Seeking Tariff Relaxation in Women-Intensive Sectors

Recent analysis by the IMF highlights that sectors that are female-intensive, such as food and beverages, and textiles and apparel, on average face higher tariffs on inputs⁵⁴. In India as well, products produced largely by women face on an average 6 percentage-points higher tariffs than products produced largely by men in export markets⁵⁵. Further, women in lower-income groups faced higher tariffs in India (Table 3.2). It is noteworthy that women consistently face higher tariffs than men across all income deciles, except for the highest income decile where men face tariffs that are nearly one percentage point higher than those faced by women. Interestingly, in the two highest income deciles, the average income of women is higher than that of men.

⁵⁴ IMF (2023), Trade Drives Gender Equality and Development

⁵⁵ WTO, World Bank (2020), Women and Trade Report

Table 3.2: Income Decile-wise Gender Wage Gap and Tariff Gap in India

Income Decile	Weekly Wage			Tariff % Faced		
	Men	Women	Wage Gap	Men	Women	Incremental Tariff Faced by Women
1	208	206	2	20.4	21.7	1.3
2	386	382	4	22.2	22.6	0.4
3	529	522	7	19.9	21.5	1.6
4	666	663	3	19.9	20.2	0.3
5	767	744	23	18.1	21.7	3.6
6	934	920	14	15.8	18.2	2.4
7	1113	1091	22	14.7	19.7	5.0
8	1419	1401	18	12.0	15.1	3.1
9	2190	2254	-64	7.8	8.6	0.8
10	8268	8508	-240	4.6	3.6	-1.0
Overall	1675	720	955	14.4	20.4	6.0

Note: i) Cells highlighted in red indicate the income groups where women get lower weekly wages than men and/or face higher tariff than men; ii) Cells highlighted in green indicate the income groups where men get lower weekly wages than women and/or face higher tariff than women.

Source: Mendoza, Nayyar, and Piermartini, 2018

Analysis of the effectively applied tariff faced by India in its top 10 export destinations also corroborates this finding. Out of the top 20 products facing highest average applied tariff across India's top 10 export destinations, 7 products belong to the food processing sector, whereas another 6 product categories are from the textile sector (Table 3.3). There is a need for policymakers to negotiate tariff relaxation in these sectors that are relatively more important for female employment.

Table 3.3: Top 20 Products facing High Tariff on Exports from India across Top 10 Export Destinations in 2021 (%)

Category Name	Weighted Average Effectively Applied Tariff on Exports from India in 2021 (%)										Maximum applied tariff rate (%) across top 10 destinations	Average applied tariff rate (%) across top 10 destinations
	Bangladesh	China	Germany	Indonesia	The Netherlands	Saudi Arabia	Singapore	UAE	The UK	The USA		
Tobacco and Manufactured Tobacco Substitutes	20.8	50.7	4.9	0.0	5.1	145.4	0.0	164.6	0.0	76.2	164.6	57.5
Dairy Produce; Birds' Eggs; Natural Honey	13.5	-	18.2	2.6	54.0	6.9	0.0	5.0		2.3	54.0	17.4
Sugars and Sugar Confectionery	10.2	32.4	28.3	8.5	21.1	0.4	0.0	0.2	6.0	30.1	32.4	15.4
Products of the Milling Industry; Malt; Starches;	0.1	14.9	29.7	9.2	36.4	4.7	0.0	1.1	27.0	3.0	36.4	14.8
Beverages, Spirits and Vinegar	23.9	8.0	8.4	42.8	6.5	5.1	0.0	4.3	0.6	3.3	42.8	13.2
Meat and Edible Meat Offal	5.0	-	44.1	5.0	-	4.8	0.0	2.5	-	0.3	44.1	13.2
Articles of Apparel and Clothing Accessories, Knitted/crocheted	15.9	5.3	9.5	24.7	9.4	5.2	0.0	5.0	0.0	13.0	24.7	10.2
Preparations of Cereals, Flour, Starch or Milk	24.4	8.7	15.8	0.1	15.1	7.6	0.0	5.0	5.7	3.0	24.4	10.0
Articles of Apparel and Clothing Accessories, Not knitted/crocheted	15.6	4.8	9.4	23.9	9.4	5.0	0.0	5.0	0.0	10.6	23.9	9.8
Knitted or Crocheted Fabrics	25.0	5.3	8.0	6.0	7.8	5.0	0.0	5.0	0.0	9.9	25.0	8.8

Category Name	Weighted Average Effectively Applied Tariff on Exports from India in 2021 (%)										Maximum applied tariff rate (%) across top 10 destinations	Average applied tariff rate (%) across top 10 destinations
	Bangladesh	China	Germany	Indonesia	The Netherlands	Saudi Arabia	Singapore	UAE	The UK	The USA		
Special Woven Fabrics; Tufted Textile Fabrics	25.0	7.7	7.2	4.6	6.6	5.0	0.0	5.0	0.0	7.8	25.0	8.5
Edible Fruit and Nuts; Peel of Citrus Fruit	24.7	13.0	4.0	3.7	7.0	2.8	0.0	2.9	3.0	1.7	24.7	8.0
Preparations of Vegetables, Fruit, Nuts	15.5	5.2	13.2	3.1	13.1	5.2	0.0	5.0	0.4	8.6	15.5	7.7
Cereals	1.2	6.4	20.0	5.0	14.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	8.8	6.0	20.0	7.5
Silk	22.8	8.8	6.6	3.3	6.9	5.0	0.0	5.0	0.0	0.8	22.8	7.5
Footwear, Gaiters and Parts	20.1	5.6	4.5	4.5	4.4	5.6	0.0	5.0	0.0	9.5	20.1	7.2
Cocoa and Cocoa Preparations	25.0	6.4	4.2	0.2	3.9	8.0	0.0	5.0	0.0	0.3	25.0	7.1
Miscellaneous Edible Preparations	18.1	10.3	4.3	3.5	5.5	5.8	0.0	4.7	0.7	6.8	18.1	7.1
Essential Oils, Resinoids, perfumery	23.7	12.0	0.0	5.5	0.0	5.4	0.0	5.0	0.0	1.3	23.7	6.9
Other Made-Up Textile Articles; Sets; Worn Clothing	9.5	6.1	8.0	10.6	7.3	5.7	0.0	5.0	0.0	9.0	10.6	6.5

Note: Cells highlighted in pink indicate products from textile and allied sector; those highlighted in yellow indicate products from agriculture and allied sector, and the cells highlighted in orange indicate products from the food processing sector—all the three sectors being relatively important for female employment.

Source: WITS Database, Exim Bank Research

In order to understand the impact of tariff relaxation in female employment intensive sectors on India’s economy and employment, a computable general equilibrium analysis has been undertaken based on a dynamic GTAP model. In this analysis, a tariff shock has been applied on female employment intensive sectors identified in the previous chapter, including crop and animal production, manufacturing industries such as textiles, apparel, food products, tobacco and beverages, wood products, leather, pharmaceuticals, chemicals, paper and paper products and other manufacturing. Exim Bank’s analysis based on this exercise suggests that a 1 percent reduction in tariffs faced by India’s exports in these sectors that are relatively more important for female workforce could lead to a 0.363 percent increase in labour supply in India and a 0.136 percent increase in India’s GDP. The overall welfare gains from such a tariff reduction are estimated to be nearly 3.6 percent (Table 3.4). Thus, India needs to consider this gendered perspective while negotiating its trade agreements, to enhance female workforce participation and welfare gains from trade.

Table 3.4: Impact of Tariff Relaxation in Sectors Relatively Important for Female Employment

Variables	Impact of a 1-Percent Tariff Relaxation in Female Employment Intensive Sectors (% change)
GDP Growth	0.136%
Labour Supply	0.363%
Overall Welfare Gains	3.615%

Source: Exim Bank Calculation Based on GTAP Model

Enhancing Implementation of Women-Centric Measures in India’s Trade Facilitation

Research suggests that the hassles and costs of border crossings lead women to opt out of cross-border trade activities or choose informal over formal practices⁵⁶. Even trade facilitation interventions are commonly devised in a

⁵⁶ WTO (2023), Gender Mainstreaming in Trade Agreements

gender-neutral manner. However, in practice, trade facilitation affects men and women differently. Women exporters, especially those who are small scale, are disadvantaged in obtaining information and justice, personal safety, as also in accessing transport services and protection from harassment, discrimination and abuse. They are also not equal in their ability to benefit from trade facilitation due to their different economic situation and resources⁵⁷. Gender-sensitive implementation of trade facilitation contributes to women's economic empowerment by addressing barriers that affect women exporters' participation in cross-border trade. It helps increase their profit from exports, lowers their vulnerability and encourages new business opportunities in cross-border trade.

Globally, one of the key trade facilitation initiatives has been the WTO's Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) 2017, which aims at implementing measures to "expedite the movement, release, and clearance of goods being traded across borders." Measures contained in the TFA directly contribute to improvement in access to the internet, reduction in corruption and bribery, and formalisation and growth of MSMEs, all of which directly impact women. Even though the TFA does not include any provisions to mainstream gender, a number of provisions under the TFA provide the opportunity to add a gender dimension to the implementation of trade-facilitating measures. Several articles of the TFA include provisions that could be made gender-inclusive in their implementation. Table 3.5 illustrates examples of gender dimension in some of the Articles of the TFA.

⁵⁷ ITC (2023), WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement: A gender lens for action

Table 3.5: Examples of Actions to Mainstream Gender into Implementation of Some TFA Articles

TFA Article	Trade Facilitation Measure to be Implemented	Actions to Mainstream Gender
Article 1: Publication and Availability of Information	Members should publish easily accessible trade-related information (about import, export, and transit procedures) on the Internet.	Women should be consulted to understand the most beneficial format and accessible platform for information to be available to them (i.e., internet, apps, SMS). Capacity-building training for women-owned businesses (WoBs) can be provided to explain trading basics and ways of navigating information platforms.
Article 2: Opportunity to Comment, Information Before Entry Into Force, and Consultations	All interested parties must be consulted and given the opportunity to give comments on rules and protocols before they are enforced. Members should provide for regular consultations between its border agencies and traders or stakeholders located within its territory.	Women's trade and entrepreneurial organisations must be consulted before policies and rules are entered into force. Women's business associations and groups must be included in the consultative process between authorities responsible for trade facilitation.
Article 10: Formalities Connected with Importation, Exportation and Transit	Members should periodically review formalities and documentation requirements in line with specified criteria. Members should use a Single Window for procedural formalities.	WoBs should be included in the review of simplified and harmonised trade processes. There should be a focus on sectors that are most likely to impact WoBs and SMEs. Further, support in terms of marketing and awareness related to the simplified trade processes could be provided among WoBs. Women must be provided capacity-building training to navigate electronic platforms, such as the single window.

TFA Article	Trade Facilitation Measure to be Implemented	Actions to Mainstream Gender
Article 21: Provision of Assistance and Support for Capacity Building	Donor members should facilitate the provision of assistance and support for capacity building to developing-country and least-developed country members.	Capacity-building funds should include specific assistance to female entrepreneurs to improve the ability of women traders to meet customs requirements and to take advantage of preferential trade agreements.
Article 23: Institutional Arrangements	Member countries should set up institutional arrangements for overseeing the implementation of measures of the TFA by establishing National Trade Facilitation Committees (NTFCs).	NTFCs should be made gender balanced and incorporate gender issues into their agendas. They should include provisions to address women's concerns in the national trade facilitation strategies and implement specific trade facilitation measures targeted at women. The agenda of the NTFCs should be made gender sensitive by making sure there is an adequate representation of women traders and women entrepreneurial support organisations in the list of members.

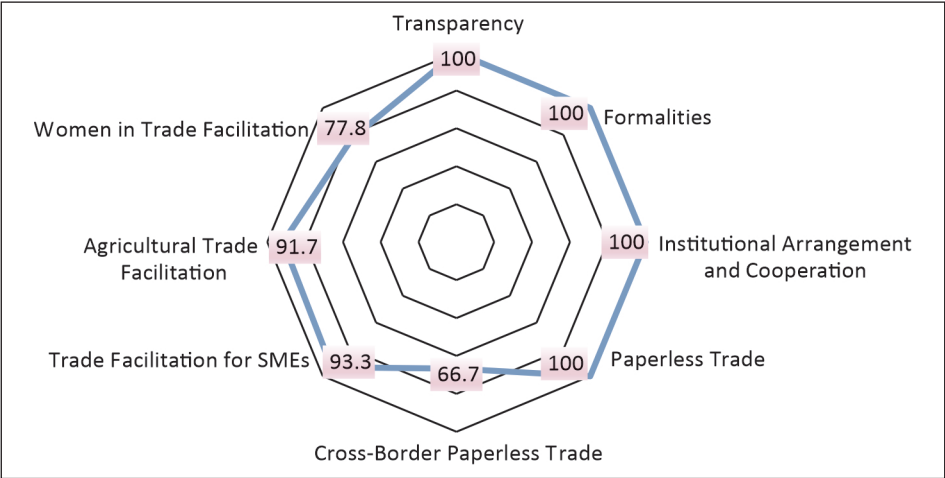
Source: Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation (2020) and Taneja et al. (2018).

India has also adopted the WTO TFA to implement measures to expedite the movement, release, and clearance of goods being traded across borders. As per the Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, which assesses the implementation of TFA measures, India's trade facilitation implementation scores have substantially improved, from 63.4 percent in 2015 to 93.5 percent in 2023. India has marked substantial improvements in the areas of transparency, formalities, institutional arrangement and cooperation and paperless trade.

The survey also includes scores on the implementation of "women in trade facilitation" measures based on answers to three main areas viz. i) trade facilitation policy/strategy to increase women's participation in trade; ii) trade facilitation measures to benefit women involved in trade and iii) women

membership in the National Trade Facilitation Committee or similar bodies. It is noteworthy that India’s implementation of all these three aspects is only partially completed. As a result, India’s scores on “women in trade facilitation” is much lower when compared to India’s implementation scores for several other trade facilitation measures under the TFA (Exhibit 3.1).

Exhibit 3.1: India’s Implementation Scores (%) for Various TFA Measures (2023)



Source: United Nations (2023) Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation Report; Exim Bank Research.

There is, thus, a need for India to work towards enhancing the implementation of the measures related to “women in trade facilitation”. In addition to these measures, some other trade facilitation measures with a gender-sensitive approach that could be implemented in India include simplifying administrative procedures and establishing support services tailored to women traders, such as gender-responsive trade facilitation centres and capacity-building programmes. India could consider implementing some of the global best practices such as the SheTrades South America project. The SheTrades South America project is designed to empower women in trade through i) customised training programmes aimed at enhancing women’s capacities in export-import procedures, market access, trade regulation

compliance and customs procedures; ii) access to critical market intelligence, trade opportunities and up-to-date information on trade-related regulations for female entrepreneurs; iii) networking opportunities by connecting women traders with potential buyers and strategic partners; and iv) advocacy efforts to promote policies and measures that create a supportive environment for women entrepreneurs⁵⁸.

Devising Distinct Support Measures for Women in India's Foreign Trade Policy

India's Foreign Trade Policy (FTP) 2023 recognises the need for focussed interventions for MSMEs and e-commerce exporters, with distinct provisions/ chapters dedicated to enhancing exports from these segments. However, there are currently no such distinct provisions/ support measures for women exporters. Given the importance of trade in women's economic empowerment, there is a need for distinct measures to encourage women entrepreneurs to enhance participation in international trade.

The Government of India (GOI) could consider introducing specific provisions to support women in its existing schemes. One example of such a provision could be in the form of greater benefits for women exporters under the GOI's Interest Equalisation Scheme (IES) for Pre and Post Shipment Rupee Export Credit. Under the scheme, interest equalisation of 3 percent is currently available for MSME manufacturer exporters exporting under any HS lines, and 2 percent for manufacturer exporters and merchant exporters exporting under 410 HS lines. As per the guidelines, there is an upfront reduction in the interest rate charged to eligible exporters by the banks. This improves the cost of export credit for exporters. The upfront reduction directly lowers the interest rate charged by banks to eligible exporters, translating into lower borrowing costs for exporters and thereby boosting their competitiveness in international markets. This also eliminates the need for exporters to submit separate documentation to claim the IES benefit, obviating the administrative burden. A higher rate of interest subvention could be considered for women-

⁵⁸ United Nations (2023) Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation Report

owned enterprises, which could further encourage women exporters and improve their competitiveness in the international market.

The GOI could also consider introducing lower thresholds for women in export promotion schemes that are based on annual turnover categorisation. For instance, relaxations could be provided in the “Status Holder Certificate System” of the FTP, in which the status categories are assigned on the basis of export performance. The Status holder certificate provides several benefits to ‘Status Holders’ including exemptions from bank guarantee requirement for availing schemes under the FTP and prioritisation during custom clearance processes. The GOI could consider relaxing the ‘Export Performance Threshold’ for grant of status holder to women-owned enterprises across all categories. Besides, the GOI could also consider extending a higher percentage of financial support to women entrepreneurs in schemes such as the Market Access Initiative (MAI) scheme. Currently, the MAI scheme recognises women as one of the priority beneficiaries. However, earmarking a certain percentage of the MAI funds for women applicants could ensure greater support for marketing efforts of women exporters.

Besides these, state governments could also bring in policy measures to encourage exports from women-owned enterprises and enhance participation of female workers in export-oriented sectors. Currently, several states extend incentives for encouraging women entrepreneurship. However, there is limited focus on incentivising and encouraging women exporters at the state level. Some of the measures that could be considered by states include i) additional capital investment subsidy for women entrepreneurs engaged in export business; ii) additional interest subsidy for women exporters on total loan availed from public financial institutions / banks; iii) reimbursement of the guarantee fee charged under the Credit Guarantee Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises (CGTMSE) scheme; iv) establishment of exclusive zones in industrial park for exporting women entrepreneurs, among others.

In addition to these, State Governments could also consider additional payroll incentives for employment of women in export-oriented sectors. The Government of Jharkhand, through its Industrial and Investment Promotion

Policy 2021, extends a similar additional employment generation subsidy of ₹ 1000 per month per worker for Women/ SC/ ST workers in the export-oriented sector of textiles and apparels. Similar incentives could also be considered by other state governments in their export-oriented sectors.

Besides, state governments could also consider extending additional subsidies/ reimbursement of certification costs related to exports. Adhering to standards and obtaining the requisite certifications entail considerable cost to the exporters, due to which many small players, including women exporters, may be unable to access the international market. With a view to improve market access for existing women exporters, state governments could provide additional subsidy/ higher rate of reimbursement of expenses incurred for obtaining statutory certifications like Conformite Europeenne (CE), China Compulsory Certificate (CCC), Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP), Phytosanitary certifications, etc. The Government of Andhra Pradesh is providing such a support under the Andhra Pradesh Export Promotion Policy 2022-27. Under the policy, up to 50 percent of the expenses on compulsory certification are being reimbursed to exporters, subject to a ceiling of ₹ 2 lakh per exporting unit, and an additional 5 percent subsidy is extended to MSME exporting units run by women and individuals of reserved communities. Other states could also introduce similar incentives to help promote women exporters in technology-oriented and high value-added sectors.

Supporting Exports through e-Commerce

e-Commerce can be a strong and effective tool for women's economic empowerment, with digital platforms enabling improved market access, allowing sellers to reach a broader pool of potential customers. e-Commerce provides an ecosystem of services – including integrated marketing tools, payment capabilities and logistics services – that decreases the individual effort required to conduct business, thus reducing barriers to entry especially for small firms, including those owned by women. The greater time flexibility associated with online versus offline trade and the possibility to work from any location present advantages for women who are time and mobility constrained. As noted in the previous chapter, women-led small and medium

enterprises in India have been able to make 50 to 75 percent of their sales digitally and are able to earn higher through digital sales compared to enterprises led by men.

In order to enhance capacities of women-owned/women-led enterprises for increasing e-commerce exports, India could consider designing focussed training programmes for women, in areas like digital skills and online business development. The GOI could partner with e-commerce platforms for organising training programmes aimed at providing women entrepreneurs with the necessary skills to export through the e-commerce mode. A similar programme has been put in place by the Government of Turkey, whereby a one-day e-commerce training programme was launched by the Turkish Ministry of Trade in 2019, in partnership with the United Parcel Service Inc. The programme targets women-owned SMEs unfamiliar with export practices and aims to integrate formal trade support networks operating nationally and internationally. The initiative offers practical information on exporting products using online platforms, marketing products through multimedia, packaging correctly, and managing return procedures⁵⁹. The GOI has already signed a memorandum of understanding with Amazon India to undertake capacity-building and outreach activities for e-commerce exports across 20 districts in India, on a pilot basis. Similar collaborations with other e-commerce players for outreach activities are also underway. The GOI could consider engaging these platforms for specific outreach and training activities aimed at women entrepreneurs. This would help build capacity of aspiring women e-commerce exporters, onboard them on e-commerce platforms and facilitate greater exports.

Enhancing Women's Access to Finance for Exports

The Global Findex 2021 data shows that the share of females (aged 15+) in India that borrowed formally was as low as 10.5 percent, as compared to 15 percent for males. According to a recent study, women in India received a credit equivalent of only 27 percent of the deposits they make, while men

⁵⁹ SheTrades Outlook, Good Practices

received a credit equivalent of 52 percent of the deposits made by them⁶⁰. Findings from recent research also highlight that female-led microenterprises are vulnerable to financing crunch in times of crisis, as compared to male-led businesses. As per a recent survey, nearly 53 percent of surveyed male-led microenterprises in India lacked cash reserves during the lockdown of 2020 in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, while the figure for female-led microenterprises was significantly higher at 72 percent⁶¹.

As per an estimate by IFC, nearly US\$ 1.5 trillion worth of credit demanded by women-owned SMEs in emerging markets remain unmet by financial institutions⁶². As per an ADB report, women-owned SMEs also face considerable difficulties in accessing trade finance. As per the report, about 70 percent of the trade finance applications made by women-owned firms surveyed were totally or partially rejected. Among SMEs who were initially rejected and sought alternative financing, 40 percent of the firms ended up using their own funds, while another 17 percent firms used informal financing⁶³.

Analysis of sector-wise share in outstanding export credit in India reveals an interesting trend. A few manufacturing segments that are relatively more important for female employment have a larger share in outstanding export credit as compared to their contribution to overall exports from the country. This includes segments like food manufacturing, textiles and chemicals. However, in some other segments such as agriculture and allied sector, and information and communication sector, which are also relatively more important for female employment, the share in outstanding export credit is below the share of the sectors in total exports from the country (Table 3.6).

⁶⁰ World Bank (2022), Improving Women's Access to Credit in India

⁶¹ Sharon Buteau, Ashwin Chandrasekhar (2020), Covid-19: Assessing vulnerabilities faced by microenterprises.

⁶² IFC (2020), Banking On Women Global Trade Finance Program

⁶³ ADB (2021), Trade Finance Gaps, Growth, and Jobs Survey

Table 3.6: Major Sector-wise Total Export Credit and Employment-Intensity Index

Occupation Group	% Share in Total Outstanding Export Credit in 2022-23	% Share in Total Exports (Merchandise + Services)	Employment Intensity Index
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	1.3%	2.3%	0.6
Mining and Quarrying	1.6%	1.1%	6.0
Manufacturing			
Food Manufacturing & Processing	12.3%	5.3%	1.6
Beverage & Tobacco*	0.1%	0.1%	0.1
Textiles and Apparels	13.3%	6.5%	0.45
Paper, Paper Products & Printing	0.7%	0.5%	1.4
Woods and Wood Products	0.2%	0.1%	1.8
Leather & Leather Products	1.5%	0.7%	1.8
Rubber & Plastic Products	3.0%	1.5%	2.5
Chemicals & Chemical Products	10.7%	1.9%	1.6
Petroleum, Coal Products & Nuclear Fuels	1.0%	13.3%	4.0
Basic Metals & Metal Products ^{##}	8.4%	7.4%	8.4
Machinery and equipment **	3.8%	3.6%	6.3
Electrical Machinery	2.7%	0.3%	5.3
Electronic Machinery and Goods	0.3%	3.3%	3.0
Vehicles, Vehicle Parts & Transport Equipment	4.9%	3.6%	7.8
Construction	0.7%	0.4%	4.3
Transportation and Storage	0.4%	4.8%	33.2
Information and Communication	0.2%	18.4%	1.4
Financial and Insurance Activities	2.9%	1.3%	2.1

Notes: 1) * - Employment intensity index is calculated jointly for Manufacture of beverages and Manufacture of tobacco products; 2) @ - Employment intensity index is calculated jointly for manufacture of textiles and manufacture of wearing apparels; 3) ^{##} - Employment intensity index is calculated jointly for Manufacture of basic metals and manufacture of fabricated metal products; 4) ** Heavy Engineering and Light Engineering as per RBI classification 5) Cells highlighted in green are sectors relatively more important for female employment that had a higher share in total export credit vis-à-vis share in total exports from the country, while those highlighted in orange represent sectors relatively more important for female employment that had a lower share in total export credit vis-à-vis share in total exports from the country

Source: RBI, MOSPI and Exim Bank Research

One way to address the gap in trade finance for women in India could be to enhance participation of banks in women-centric trade finance programmes of multilateral development banks (MDBs) such as the International Finance Corporation (IFC). With a view to increase trade financing for businesses owned and led by women in developing countries, the IFC, in partnership with Goldman Sachs, launched the Banking on Women (BOW) - Global Trade Finance Program (GTFP) initiative. The programme aims to close gender gaps in trade financing by creating incentives for more than 240 partner banks in more than 80 emerging markets to increase financing to exporting and importing women entrepreneurs. Under this initiative, participating banks in emerging markets that lend to women-owned/women-led SMEs receive a rebate of 20 basis points on the funds they borrow for those loans from the IFC, for loans financed above 100 basis points per annum. In addition to the rebate, the programme also encourages partner banks to better understand and better serve women-owned SMEs, which has commercial benefits for the financial institutions. Since its inception in 2019 till 2022, the IFC has issued US\$ 120 million in loans and loan guarantees under the BOW–GTFP initiative. However, currently only 3 Indian banks are participating under the IFC initiative. More Indian banks need to partner with MDBs in such initiatives and actively engage in their women-centric programmes to enhance the credit flow to women enterprises.

Besides, a tailored financing programme for women-owned/led enterprises in India could be developed, particularly focussed on export finance. Export Development Canada (EDC)'s Inclusive Trade Investments programme is an example of best practice that India could consider emulating. The programme invests in women, indigenous and minority-owned/-led export businesses. Under the programme, EDC invests in companies led or founded by women and/or other diverse management teams who are raising, or have recently raised, equity funding (Seed to Series B funding rounds) to support international growth. EDC participates either as a co-investor or as a syndicate partner alongside other venture funds. The direct equity investment under this programme serves as a catalyst for international expansion of diverse women-owned businesses with high growth potential. Since launching its first

national strategy specific to women in trade in 2018, EDC has served almost 3,000 women entrepreneurs, facilitating CAD 6.8 billion (approximately US\$ 4.96 billion) in business. In 2021, EDC invested CAD 22 million (approximately US\$ 16 million) in 3 women-focused or managed funds, and supported six new indirect investments in women-managed companies. Similarly, the US Export-Import Bank (US Exim) has programme specifically aimed at supporting business owned/led by women and persons belonging to minority communities. Under this initiative, the US Exim offers primarily two products viz. working capital guarantees and export credit insurance. As per the US Exim Annual Report 2023, in FY 2023, the US Exim had approved US\$ 349.3 million in support of minority- and women-owned businesses, which constituted more than 30 percent of the US Exim's total direct small business support for the fiscal year. As part of this initiative, the US EXIM also provides hands-on guidance on how to qualify for and access financing from the US Exim to minorities and women-owned businesses, in order to grow their exports. The US Exim has also constituted a dedicated team to conduct outreach events with businesses owned by minorities, women, veterans, the LGBTQI+ community, and persons with disabilities. These best practices could provide a template for development of similar tailored export financing programmes for women exporters in India.

Besides these, the Government of India could also create a fund for improving access to finance for women entrepreneurs, particularly for exports. South Africa's Women's Fund is one such example, which provides affordable, usable and responsive finance to enterprises with more than 50 percent ownership/management by women. Support extended by the fund includes export sectors, while non-export sectors are also financed. Similar funds also exist in Tunisia and Zambia for extending financial support to exporters, with a special preference extended to women entrepreneurs (Box 1).

Box 1: Select Examples of Policy Support for Improving Women Exporters' Access to Finance

South Africa: The Government of South Africa's Women's Fund provides affordable, usable and responsive finance to enterprises to accelerate the economic empowerment of women. It targets formally registered enterprises that are owned and/or managed by women. The fund supports start-up enterprises and expansions. While not especially targeting the export sectors, these women could operate in export sectors. Additionally, South Africa also has in place a Sector Specific Assistance Scheme (SSAS), which aims to develop the industrial sector and broaden the export base. The SSAS addresses factors that constrain export growth and supports the participation of women in the export sector (among other groups). The scheme is an 80:20 cost-sharing grant for projects to develop particular sectors, find new export markets, and promote the economic empowerment of women.

Tunisia: Tunisia's Competitiveness Support and Export Development Fund (TASDIR+) is a project to promote Tunisian exports through a range of support services and technical and financial support. This involves intervention in the form of partial matching grants, partial subsidies with non-reimbursable co-financing to individual businesses and trade associations. The scheme also gives preference to companies headed by women.

Zambia: Zambia has put in place an Export Development Fund, which is managed by Zambia's Development Agency. The fund is designed to facilitate export finance by providing low interest loans to exporting companies as well as those with the potential to export. Loans are mostly for the purpose of pre-shipment or post shipment requirements of exporters. The fund works with various Producer Associations with women members such as the Association of Zambian Women in Mining.

Source: WTO (2024), Informal Working Group On Trade And Gender, Access To Finance For Women-Led Micro, Small And Medium-Sized Enterprises (MSMEs): A Compendium Of Financial Inclusion Initiatives

Addressing Gaps in Gender-Disaggregated Data

Policymakers need to use gender-disaggregated data to better assess and monitor the impact of trade facilitation for women traders. Collection and availability of meaningful gender-disaggregated data for trade facilitation are sparse, irregular and inconsistent. Formal trade statistics published by national statistics offices and international agencies such as UNCTAD's COMTRADE database capture directional trade flows. However, these data are not typically disaggregated by gender. Furthermore, while labour force data are more frequently disaggregated by gender and are available in the public domain, there is no coverage of trade aspects in these data in India. Combining employment and wage indicators of companies with characteristics such as their involvement in trade activities would enable the compilation of disaggregated gender-in-trade indicators such as a) share of women and men in the total employment of companies involved in foreign trade; b) women's average wages as a proportion of men's average wages in exports-oriented companies; c) share of women and men owners in export-oriented companies, among others.

Further, in India, comprehensive data on business registration disaggregated by gender is also not available in the public domain. The Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA), Government of India collects details of registered, active, non-active, closed companies/ limited liability partnership (LLP) firms, and publishes the same in the form of a monthly information bulletin. However, gender-disaggregated data is not included in these statistics⁶⁴. The MCA could consider making available such data in the public domain.

The Government of India could consider estimation and publication of gender-related trade data. To that end, tax administration and customs records could act as an important source for identifying women enterprises involved in international trade. Presently, the Central Bureau of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) provides limited information on gender-disaggregated data at firm level⁶⁵. For informed policy making and impact assessment, the

⁶⁴ Monthly Information Bulletin, Ministry of Corporate Affairs, Government of India

⁶⁵ The Asia Foundation (2023), The US Department of State funded Project on "Women's Inclusion in India's Trade Ecosystem: From Talk to Action"

CBIC could collect national gender-disaggregated data as part of its existing GST and Customs data collection. The same could also be made accessible to the public for research and policy analysis. Similar approach is also being used by New Zealand, whereby the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade uses Customs data and firm- and individual-level data from Stats New Zealand's Longitudinal Business Database and Integrated Data Infrastructure to generate gender disaggregated data on New Zealand's goods exporting and non-exporting firms⁶⁶.

Conclusion

The female labour force participation in India is substantially below that of males. Analysis in the study indicates export-intensive sectors with relatively more female employment, predominantly comprise resource-intensive sectors such as crop and animal production, and low-value added exports such tobacco products, textiles and apparel. These sectors are highly susceptible to external demand and price shocks. Meanwhile, in case of several high technology intensive industries such as transport equipment, machinery and equipment, electrical equipment and computer, electronic and optical products, etc., the proportion of female employees engaged in these sectors is low compared to the proportion of male employees.

Looking ahead, there is a need for India to utilise trade as a means to boost women's participation in the economy. To that end, the study proposes several strategies including integrating gender considerations into India's trade agreements through measures such as incorporating gender provisions in FTAs, negotiating tariff concessions in female-intensive sectors and empowering women as suppliers in public procurement; improving the implementation of gender-related measures in trade facilitation; introducing specific measures for women in export promotion policies; leveraging e-commerce to expand market access for women-owned businesses; enhancing women's access to trade finance; and addressing the gaps in gender-disaggregated data.

⁶⁶ SheTrades Outlook, Good Practices

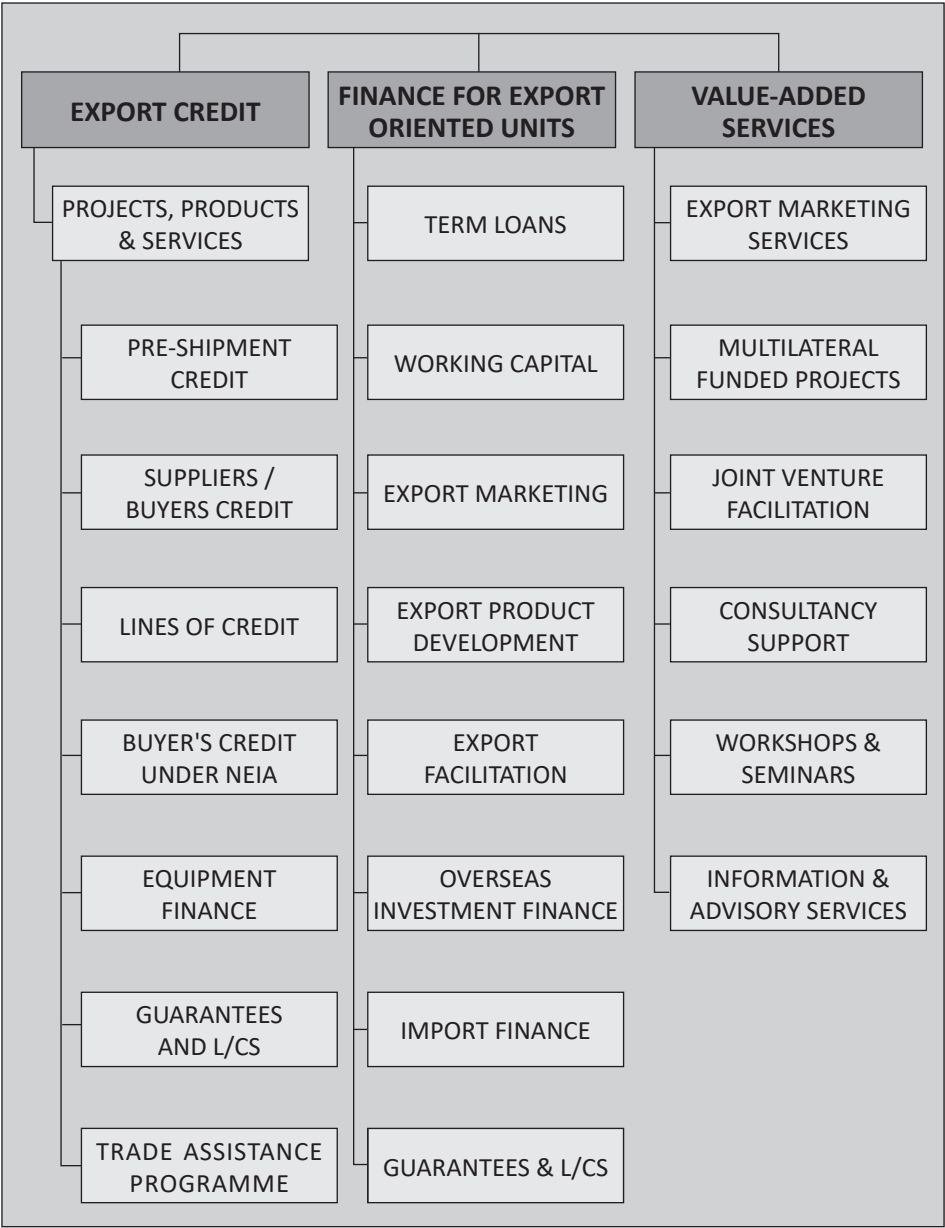
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