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"THE MICRO POLITICAL ECONOMY OF GAINS BY UNORGANIZED WOMEN WORKERS IN INDIA"

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Abstract

An Unorganized Sector can be defined as the sector where the elements of the raised Sector is absent. In the absence of a more analytical definition, the landscape of the unorganized sector becomes synonymous with the kaleidoscope of unregulated, poorly skilled and low-paid workers. While defining an unorganized sector we can say that it is a part of the workforce which has not been able to organize in pursuit of a common objective because of constraints such as casual nature of employment, ignorance and illiteracy, small size of establishments with low capital investment, per person employed, scattered nature of establishments, superior strength of the employer etc. "The unorganized Sector consists of all private enterprises having less than ten total workers, operating on a proprietary or partnership basis." - by National Commission on Enterprises in the Unorganized/Informal Sector in 2004. The female labour force constitutes one third of the rural workers in India. Women workers face serious problems and constraints related to work such as lack of continuity, insecurity, wage discrimination, unhealthy job relationship, absence of medical and accident care etc. The exploitation of female labourers in rural regions happens both horizontally and vertically. It is time to address the issues and discuss the kind of policy reforms and institutional changes required for the emancipation and empowerment of rural female labour force. Empowerment should aim at changing the nature and direction of the power structures which marginalize the women labourers." Women are Overworked Women work roughly twice as many as many hours as men. Women's contribution to agriculture — whether it be subsistence farming or commercial agriculture — when measured in terms of the number of tasks performed and time spent, is greater than men. "The extent of women's contribution is aptly highlighted by a micro study conducted in the Indian Himalayas which found that on a one-hectare farm, a pair of bullocks' works 1,064 hours, a man 1,212 hours and a woman 3,485 hours in a year."

Introduction

An Unorganized or informal sector constitutes a pivotal part of the Indian economy. More than 90 per cent of workforce and about 50 per cent of the national product are accounted for by the informal economy. A high proportion of socially and economically underprivileged sections of society are concentrated in the informal economic activities. The high levels of growth of the Indian economy during the past two decades is accompanied by increasing in formalization. There are indications of growing interlinkages between informal and formal economic activities. There has been new dynamism of the informal economy in terms of output, employment and earnings. Faster and inclusive growth needs special attention to informal economy. Sustaining high levels of growth are also intertwined with improving domestic demand of those engaged in informal economy, and addressing the needs of the sector in terms of credit, skills, technology, marketing and infrastructure.

An Unorganized Sector can be defined as the sector where the elements of the raised Sector is absent. In the absence of a more analytical definition, the landscape of the unorganized sector becomes synonymous with the kaleidoscope of unregulated, poorly skilled and low-paid workers. While defining an unorganized sector we can say that it is a part of the workforce which has not been able to organize in pursuit of a common objective because of constraints such as casual nature of employment, ignorance and illiteracy, small size of establishments with low capital investment, per person employed, scattered nature of establishments, superior strength of the employer etc. "The unorganized Sector consists of all

private enterprises having less than ten total workers, operating on a proprietary or partnership basis." - by National Commission on Enterprises in the Unorganized/Informal Sector in 2004.

Importance

The informal sector is regarded as a group of production units which, according to the definitions and classifications provided in the United Nations System of National Accounts, form part of the household sector as household enterprises or, equivalently, unincorporated enterprises owned by households. The 15th ICLS recommends that for practical reasons, the scope of the informal sector may be limited to household enterprises engaged in non-agricultural activities. Informal employment, as per 17th ICLS, comprises the total number of informal jobs, whether carried out in formal sector enterprises, informal sector enterprises, or households, during a given reference period.

Broadly, the following can be treated as having informal employment:

- (i) own-account workers employed in their own informal sector enterprises;
- (ii) Employers employed in their own informal sector enterprises;
- (iii) Contributing family workers, irrespective of whether they work in formal or informal sector enterprises;
- (iv) Members of informal producers' cooperatives;
- (v) Employees holding informal jobs in formal sector enterprises, informal sector enterprises, or as paid domestic workers employed by households;

(vi) Own-account workers engaged in the production of goods exclusively for own final use by their household.

Why do women work? Women work mainly for economic independence, for economic necessity, as some women are qualified enough to work, for a sense of achievement and to provide service to the society. Most Indian women by and large undertake "productive work" only under economic compulsion. This is the reason for high female participation rates in economically under privileged communities. Usually upper class women are limited to homes. Work participation rate is found to be higher among rural women (27%) than the urban women (10%). We will find that women usually go in for temporary and standby jobs because of the prevalent hesitancy to employ women in regular jobs and providing them with good working conditions. The main workers are those who "work" for the major part of the year. Female main workers constitute 14.65% of the population and men- 50.54%. Female marginal workers constitute 6.26% of the population, whereas males being only 0.98%

Most of the women are found to be employed in agricultural activities and in the unorganized sector. The employment of women is high in the unorganized sector such as part time helpers in households, construction center, tanneries (setting, parting and drying), match and bidi industries etc. An estimate by the World Bank shows that 90% of the women working in the informal sector are not included in the official statistics and their work is undocumented and considered as disguised wage work, unskilled, low paying and do not provide benefits to the workers. Statistics show that vast majority of Indians work in Agriculture where 55% of the population is female agricultural workers and 30% of the men are labourers and not cultivators

The major characteristics of the unorganized workers:

- 1. the unorganized labour is overwhelming in terms of its number range and therefore they are omnipresent throughout India
- 2. as the unorganized sector suffers from cycles of excessive seasonality of employment, majority of the unorganized workers does not have stable durable avenues of employment. Even those who appear to be visibly employed are not gainfully and substantially employed, indicating the existence of disguised unemployment.
- 3. the workplace is scattered and fragmented.
- 4. there is no formal employer - employee relationship.

in rural areas, the unorganized labour force is highly stratified on caste and community considerations. In urban areas while such considerations are much less, it cannot be said that it is altogether absent as the bulk of the unorganized workers in urban areas are basically migrant workers from rural areas.

Workers in the unorganized sector are usually subject to indebtedness and bondage as their meagre income cannot meet with their livelihood needs.

the unorganized workers are subject to exploitation significantly by the rest of the society. They receive poor working conditions especially wages much below that in the formal sector, even for closely comparable jobs, i.e., where labour productivity are no different. The work status is of inferior quality of work and inferior terms of employment, both remuneration and employment.

Primitive production technologies and feudal production relations are rampant in the unorganized sector, and they do not permit or encourage the workmen to imbibe and assimilate higher technologies and better production relations. Large scale ignorance and illiteracy and limited exposure to the outside world are also responsible for such poor absorption.

the unorganized workers do not receive sufficient attention from the trade unions.

Inadequate and ineffective labour laws and standards relating to the unorganized sector.

According to the Economic Survey 2007-08 agricultural workers constitute the largest segment of workers in the unorganized sector (i.e. 52% of the total workers). As per the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO), 30 million workers in India are constantly on the move (migrant labour) and 25.94 million women workforce has been added in the labour

Women's work is rarely recognized

many maintain that women's economic dependence on men impacts their power within the family. With increased participation in income-earning activities, not only will there be more income for the family, but gender inequality could be reduced. This issue is particularly salient in India because studies show a very low level of female participation in the labor force. This under-reporting is attributed to the frequently held view that women's work is not economically productive. If all activities — including maintenance of kitchen gardens and poultry, grinding food grains, collecting water and firewood, etc. — are taken into account, then 88 percent of rural housewives and 66 percent of urban housewives can be considered as economically productive. Women's employment in family farms or businesses is rarely recognized as economically productive, either by men or women. And, any income generated from this work is generally controlled by the men. Such work is unlikely to increase women's participation in allocating family finances. In a 1992 study of family-based textile workers, male children who helped in a home-based handloom mill were given pocket money, but the adult women and girls were not

Recent problems and Government action

The most serious hazard faced by the working class in the era of globalization is the increasing threat to job security. The informal sector is fast expanding, while the organized sector is shrinking. Contract, casual, temporary, part-time, piece-rated jobs and home based work etc. are increasingly replacing permanent jobs. To circumvent resistance to amendments to labour laws and to give the employers the freedom to 'hire and fire' workers, the governments of the day are resorting to various back door measures. The NDA government had introduced 'fixed term' employment through an administrative order, which continues under the present UPA regime. Special Economic Zones, which are areas deemed

to be outside our territory, are being opened in large numbers throughout the country. While there is no explicit provision that labour laws would not be applied in these zones, in practice, even labour commissioners are not allowed inside these zones and the workers are practically at the mercy of the employers. Neither the central nor the state governments intervene to protect the interests of the workers. The workers in the informal sector, a large number of who are women, have no job security. Work is often unskilled or low skilled and low paid. Availability of work is irregular; when work is available, they have to work for long hours. However the concerned governments choose to ignore this open flouting of the labour laws. The Factories Act, the Mines Act, The Dock Workers' Act etc. are some of the laws, which contain provisions for regulating the health of the workers in an establishment. The Employees' State Insurance Act and the Workmen's Compensation Act provide health benefits and compensation to the workers in cases of ill-health and injuries etc. But in the unorganized sector where the majority of women workers are concentrated, no occupational safety and health safeguards are in place. Even in the organized sector, where these are applicable, safeguards are rarely provided for the workers, either male or female. Usually the safety devices are designed keeping the male workers in view and become unsuitable for women workers. Besides, the social aspects of work are not considered risk factors. As a result, more emphasis is given to work related accidents than to illnesses.

Conclusion

Indian economy has preponderance of informal and unorganized sector both in terms of number of workers and enterprises. This segment of economy has inbuilt vulnerabilities, and the study of unorganized sector based on reliable data is important for informed decision making and addressing the problems faced. The National Statistical Commission constituted a Committee on Unorganized Sector Statistics to identify major data gaps relating to unorganized enterprises and unorganized workers and to suggest ways and means for developing statistical data base on unorganized sector with standardized concepts, definitions, coverage and comparability over time and space. The female labour force constitutes one third of the rural workers in India. Women workers face serious problems and constraints related to work such as lack of continuity, insecurity, wage discrimination, unhealthy job relationship, absence of medical and accident care etc. The exploitation of female labourers in rural regions happens both horizontally and vertically. It is time to address the issues and discuss the kind of policy reforms and institutional changes required for the emancipation and empowerment of rural female labour force. Empowerment should aim at changing the nature and direction of the power structures which marginalize the women labourers."

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