

## **Contextualizing women's work, within the current macro economic incentives in India**

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Good afternoon,

Ms. Reiko Tsushima and I have prepared this presentation with the help of Ms. Anandi Venkateswaran. We want to offer this as a door opener , and the “How to” of designing an employment policy that takes note of women's work.

Wish I had Dr Abhijit Sens presentation with me earlier, as I found it very rich He also contextualized the application of an employment policy within a larger framework, including the rights framework which gives a handle to ensure that policies reach their goals .

1. It is well established that women's work strides across diverse domains:

- Paid /unpaid
- Measured, un measured and also
- Contested domains like care work

It is also well established that the conventional definition or conceptualization of employment,

- not only excludes certain types of women's work, which could be deemed as employment , if definitions and measures were more nuanced
- but also screens/ baffles the values that women bring into the economy apart from inhibiting their opportunities for improving their economic status

Hence we are using the term *women's work* rather than women's employment , as it is more inclusive

2. What we wish to suggest in this paper and we hope it provokes debate, is the need to shift the understanding and inclusion of women in employment policy , from focusing on discrimination and special needs to recognizing their central role in stimulating the macro economy, and therefore to make a more nuanced and policy oriented factual mapping of women's engagement and disengagement in employment, both formal and informal, a kind of women's

economic topography, mapping across regions, occupations, work locations and so on. Overlay it on other maps demographic, natural resource, NHFS etc., to understand analyse and give visibility, value and pointers to action.

3. In other words begin the construction of sectoral and overall macro economic policy planning from the ground of women's location in work, - and derive the national employment policy from these ground level facts. This idea resonates with what Mr. Adyanthaya referred to, that is bottoms up approach to policy formation..

4. Such a development of facts and linkages to overall data was done when population policies were being designed , leading to a recognition of the strong linkages between unemployment , poverty ,illiteracy and high TFRs . Enabling population policy to address the overarching issue of area development plan as an approach.

5. Another experience which also suggests this broader approach , arose from the value added by a committee of feminist economists that was constituted by the Planning Commission, 2007, and they had the benefit of examining the sectoral plans of the 11<sup>th</sup> five year plan and attempted to locate women's role in each sector and then argue for recognition and response to this location, by the plans allocations and designs and advisories to the sectoral ministries and the states. We learnt a great deal through the process on how to locate women in the political economy.

Reviewing the approach paper and the Chapter one of the 11<sup>th</sup> Plan called "Towards Inclusive Growth", and intended to address the poor, they argued that it did not pay enough attention to employment as an important instrument for poverty removal etc. (With all due apologies to Prof. Sen) They pulled together data that revealed the widespread and deep presence of women in the economic sectors, their contribution to production and the services, and renamed women "the growth agents".

6.. This experience and the aim to highlight how women's work, what SEWA calls "hands of hope", has been the oil that fuels India's engines of growth lead us to suggest to ILO that some detailed data based profiling followed by analysis, of women's work, within the Indian economy is prepared in order to design employment policy.

This would include not only the NSSO and data from the Small Enterprise Commissions etc but also look at other sources.

The regional variations in occupational distribution of women, can be indicated on new maps of India, where within an economic geography or a demographic map, we colour or dot it with the employment characteristics,

We could then focus on specific programmes like the National Rural Employment Guarantee and understand the female presence with its variations across states, and raise questions such as *why the push and pull of job seekers , analyse the phenomena*

Again women are a high proportion of the Self help groups and micro credit and again raise the question of *why there is variation across states and over time*

We can also map other employment oriented schemes – both data and analysis

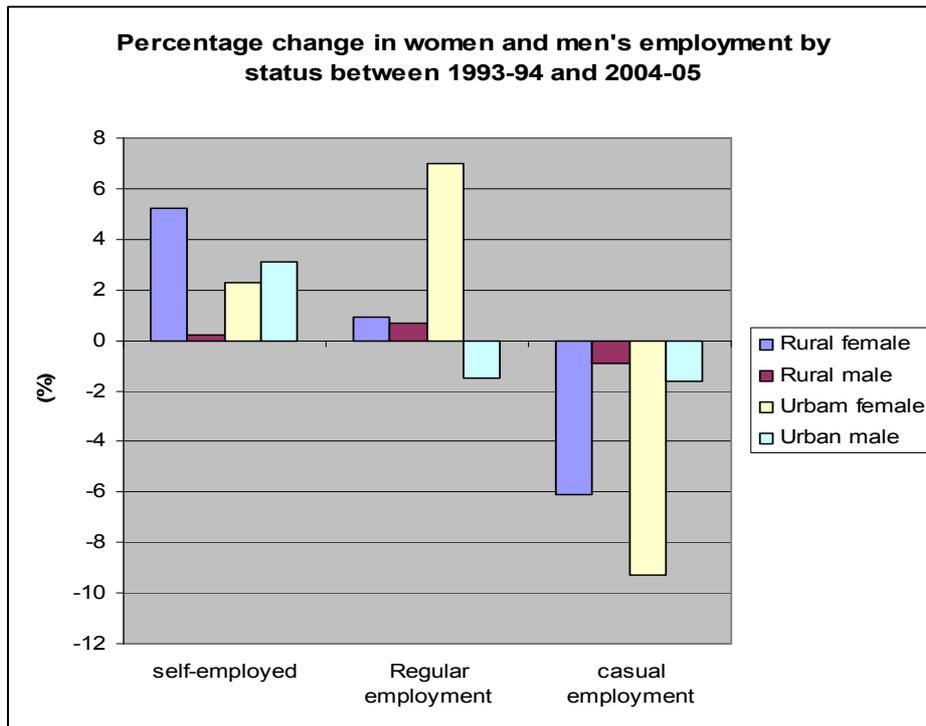
. *These we suggest would be knowledge mapping* and it would highlight women's work, as we do with fertility or mortality etc

7. The fact that women are now in greater demand, have an increasing presence in “employment” raises questions not only of wage parity, working conditions, skill development, migration etc **but also questions on how far their value as the main economic agents in India's growth has been recognized**, rewarded by inclusion in the design of projects, in the negotiations of trade agreements, in sum in policy

Further it is also arguable that, if the real role and values of women's work is made visible not only through statistics but through such mapping and analysis, whether some of the social discriminations and punishments they experience could be contained, apart from the shaping of schemes which make the job itself less punishing by giving other forms of support to their double burden

8. As the data from India reveals, and this is also true of many other countries in the world to day as is revealed by the ILO's Report on *Global Employment Trends for Women 2008* women's participation in regular employment is increasing, and casual employment is decreasing, while men's is not to the same extent. This could be seen as a positive from women's point of view

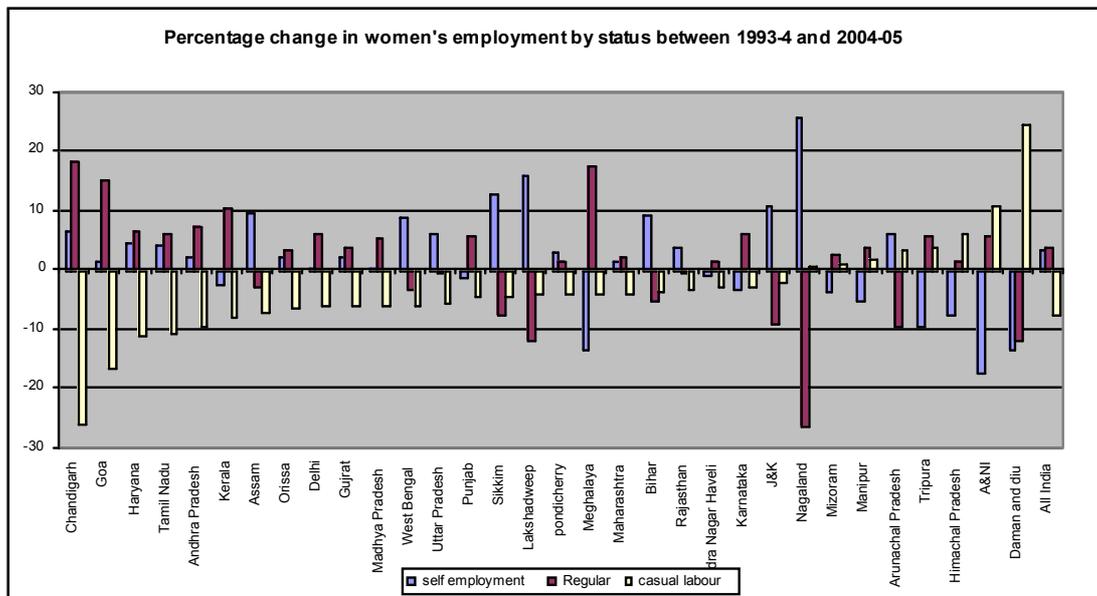
The Tables below are General, Statewide and Sectoral from NSSO

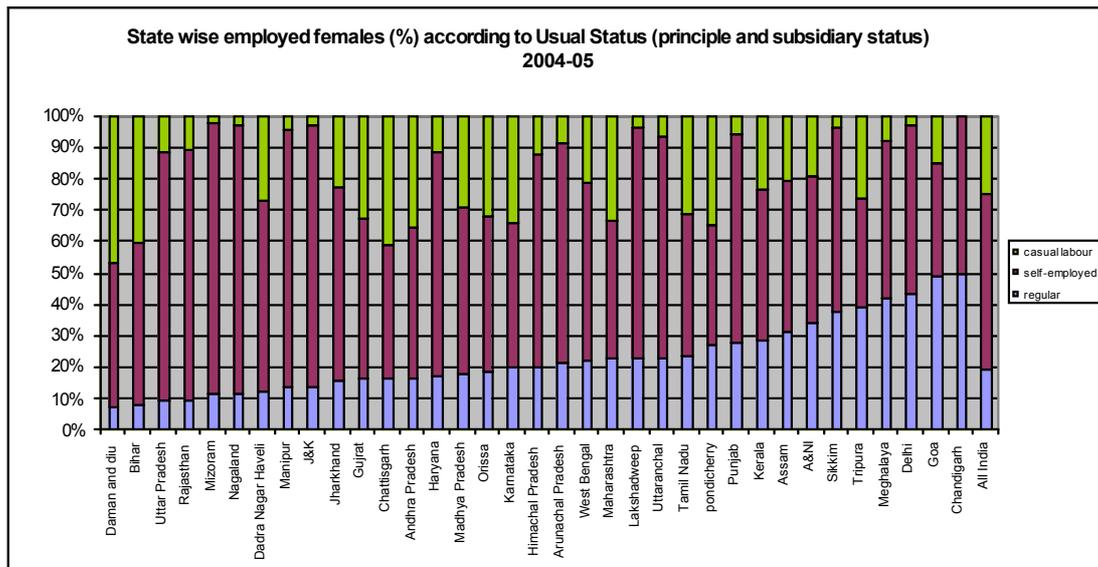


Source: National Statistical Reoport

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3. Women's employment trends show great variation across States and sectors. The next tables show how in most States women's casual employment has decreased over time. However, the majority of women are still engaged in casual or self-employment.





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A sectoral analysis shows that rate of growth of women’s employment in both rural and urban manufacturing sector has outstripped that of men’s. In figures the increase in rural manufacturing was 9.12 percent and 4.88 percent for urban manufacturing. Rural transport saw a 18 per cent rate of growth of women’s employment. However, on average, there is a noticeable wage gap and according to NSSO data on average wage/salary earnings regular wage/salaried employees, women still earn 80-90% of men on average. In rural manufacturing, women earn 35 % of what men do.

If we compare the wage data with employment growth, we can see that rural transport where there has been a substantial employment increase, women earn 82% of what men do, in manufacturing women earn between 34 % and 60% of what men earn. In some sectors, particularly in urban areas, in construction trade and hotels and transport women earned more than men (note the data is for regular employment) however, these sectors did not witness a robust employment growth.

9.Hence the idea is to go beyond the general to the particular and uncover both the economic role and contribution but also the implications of that for the economy as well as the worker. Through such mapping we would be able to ensure that the employment policy responds to women workers as growth agents.

**To illustrate how facts can be used for shaping policy; we illustrate from a linkage between women’s wages and food security that is sustainable.**

It is not often well known that

- The number or percentage of women cultivators is growing very fast, as men are migrating out of rural areas in search of non land based jobs.

- It is also well established that by and large women own small plots. This has been well documented.
- By and large women grow food for self consumption, i.e. for the household consumption, called subsistence farming. There are many narratives on how it is the women's kitchen garden that provides a survival kit in periods of crisis as was experienced in the Soviet Union decades ago. Data worldwide shows that women tend to grow crops for family use whereas men tend to grow crops for marketing.

Given this characteristic of women farmers, women farmers and small size farms can be given focus of attention for NREGS schemes as they do water.

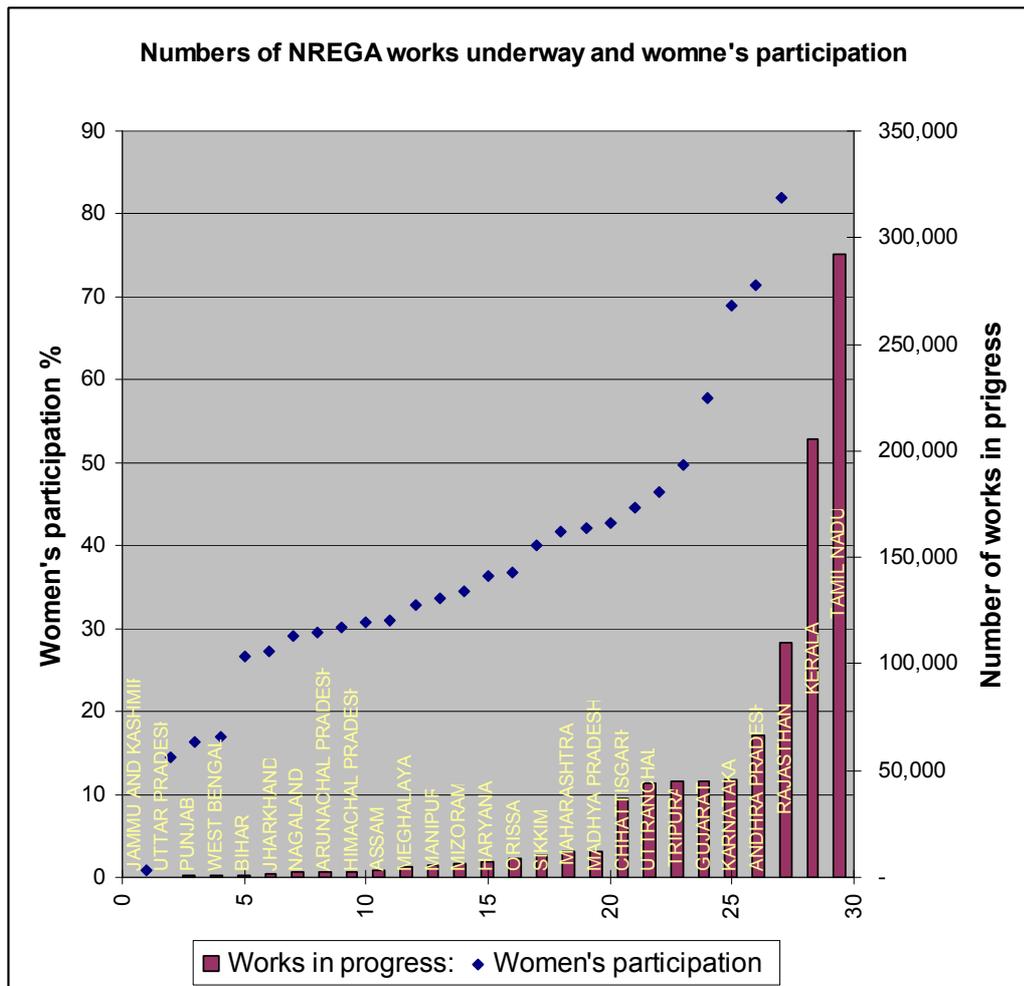
### **10.To illustrate from a closer look at the National Rural employment guarantee programme[nregs]**

**Under the theme environment and sustainable development**, water has been identified by the implementers ,as one of the items around which projects can be built and indeed this is an extremely valuable way of looking at asset creation and environmental safeguarding and removing the scarcity of water both for land based production as well as for human and animals consumption.

However in attending to food security through the NREGS, **women can be the key players and this becomes clear when we see the official facts.**

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According to the latest figures from MORD between 2006 and 2008 the %age of women employed in nregs grew from 41% to 43% and there are great state-wise variation. The pattern across seems to be that where there are more works in progress, women become majority of workers in NREG schemes, outnumbering men.



What would it require to direct NREGS focus on food security? In every area small farms can be identified, and projects made up which enable small farms to improve their ability to grow food. This could be water, soil improvement and this could even mean sale or marketing assistance in order to add to the household or farm income.

Here the mid day meal programme, the local PDS could become the buyers of the food crops that are grown in these small farms making a food chain.

If small farms have an opportunity to have common services, and it requires either a building or a service station and some cadres to put in the inputs and pick up the outputs as has been done in the model of the Amul cooperatives, these small farms and women and children inside them and the others in the village would have food security.

Although the participation rate of women in NREGS may be increasing, yet for women, the hours of work, the kind of works they undertake, the need for long duration crèches even possibly soup. Kitchens on site, apart from shelter are crucial. Further, women workers organizations at the site level are critical for ensuring not only wages, but also other amenities that they are entitled to.

Women may have a voice which is different from men even in choosing works and in auditing them.

Since women's institutions have been identified as one of the major users and useful partners of NREGs, the flag ship program of the govt, we suggested that it is important to have a *special task force or council which focuses on this aspect of the scheme, listens to the voices of women and gives them greater space in designing governing, implementing and receiving the programme*.ie inclusion This which could be both from the women workers who register, the women's groups in rural areas such as Mahila Samakhya, self help groups and others and finally the elected women themselves. This can add a lot to the vivacity of the project and the programme at the national level.

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This is an illustration of how profiling women can lead to important policy and project inputs

#### 11. To summarize, the Employment policy in India

- Needs to recognise the economic contribution of women to India's growth and therefore draw on
- Facts emerging from uncovering women's location as workers in sectors,
- Subclassified across variations emerging from States, regions, over time
- Related to other overlay of factors , demographic, geographic etc
- Link employment policy to institutional arrangements like decentralised development planning.
- It may not be known to all in this domain, that state govts have been mandated by the Planning Commission and the NDC that every state plan has to be built on district plans. Districts now have large funds from many schemes , many of which are economic in their goals ...
- It is here , at the District that a plan , which has a goal or envisions " full employment " ie a maximum use of available labour force , and also plans to achieve an increase in district level gdp of say 10 percent, can provide the best opportunity to weave to gether all the concerns that are expressed as well as engage with skill development towards a job ...
- At another national seminar held in New Delhi on 16<sup>th</sup> MAY called by the Minstry Of Rural development, this aspect of integrating all the various schemes which reach out to the poor , such that there is a long term value for the NREGS was discussed .
- Employment policy needs to engage with such institutional frameworks, and make mention of local level planning for full employment .

12. None of the presentations provided their data with gender disaggregation,. This is a deep fault in this era of understanding .