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ANALYZING HOW WOMEN WORKERS IN INFORMAL SECTOR ARE VULNERABLE TO EXPLOITATION AND THEIR LEGAL PROTECTION

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ABSTRACT

Women workers in India's informal sector face widespread exploitation due to the sector's unregulated nature and lack of legal protections. This paper examines the vulnerabilities of women in informal employment, analyzing the factors contributing to their exploitation and assessing the effectiveness of existing labor laws in safeguarding their rights.

Women in the informal sector, including domestic workers, street vendors, home-based workers, and agricultural laborers, often endure low wages, long hours, job insecurity, and hazardous working conditions. Gender-based discrimination exacerbates these challenges, leading to wage disparities, workplace harassment, and exclusion from social security benefits. The absence of formal contracts further exposes women to unfair labor practices such as arbitrary dismissal and underpayment.

A critical issue is the inadequate legal protection for informal women workers. While India has several labor laws, such as the Unorganized Workers' Social Security Act, 2008, and the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2013, enforcement remains weak due to bureaucratic inefficiencies and lack of awareness. Many women workers remain unaware of their rights, making them more susceptible to exploitation.

This paper explores national legal frameworks, international labor standards set by the International Labour Organization (ILO), and the role of trade unions, self-help groups, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in advocating for women's labor rights. It highlights successful interventions and suggests policy reforms to improve protections for women in the informal sector. Strengthening enforcement mechanisms, increasing legal awareness, and

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integrating informal workers into formal labor structures are essential for ensuring economic security and dignity for women workers in India.

Keywords: *Unfair labor practices, informal sector, women workers, exploitation, gender discrimination, India, legal protection, labor laws, social security, wage disparities, job insecurity, workplace harassment, Unorganized Workers' Social Security Act, International Labour Organization (ILO), policy reforms, enforcement mechanisms.*

INTRODUCTION

The informal sector plays a crucial role in India's economy, employing a significant portion of the workforce, particularly women. According to various reports, over 90% of India's total workforce is engaged in informal employment, with women forming a large segment of this labor force. Despite their vital contribution, women workers in the informal sector remain highly vulnerable to exploitation due to the absence of legal protections, lack of job security, and poor working conditions.

Women in informal employment, including domestic workers, street vendors, home-based workers, and agricultural laborers, often face unfair labor practices such as low wages, long working hours, wage discrimination, and workplace harassment. Their work is frequently undervalued, and they are excluded from benefits such as maternity leave, health insurance, and pension schemes. The lack of formal contracts makes them more susceptible to exploitation, including sudden job termination and non-payment of wages.

Although India has enacted several labor laws aimed at providing protection to informal workers, such as the **Unorganized Workers' Social Security Act, 2008**, and the **Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2013**, enforcement remains weak. Many women workers are unaware of their rights, and legal mechanisms are often inaccessible due to bureaucratic hurdles and social constraints. Furthermore, informal workers are rarely covered under minimum wage laws, and their grievances often go unaddressed.

This research paper explores the various dimensions of unfair labor practices affecting women workers in India's informal sector. It analyzes the effectiveness of existing legal frameworks and highlights the role of trade unions, self-help groups, and NGOs in advocating for labor rights. The paper also discusses policy reforms necessary to ensure better working conditions, fair wages, and social security for women workers, ultimately aiming to bridge the gap between legal protections and their implementation.

OBJECTIVES OF RESEARCH

- The primary objective of this research is to analyze the vulnerability of women workers in India's informal sector to unfair labor practices and assess the effectiveness of existing legal protections.
- It aims to examine the nature and extent of exploitation faced by women workers, including wage disparities, long working hours, workplace harassment, and the absence of social security.
- Additionally, the research seeks to identify gaps in legal protection by analyzing labor laws and policies such as the Unorganized Workers' Social Security Act, 2008, and the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2013.
- Another objective is to evaluate the role of various stakeholders, including government agencies, trade unions, self-help groups, and NGOs, in advocating for the rights of informal women workers.
- Furthermore, the study aims to highlight challenges in implementing labor laws, such as weak enforcement, lack of awareness, and cultural barriers.
- Finally, the research provides policy recommendations and reforms to strengthen legal protections, improve working conditions, and promote social security for women in the informal sector.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is based on secondary data, utilizing existing literature, reports, and case studies to analyze unfair labor practices and legal protections for informal women workers in India. The methodology includes a review of existing literature through academic research papers, journal articles, and books on labor laws, gender discrimination, and the informal economy. It also involves an analysis of legal and policy frameworks, including Indian labor laws and international labor standards set by organizations such as the International Labour Organization (ILO). Government reports and surveys, such as those from the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) and the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), provide additional data on labor conditions. Media reports and news articles are also examined to highlight recent instances of labor exploitation and government interventions.

UNDERSTANDING THE INFORMAL SECTOR IN INDIA AND ROLE OF WOMEN IN IT

The informal sector plays a significant role in India's economy, providing employment to a vast majority of the workforce. It is characterized by small-scale, unregulated economic activities that operate outside formal labor laws and government oversight. The informal sector includes self-employed individuals, casual laborers, and workers in small, unregistered enterprises. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), informal employment lacks social security, job stability, and legal protection, making workers more vulnerable to exploitation (ILO, 2018).³ In India, the National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector (NCEUS) defines informal employment as work that is not covered by formal labor regulations and where workers do not receive social benefits such as pensions, health insurance, or paid leave (NCEUS, 2007). Women play a crucial role in India's informal economy, constituting a significant proportion of the workforce in domestic work, agriculture, home-based industries, construction, and street vending. A report by the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS)⁴ states that nearly 94% of women workers in India are engaged in informal employment. However, they often receive lower wages than men, have limited bargaining power, and work in insecure and hazardous conditions. Despite these challenges, women's participation in the informal sector provides essential income for their families and contributes to overall economic growth.

The contribution of informal women workers to India's economy is substantial. According to the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), women in the informal sector play a key role in labor-intensive industries such as textiles, handicrafts, and food production, significantly contributing to India's . Additionally, women's participation in unpaid family labor in agriculture and small businesses remains undercounted in economic statistics, further undervaluing their role in the economy .Several factors contribute to the dominance of women in the informal sector. Socio-economic constraints, lack of formal education, and cultural expectations often push women into informal employment, where entry barriers are lower compared to formal jobs.

³ International Labour Organization (ILO). (2018). *Women and Men in the Informal Economy: A Statistical Picture*. Geneva: ILO.

⁴ Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS). (2022). *Annual Report 2021-22*. Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India.

CLASSIFICATION OF WOMEN WORKERS IN INFORMAL SECTORS⁵

1. **Domestic and agriculture Work** – Many women work as housemaids, cooks, caretakers, and cleaners in private households. They often face exploitation, irregular wages, and lack of social security. Women play a significant role in farming, including sowing, weeding, harvesting, and post-harvest processing. However, they often receive lower wages than male laborers and are excluded from land ownership rights.
2. **Construction Work** – Women work as daily-wage laborers in construction, carrying bricks, mixing cement, and assisting in building activities. They face hazardous working conditions, wage discrimination, and lack of safety measures.
3. **Street Vending and Hawking** – Many women sell vegetables, fruits, clothes, and household items on streets and in local markets. They often deal with police harassment, lack of legal recognition, and uncertain income.
4. **Home-Based Work** – Women are involved in small-scale production activities such as tailoring, handicrafts, embroidery, and making incense sticks, bangles, and beedis. These jobs are often underpaid and lack legal protection.
5. **Garment and Textile Industry** – Women work in small garment units or from home, stitching, weaving, and packaging clothes. They are often subjected to unfair wages, long hours, and exploitative middlemen.
6. **Beedi Rolling and Agarbatti Making** – Women working in these industries earn meager wages and are exposed to health hazards due to prolonged exposure to tobacco dust and chemicals.
7. **Waste Picking and Recycling** – Many women work as rag pickers, collecting and sorting waste materials for recycling. They face social stigma, health risks, and lack of formal employment recognition.
8. **Domestic and Caregiving Services** – Women provide childcare, elderly care, and nursing assistance in informal settings, often working without contracts or legal benefits.
9. **Dairy and Animal Husbandry** – Many rural women engage in dairy farming, poultry, and livestock rearing, but their work is often considered an extension of household duties rather than formal employment.

⁵ Mehrotra, S., & Sinha, S. (2017). *Counting the Uncounted: Women's Work in the Informal Economy*. Indian Journal of Labour Economics, 60(1).

10. **Sex Work and Entertainment Industry** – Some women, due to economic hardships, work in highly exploitative sectors like sex work, dance bars, and unregulated entertainment jobs, where they face violence and lack of legal protection.

UNFAIR LABOR PRACTICES AFFECTING WOMEN WORKERS IN THE INFORMAL SECTOR⁶

1. Women workers in India's informal sector face multiple forms of labor exploitation due to the absence of regulatory oversight and inadequate legal protections. These unfair labor practices include low wages, long working hours, unsafe workplaces, and gender-based discrimination, making women highly vulnerable to economic and social marginalization.

2. One of the most pervasive issues is **low wages and wage disparities**. Women in informal employment consistently earn lower wages than their male counterparts, even when performing similar tasks. The gender wage gap is evident across various informal sectors, including domestic work, agriculture, construction, and garment production. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2018), women in India's informal sector earn approximately 30-50% less than men. Factors such as cultural biases, lack of education, and occupational segregation contribute to these wage disparities.

3. Another major issue is **long working hours and lack of job security**. Women in informal employment often work excessive hours without any legal limits on their working time. Domestic workers, home-based workers, and agricultural laborers frequently work 12-16 hours a day with no overtime pay (SEWA, 2020). Additionally, informal employment lacks job security, as workers can be dismissed without notice or compensation, leaving them in a constant state of financial instability.

4. **Workplace harassment and unsafe working conditions** further exacerbate the exploitation of women in informal employment. Many women, particularly in domestic work, construction, and street vending, report cases of verbal abuse, physical assault, and sexual harassment at the hands of employers, customers, or supervisors (Ghose, 2019). The lack of legal recognition and union representation makes it difficult for these women to seek justice. Moreover, unsafe working

⁶ Deshpande, A. (2019). *The Visible and Invisible Barriers: Gender and Informal Work in India*. Economic & Political Weekly, 54(31).

environments, such as exposure to harmful chemicals in beedi rolling, garment manufacturing, and waste picking, pose serious health risks.

5. The **absence of formal contracts and social security benefits** is another critical concern. Most women in the informal sector work without written contracts, which means they have no legal claims to wages, benefits, or compensation in case of workplace injuries (NCEUS, 2007). Informal workers are often excluded from government welfare schemes, including maternity benefits, health insurance, and pension plans. According to the Periodic Labour Force Survey, less than 10% of informal women workers have access to any form of social security.

6. Lastly, **gender-based discrimination in wages and opportunities** remains a widespread problem. Women are often confined to low-paying, labor-intensive jobs such as domestic work, agricultural labor, and home-based production, while men dominate higher-paying sectors such as transport and skilled trades , . Even in industries where women constitute a majority of the workforce, such as garment and textile production, they are rarely promoted to supervisory positions . Cultural norms, patriarchal attitudes, and systemic biases prevent women from accessing better economic opportunities.

Addressing these unfair labor practices requires stronger enforcement of labor laws, expansion of social security schemes, and increased representation of informal women workers in policymaking. Without significant policy interventions, women in India's informal sector will continue to face economic vulnerability and social injustice.⁷

RELEVANT SECTIONS UNDER INDIAN LABOR LAWS FOR WOMEN'S PROTECTION IN THE INFORMAL SECTOR

1. UNORGANIZED WORKERS' SOCIAL SECURITY ACT, 2008⁸

- **Section 3:** Provides for social security schemes, including health insurance, maternity benefits, and old-age protection.
- **Section 10:** Establishes the National Social Security Board to recommend welfare measures for unorganized workers, including women.

⁷ Ghose, A. K. (2019). *Informality and Women's Employment in India: Issues and Challenges*. ILO Report.

⁸ The Unorganized Workers' Social Security Act, No. 33 of 2008, § 3, 10, India Code (2008).

2. MINIMUM WAGES ACT, 1948⁹

- **Section 3:** Empowers the government to fix minimum wages for different categories of workers, including women in the informal sector.
- **Section 12:** Ensures that no worker is paid less than the prescribed minimum wage.
- **Section 13:** Provides for equal pay for men and women performing similar work.

3. SEXUAL HARASSMENT OF WOMEN AT WORKPLACE (PREVENTION, PROHIBITION, AND REDRESSAL) ACT, 2013¹⁰

- **Section 2(n):** Defines "workplace" to include households and informal workplaces, extending protection to domestic workers and street vendors.
- **Section 4:** Mandates the formation of an Internal Complaints Committee (ICC) in workplaces with 10 or more employees.
- **Section 6:** Requires the formation of a Local Complaints Committee (LCC) at the district level for informal workers.
- **Section 9:** Grants women the right to file complaints against sexual harassment.

4. EQUAL REMUNERATION ACT, 1976 (NOW MERGED UNDER THE CODE ON WAGES, 2019)¹¹

- **Section 4:** Ensures equal pay for equal work for men and women.
- **Section 5:** Prohibits discrimination in recruitment and working conditions based on gender.

5. MATERNITY BENEFIT ACT, 1961 (NOW COVERED UNDER THE CODE ON SOCIAL SECURITY, 2020)¹²

- **Section 5:** Grants maternity leave of 26 weeks with full wages.
- **Section 8:** Provides medical bonus in addition to maternity benefits.

⁹ The Minimum Wages Act, No. 11 of 1948, § 3, 12, 13, India Code (1948).

¹⁰ The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act, No. 14 of 2013, § 2(n), 4, 6, 9, India Code (2013).

¹¹ The Equal Remuneration Act, No. 25 of 1976, § 4, 5, India Code (1976) (repealed & subsumed under Code on Wages, 2019).

¹² The Maternity Benefit Act, No. 53 of 1961, § 5, 8, 12, India Code (1961) (repealed & incorporated in Code on Social Security, 2020).

- **Section 12:** Prohibits dismissal or termination of a woman employee due to pregnancy.

6. BUILDING AND OTHER CONSTRUCTION WORKERS (REGULATION OF EMPLOYMENT AND CONDITIONS OF SERVICE) ACT, 1996¹³

- **Section 22:** Provides for health, safety, and welfare measures for women construction workers.
- **Section 24:** Ensures creche facilities for women construction workers with young children.

7. CODE ON SOCIAL SECURITY, 2020¹⁴

- **Section 109:** Extends social security schemes to gig, platform, and unorganized workers, including women.
- **Section 114:** Proposes maternity benefits for women workers in unorganized sectors.

8. OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY, HEALTH, AND WORKING CONDITIONS CODE, 2020¹⁵

- **Section 22:** Mandates safe and hygienic working conditions for women workers.
- **Section 43:** Provides for prohibition of employment in hazardous occupations for women.
- **Section 44:** Requires separate restrooms and facilities for women workers.

CONSTITUTIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL PROVISIONS

The **Constitution of India** provides several fundamental rights and directive principles that safeguard women workers, including those in the informal sector. **Article 14**¹⁶ guarantees equality before the law and equal protection under the law, ensuring that women are not discriminated against in employment. **Article 15(3)**¹⁷ allows the state to make special provisions for women and children, enabling affirmative action for their welfare. **Article 16**¹⁸ ensures equal opportunities in

¹³ The Building and Other Construction Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, No. 27 of 1996, § 22, 24, India Code (1996).

¹⁴ The Code on Social Security, No. 36 of 2020, § 109, 114, India Code (2020).

¹⁵ The Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, No. 37 of 2020, § 22, 43, 44, India Code (2020).

¹⁶ **INDIA CONST.** art. 14

¹⁷ **INDIA CONST.** art. 15(3)

¹⁸ **INDIA CONST.** art. 16

public employment, though informal sector workers often remain excluded due to the nature of their work.

Article 39(a) and (d) ¹⁹under the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP) mandates that men and women should have the right to an adequate means of livelihood and equal pay for equal work, forming the basis for labor laws such as the Minimum Wages Act and the Equal Remuneration Act. **Article 42** ²⁰directs the state to ensure just and humane working conditions and maternity relief, which has been implemented through laws like the Maternity Benefit Act. **Article 43** ²¹promotes living wages and decent work conditions for all workers, particularly those in the unorganized sector.

India is a member of the **International Labour Organization (ILO)** and has ratified several conventions that impact women workers' rights. **ILO Convention No. 100 (Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951)** ²² ensures equal pay for men and women performing work of equal value, though implementation remains weak in the informal sector. **ILO Convention No. 111 (Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958)** ²³ prohibits discrimination based on gender in employment opportunities and working conditions.

ILO Convention No. 189 (Domestic Workers Convention, 2011) ²⁴ recognizes domestic work as formal employment and mandates decent working conditions, social security, and fair wages. However, India has not yet ratified this convention, leaving domestic workers without sufficient legal protection. **ILO Recommendation No. 204 (Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy, 2015)** ²⁵ urges governments to provide social security, decent wages, and labor rights to informal workers, emphasizing the need to formalize employment relationships for better legal enforcement. The **United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979)**, ²⁶ which India ratified in 1993, mandates the protection of women's labor rights, equal pay, and safe working conditions. The **Sustainable**

¹⁹INDIA CONST. art. 39(a) (d)

²⁰INDIA CONST. art. 42

²¹INDIA CONST. art. 43

²²Convention Concerning Equal Remuneration for Men and Women Workers for Work of Equal Value (No. 100), June 29, 1951, 165 U.N.T.S. 303.

²³Convention Concerning Discrimination in Respect of Employment and Occupation (No. 111), June 25, 1958, 362 U.N.T.S. 31

²⁴Convention Concerning Decent Work for Domestic Workers (No. 189), June 16, 2011, 2955 U.N.T.S. 197.

²⁵Recommendation Concerning the Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy (No. 204), Int'l Lab. Conf. (June 12, 2015).

²⁶Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, Dec. 18, 1979, 1249 U.N.T.S. 13.

Development Goals (SDGs), particularly **Goal 5 (Gender Equality)** and **Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth)**, stress the need for inclusive labor policies that protect informal women workers from exploitation. The **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948)** under **Article 23²⁷** guarantees the right to work, equal pay, and just conditions of employment, forming the foundation for labor rights globally.

GAPS AND CHALLENGES IN LEGAL PROTECTION

Women workers in India's informal sector face numerous challenges due to gaps in legal protection and enforcement. Below is an analysis of these challenges, supported by relevant reports and citations:

A. WEAK ENFORCEMENT OF EXISTING LABOR LAWS

Despite the existence of labor laws intended to protect workers' rights, enforcement remains inadequate, particularly for informal women workers. The lack of formal recognition and regulation of informal employment makes it difficult to monitor compliance and hold employers accountable. This results in widespread violations, including underpayment and unsafe working conditions. A study highlights that women in the unorganized sector confront multiple difficulties such as inequitable employment and salary possibilities

B. LACK OF AWARENESS AMONG INFORMAL WOMEN WORKERS

Many women engaged in informal work are unaware of their legal rights and the protections available to them. This lack of awareness stems from limited access to education and information, preventing them from advocating for better working conditions or seeking legal recourse. The absence of flexible work time policies, proper overtime regulations, and supportive workplace practices often force women out of the workforce entirely

C. SOCIAL AND CULTURAL BARRIERS TO LEGAL ENFORCEMENT

Deep-seated social and cultural norms often discourage women from asserting their rights. Patriarchal attitudes may restrict women's mobility and decision-making power, leading to acceptance of substandard working conditions as the norm. Additionally, societal stigma associated

²⁷ G.A. Res. 217A (III), Universal Declaration of Human Rights, U.N. Doc. A/810 (Dec. 10, 1948).

with women speaking out against employers can deter them from reporting abuses. The issue of implementation of the POSH Act, 2013 has remained one of the biggest challenges, particularly for women workers in the informal sector

D. INACCESSIBILITY OF GRIEVANCE REDRESSAL MECHANISMS

For informal women workers, accessing formal grievance redressal systems is often challenging. Bureaucratic hurdles, lack of legal support, and fear of retaliation contribute to underreporting of labor violations. Moreover, existing mechanisms may not be tailored to address the unique circumstances of informal employment, leaving many grievances unaddressed. The barriers outlined above provide some idea of how challenging it remains for informal women workers and their families to access social protection at the grassroots level

Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach, including strengthening enforcement of labor laws, raising awareness among workers, challenging detrimental social norms, and making grievance redressal mechanisms more accessible and responsive to the needs of informal women workers.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROTECTING INFORMAL WOMEN WORKERS IN INDIA

1.Strengthening Enforcement of Labor Laws: Effective enforcement of labor laws is crucial to protect informal women workers. The government should enhance oversight by increasing labor inspections in informal sectors, ensuring stricter penalties for violations such as wage discrimination and lack of maternity benefits. Policies must be developed to formally recognize informal employment and bring more workers under legal protection. Streamlining registration processes and reducing bureaucratic hurdles will help incorporate informal workers into the legal framework.

2. Enhancing Awareness and Legal Literacy: A significant challenge faced by informal women workers is their lack of awareness regarding labor laws and available legal protections. Large-scale awareness campaigns should be conducted to educate them about their rights under laws such as the **Minimum Wages Act, 1948**, and the **Sexual Harassment at Workplace Act, 2013**. Community-based legal aid programs should be established to provide free assistance in filing grievances. Collaborations with NGOs, trade unions, and women's self-help groups can further strengthen legal literacy and collective bargaining power.

3. Addressing Social and Cultural Barriers: Cultural and societal norms often prevent women from asserting their labor rights. Gender-sensitive labor policies must be implemented to acknowledge the dual burden of unpaid domestic work and paid employment. The formation of women-led cooperatives and self-help groups should be encouraged to improve bargaining power and financial independence. Additionally, behavior change campaigns can help challenge societal norms that discourage women from reporting labor law violations.

4. Improving Access to Grievance Redressal Mechanisms: Many informal workers face significant hurdles in accessing formal grievance redressal systems. Legal procedures for filing labor complaints should be simplified, and redressal mechanisms must be made more accessible, particularly at the local level. **Local Complaints Committees (LCCs)** under the **POSH Act, 2013**, must be strengthened to address workplace harassment complaints from informal workers. Mobile-based grievance reporting systems should be introduced to facilitate easy complaint filing for workers who lack physical access to labor courts or tribunals.

5. Expanding Social Security and Welfare Benefits: The extension of social security benefits to informal women workers is essential. Universal social security coverage under the **Unorganized Workers' Social Security Act, 2008**, should be ensured by simplifying the registration process. The government should also provide maternity benefits and childcare support, including workplace creches, to help women balance work and family responsibilities. Additionally, microinsurance and pension schemes specifically designed for informal workers should be introduced to ensure long-term financial security.

6. Promoting Women's Participation in Decision-Making: Women's representation in labor boards, policymaking bodies, and trade unions should be strengthened to amplify their voices in labor-related decision-making. Data collection and research on informal women workers should be improved to design evidence-based policies that effectively address their needs. Providing leadership training and capacity-building programs will empower women to take on decision-making roles within their workplaces and communities.

7. Aligning with International Standards: India should align its policies with international labor standards to ensure better protection for informal women workers. Ratifying **ILO Convention No. 189 (Domestic Workers Convention, 2011)** would provide legal recognition and protections to domestic workers. Implementing **ILO Recommendation No. 204 (2015)** would help formalize informal work and integrate informal workers into mainstream economic policies.

Additionally, collaboration with international organizations can facilitate the adoption of global best practices for regulating informal labor.

CONCLUSION

Women workers in India's informal sector play a crucial role in the economy but remain highly vulnerable to exploitation due to inadequate legal protections and systemic challenges. The absence of formal contracts, low wages, wage disparities, long working hours, and unsafe working conditions expose them to unfair labor practices. Gender-based discrimination further limits their opportunities, reinforcing economic insecurity and dependence. Despite the presence of labor laws such as the Unorganized Workers' Social Security Act, 2008, the Minimum Wages Act, 1948, and the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2013, enforcement remains weak, leaving a large section of informal women workers without effective safeguards.

The challenges faced by these workers are further compounded by low awareness of their rights, cultural and societal barriers, and inaccessibility of grievance redressal mechanisms. Many informal women workers lack the resources and support needed to seek legal remedies, making them more susceptible to workplace exploitation. Additionally, the failure to integrate informal workers into mainstream labor policies limits their access to essential benefits such as maternity leave, social security, and skill development programs.

To ensure comprehensive protection, there is a need for stronger enforcement of labor laws, increased legal literacy, improved social security coverage, and gender-sensitive labor policies. Addressing social norms that discourage women from asserting their rights and ensuring accessible grievance mechanisms are also essential steps toward empowering informal women workers. Aligning national policies with international labor standards, such as ILO Convention No. 189 on Domestic Workers and ILO Recommendation No. 204 on the Transition from Informal to Formal Employment, would further enhance protections.

Recognizing and formalizing informal work, implementing inclusive labor laws, and creating an enabling environment for women's economic participation are crucial to ensuring fair labor practices. Only through a concerted effort by the government, civil society, and international organizations can meaningful improvements be made in the working conditions of informal women workers in India. Their empowerment is not just a matter of labor rights but also a critical step toward achieving economic justice and gender equality in the workforce.