

GENDER-INTENTIONAL ACTION FOR LIVELIHOODS PROGRAMME DESIGN

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Acknowledgements

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Executive Summary

The economic landscape in India is at a pivotal juncture. The potential for women's labour remains vastly untapped, posing a significant challenge to maximising national economic growth. Despite women constituting over half of the working-age population, their participation in measured economic activities is low, highlighting a critical gap in harnessing the full potential of the workforce. The Gender-intentional Livelihoods Design framework is designed to dissect and understand the myriad factors influencing women's labour force participation in a dynamic economic context.

Rooted in a comprehensive analysis that spans across social, economic, political, and infrastructural dimensions, this framework presents a nuanced understanding of the determinants at play. From societal norms and cultural expectations to the macroeconomic environment and infrastructural adequacies, the framework delineates how these determinants collectively influence women's decisions to enter, remain in, or exit the workforce. At the heart of our framework is the agency; the capacity of a woman to pursue goals without facing retribution in the form of social stigma or professional disadvantage.

The Gender-intentional Livelihoods Design framework is not merely a diagnostic tool, but a potential blueprint for sustainable and impactful solutions. Through the use of personas, the framework demonstrates its applicability in understanding the breadth and depth of factors influencing women's work in India. These personas highlight the necessity of addressing both visible barriers and underlying issues to design effective solutions. Through targeted interventions informed by this framework, stakeholders have the opportunity to craft policies, programmes, and initiatives that not only address immediate barriers but also dismantle the underlying structures perpetuating inequalities. The framework thus informs action at three levels. It enables a **deeper understanding of the stressors that undermine women's labour** and impact her participation and factors which contribute to her agency. It can **inform the design of holistic, relevant and contextual solutions** across the continuum of economic empowerment of women. This framework lays the groundwork for catalysing systemic change by **identifying leverage points** where interventions can have the most significant and scalable impact.

This framework operates on the premise that acknowledging and addressing the full spectrum of determinants affecting women's labour participation are essential to gender-inclusive economic growth. Linking this approach of understanding the determinants of women's labour to a theory of change can help elucidate how a project, policy, strategy, programme, or other initiative contributes towards the intended agency outcome.

Introduction

The imperative of improving women's economic participation is well-recognised in developed as well as developing economies. Women make up a little over half the working age population in India, but their contribution to measured economic activity and growth is far below potential. Global GDP could increase 26 percent by closing the gaps between women and men in the workforce, which would benefit both advanced and developing countries.¹ Failing to harness the full potential of our workforce and build inclusive markets can have serious macroeconomic consequences.

Labour market outcomes for women are the result of a diverse range of factors and considerations. Women are not a monolithic group. Their experiences in the labour market vary significantly based on age, education, geographic location, and socio-economic background, in addition to the prevailing market structures. Interventions aimed at improving women's economic empowerment thus require a holistic view that encompasses all these influencing factors, along with a contextual perspective that situates these factors in the realities of women's lives. Our earlier work, 'Rethinking the ways of measuring women's labour,' highlights the disconnect between the actualities of women's work in India and its representation in national accounts. This gap in understanding, stemming from traditional labour metrics, fails to fully capture the diversity of women's work, particularly in informal arrangements and unpaid labour. Without accurate measures of women's labour, predicting women's response to changes like wage increases, innovations in the markets or tax policies becomes challenging.

This deficiency not only perpetuates existing societal and market norms that often limit women's economic opportunities, but also hinders any fundamental shifts in how the economies can possibly evolve. As a result, women remain largely marginalised in crucial aspects of economic planning, workforce strategizing, and policy development.

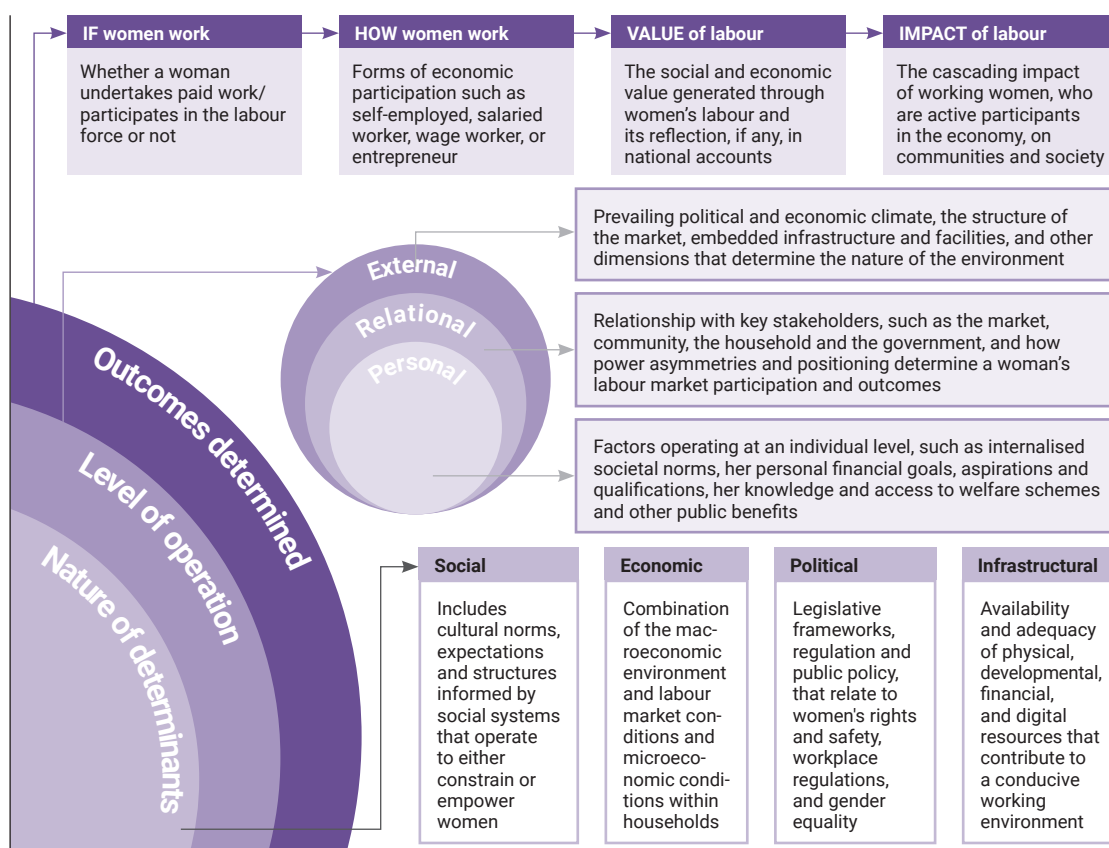
Need for this Framework

Our framework emerges at a critical juncture, learning from the extensive body of existing frameworks and recognising the dynamic nature of today's economy and emerging possibilities in the realm of infrastructure, nature of work and opportunities to overcome the challenges which have plagued women's participation. Existing frameworks, while informative, often fall short in capturing the nuanced realities of women's labour force participation in the contemporary settings of the Global South. This gap underscores the need for a new, more agile framework – one that is not only responsive to the present but also anticipates future trends and challenges.

Achieving material gains for women by advancing their economic empowerment thus requires a holistic view of the factors that affect women's lives – and by extension, their labour. It is imperative that the market and state appreciate the full range of factors, and the manner in which they operate to influence women's work.

There is thus a need for a contextualised and holistic framework that considers the interlocking nature of factors that determine women’s labour, and how they collectively combine to produce labour market outcomes for women. This can guide policy, economic growth, and industry action to drive inclusive and decent participation of women in the economy.

The Framework: Gender-intentional Livelihoods Design



Breaking Down the Framework: Overview of Each Component

Nature of the determinant

The determining factors of women’s work are not solely social, economic or political. Literature on women’s labour, especially in South Asia, stresses the prevailing social norms and prioritisation of care work within the home as primary impediments to women’s labour force participation. However, as the following illustrative examples demonstrate – it is not merely social barriers that women encounter. It is a combination of social, economic,

political and infrastructural factors that operate in tandem to produce labour market outcomes for women.

Our framework considers the following four categories of determinants as crucial in influencing women's labour market participation:

- **Social factors:** Social and cultural norms operate in a variety of spheres, such as within the household, the community, labour markets, and even the workplaces. These include societal expectations regarding marriage and motherhood, traditional gender roles and their evolution, segregation of work within the labour market into masculine and feminine professions, and cultural norms that govern a woman's behaviour. Additionally, aspects of a woman's identity - such as her caste, geographic location and religion - play a key role in determining the nature of her labour.
- **Economic factors:** Economic factors encompass elements in the macroeconomic environment, such as the availability of jobs, wage equity, inflation, as well as microeconomic conditions within the household, the level of economic distress in a family, and the necessity of supplementary income. These factors collectively influence women's decisions to enter, remain in, or exit the workforce.
- **Political factors:** Political factors involve legislative frameworks, government policies, and political initiatives that impact women's rights, workplace regulations, and gender equality. It also includes the regulation of labour antecedents, such as welfare nets, social security, minimum wage guarantees, and protection from occupational hazards.
- **Infrastructural factors:** Infrastructural factors encompass the availability and adequacy of physical, developmental, financial, and digital resources that contribute to a conducive working environment. These include reliable transportation networks, accessible and affordable childcare facilities, proper healthcare services, education and skilling, financial resources, and robust digital access and literacy that facilitate labour market opportunities for women.

Level of operation

Each determinant operates at three different spheres. Social factors are not constrained to society alone, but percolate into household norms and expectations. Similarly, macroeconomic factors such as inflation have a material impact on household finances and necessities, influencing how women in a particular household expend their labour. Thus, it is important to consider that each determinant operates at three key levels:

- **Personal:** The factors here operate at the level of the woman herself. It includes internalised societal norms, her personal financial goals, aspirations and qualifications, her knowledge and access to welfare schemes and other public benefits, etc.

GENDER-INTENTIONAL ACTION

Example: A woman chooses to be a housewife as a result of the internalised household norms and cultural expectations that all women in her family have conformed to.

- **Relational:** Here, the factors manifest in terms of a woman's relationship with key stakeholders, such as the market, community, the household and the government. At this level, a woman's labour market participation and outcomes are the result of power asymmetries and her positioning in relation to other actors.

Example: A woman who is returning to work after maternity accepts a job that pays far below what she is entitled to on the basis of her qualifications and experience, as she recognises her poor negotiating position in relation to the hiring manager.

- **External:** Lastly, all determinants of her labour also manifest in the environment and structures which colour her circumstances and choices. This includes the prevailing political and economic climate, the structure of the market, embedded infrastructure and facilities, and other dimensions that determine the nature of the environment in which a woman operates.

Example: In a period of limited economic growth and high levels of unemployment, a woman deprioritises her personal goals and aspirations to take up casual wage work at a nearby factory, in order to provide for her family and supplement household income.

Outcomes determined

Viewing women's work in a binary manner, where they are in or out of the labour market is not consistent with the realities of how women work. In fact, women are constantly working, even when their work is not counted in labour market statistics or GDP. Women's labour in India also occupies a diverse spectrum; they are often self-employed, work informally, or work part-time. Thus, it is crucial to understand the different possible outcomes of a woman's work, and to capture more than just whether a woman works or not. It is equally important to also understand the manner in which she works, what value she generates through her labour, and the cascading impact of a woman's work on both her household and external society.

In our framework, we have identified four outcomes that are determined by the combination of the nature of determinants and the levels at which they operate:

- **IF women work:** This is the starting point for this component of the framework, which determines whether a woman undertakes paid work or not. This is the metric that is commonly tracked in national statistics and informs the country's female labour force participation rate.
- **HOW women work:** Women expend their labour in a multitude of ways. It could be that they work within the home performing unpaid work, they could undertake home-based work, work informally or as a casual wage worker. Work arrangements encompass a diverse array of possible outcomes, and this segment of the framework aims to capture this diversity.

- **VALUE of their work:** Only a small fraction of the value generated through women's work is captured in national statistics, which is women's paid work outside the home. A significant amount of value generated through women's labour slips through the cracks of national accounts due to its unquantifiable nature (social value), the fact that the labour is expended within the home and not for production of goods and services, and the invisibility of informal sector in which a large majority of women are engaged.
- **IMPACT of their labour:** Women's work and labour is a critical pillar of societal and economic well-being. Their labour within the home is indispensable, yet invisible. At times, their work aims to supplement household income, while at others, they may be the primary breadwinner. Beyond social and economic impact, women's work is also a key indicator of overall gender equality and progress in the country, and has an intergenerational impact of encouraging women to participate in a decent and dignified manner in the economy.

Using this framework

All actors who are working to advance women's economic empowerment are cognisant of the mosaic of factors that go into determining women's labour outcomes, the many different ways in which they expend their labour, as well as the need to ensure that women are able to participate in decent and dignified work on their own terms.

Our framework aims to simplify and break down this complexity. In order to demonstrate the use case of this framework, we have chosen four personas who showcase the diversity of women's work in India. By applying this framework to these personas, we aim to show the usefulness of this framework in understanding the breadth and depth of what needs to be considered when designing interventions for women workers in India.

Use Case 1: Anuradha, a clerk in Muzaffarnagar

Anuradha is a BCom graduate living in Muzaffarnagar with her parents. She is an only child. Her parents encouraged her to find a job and work, but have concerns regarding her security, and prefer that she stay close to home. Even though there are many jobs available in Lucknow, these restrictions compelled Anuradha to take up a job as a clerk in the Muzaffarnagar District Court. Anuradha desires financial independence and agency, and has aspirations of supporting her future on her own terms. She also desires to study further, and wishes to fund these opportunities herself without placing stress on family finances. The salary is not commensurate with her qualifications, her working hours are long and the tasks are not interesting. However, the job comes with government benefits and allows her to stay close to home.

Nature of determinant	Level of relation	Outcome determined
Social	Personal: Anuradha's decision to work locally is influenced by internalised family expectations and her own concerns about her security.	IF: Anuradha is employed, but in a position that does not fully utilise her qualifications. HOW: Her work is locally based, formal, secure, but not intellectually stimulating or financially rewarding.
	Relational: The societal and familial norms regarding women's safety and the traditional role of women influence her career choices.	
	External: External social norms in her town continue to view women's place as being within the household, rather than outside it. Embedded cultural notions of women's safety and security being threatened, if moving out of their hometown to work, continue to be prevalent.	
Economic	Personal: Anuradha's choice of a lower-paying job is influenced by the need for security and proximity to her family, rather than pursuing better economic opportunities elsewhere.	VALUE: Anuradha's job contributes to her family's income and offers government benefits, but her skills and education are underutilised. Her labour is nevertheless accounted for in national statistics.
	Relational: The job market in Muzaffarnagar, compared to Lucknow, might offer limited opportunities for someone with her qualifications.	
	External: With rising inflation and high levels of unemployment, Anuradha recognises that the external environment is not conducive. The economic structure of her region influences the availability of suitable jobs closer to home.	
Political	Personal: Her awareness of policies, presence of role models in politics determine the choice of employment she chooses.	

Nature of determinant	Level of relation	Outcome determined
Political	Relational: Even though there are a range of political commitments towards improving women's safety and agency in the state of Uttar Pradesh, these have not materialised for women, who continue to advocate for improvements to safety and speedy judicial remedies for violence against women.	IMPACT: Her role reinforces the societal norm of women working in 'safe', close-to-home environments, possibly impacting her long-term career growth and satisfaction.
	External: Government jobs are well-regulated, and come with a range of benefits, pensions and job security, making it an attractive and secure option for Anuradha to take up.	
Infrastructural	Personal: Her decision is influenced by infrastructural elements like transportation and safe accommodation in other cities. The knowledge and availability of work options online also limit the options for her.	
	Relational: The availability of local job opportunities like the clerk position in the court and the infrastructure supporting women's employment in her region influences her family's opinion about the market opportunities for her.	
	External: There is a lack of availability of reliable and safe public transport that could enable her to commute longer distances and access a larger pool of opportunities.	

Summary: Anuradha's ability to exercise agency is limited by social and infrastructural factors. While she has the agency to work, it is within the confines of her family's and society's comfort zones regarding safety and proximity. Her capacity to pursue her career goals without facing societal retribution or familial concern is restricted.

Use Case 2: Selvi, a worker in a garment factory

Selvi is a worker in a garment factory in Tiruppur. She comes from a working class household, and economic necessity compels both her and her husband to work in order to provide for their three children and her in-laws. She was recently promoted to a floor supervisor in the factory. While the supplementary income is welcome, the nature of her work is extremely precarious and challenging. She is constantly harassed by her managers and has no access to redressal mechanisms. Although she works long hours, she does not get overtime pay, and her wages are seldom paid on time. Selvi and the other women in her family have navigated caste-based norms that have dictated their access to resources, education and jobs for centuries. Selvi wishes to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty, achieve financial independence for herself and contribute to providing for her children’s healthcare and education. She wants to earn enough to have a measure of disposable income to improve her quality of life.

Nature of determinant	Level of relation	Outcome determined
Social	Personal: Selvi’s choice to work is driven by economic necessity within a working-class household, influenced by her role as a provider.	IF: Selvi is employed and has even been promoted, showing her capability and value as a worker. HOW: Her work is marred by harassment, lack of fair compensation, and precarious conditions, highlighting the need for systemic change.
	Relational: Caste-based norms and societal expectations around gender roles impact her access to resources and shape her work environment.	
	External: The broader societal and cultural context in Tiruppur, including prevailing attitudes towards women and caste influence her opportunities and experiences at work.	
Economic	Personal: Economic necessity dictates her participation in the workforce, despite the challenges of her job.	VALUE: Selvi’s work is technically counted in national accounts, but due to the informal nature of her work, she is likely to be overlooked and slip through statistical cracks during surveys due to lack of appropriate “recovery questions”.
	Relational: The structure of the garment industry, characterised by precarious work conditions and unfair labour practices, directly impacts her economic well-being.	
	External: The overall state of the garment industry and informality of the sector in India affects her wages and job security.	
Political	Personal: Selvi is extremely politically conscious and active. She strongly believes that justice for the violations of worker rights can help improve the garment industry and its treatment of workers. She has joined a trade union for garment workers to campaign for better working conditions and wages.	

Nature of determinant	Level of relation	Outcome determined
	<p>Relational: The layers of subcontracting arrangements through which garment factories source their labour operate in the shadows and are unregulated. This leaves workers without access to adequate and appropriate legal protections and recognition of their rights.</p>	<p>IMPACT: Her situation reflects the broader issues of gender and caste discrimination in the labour market, impacting not just her but other women in similar positions.</p>
	<p>External: The prevailing political climate and the government focuses on economic growth, but without enough emphasis on welfare of informal and invisible workers like Selvi, who are the indispensable backbone of the booming apparel sector.</p>	
<p>Infrastructural</p>	<p>Personal: Limited access to resources and education from early life due to her caste and class, affect her ability to seek better employment or redressal.</p>	
	<p>Relational: The infrastructure of the garment factory, including workplace policies and management practices, directly impacts her work experience.</p>	
	<p>External: Absence of robust infrastructure to support worker's rights and women's empowerment in her region and industry are a big deterrent to her motivations to contribute to the industry.</p>	

Summary: Selvi's agency is constrained by a combination of economic necessity, social norms, and workplace challenges. While she has shown the ability to navigate these constraints to some extent (evidenced by her promotion), her capacity to make empowered decisions or influence her work conditions is limited by systemic barriers of gender, caste, and class. Due to limited agency she waits for the State or markets to address the failure. Inaction by authorities and prevalence of such patterns disincentivise women from participating in the economy.

Use Case 3: Meeraben, an artisan in Gujarat

Meeraben is a self-employed artisan from Gujarat belonging to the Khatri community. This community has historically been producers and preservers of the bandhani tie-and-dye craft, a tradition which she continues to carry on. However, mass-produced bandhani from factories has begun to flood markets, affecting the traditional methods of working with bandhani designs. In a hyper-competitive market environment, Meeraben and her family's generational craft is in a precarious position.

Nature of determinant	Level of relation	Outcome determined
Social	Personal: Meeraben's identity as a member of the Khatri community and her role as a preserver of the bandhani craft are key aspects of her social context. Her engagement with the artwork by observing her family members since childhood influences her decision to work as an artisan.	IF: Meeraben is self-employed and committed to her traditional craft. HOW: She works in an environment increasingly dominated by mass-produced goods, which challenges the sustainability of her traditional methods. VALUE: Her work may not be economically accounted for in national statistics due to the invisibility of home-based and informal work. The cultural and economic value of Meeraben's work is under threat due to market shifts towards mass production.
	Relational: The community's historical association with the bandhani craft influences her engagement with this traditional art form. She joined the family business under the responsibility of the legacy carried by her generation, and sees her labour as intrinsic to her relationship with her community.	
	External: The prevailing cultural norms in her environment dictate the kind of work that women are permitted to undertake. Self-employment as an artisan is seen as an option where women continue community traditions, while simultaneously being able to continue their non-negotiable role as caregivers within the home.	
Economic	Personal: Meeraben has aspirations to bring traditional handmade bandhani designs into the market and earn a good income for her household. She wants to expand operations by expanding the size of the workshop and upgrading her equipment.	
	Relational: As a small artisan, Meeraben finds it challenging to negotiate with bandhani designs that are mass-produced in factories and flood the market. She is unable to compete with the low prices at which these goods are sold, thus threatening her generational craft and painstaking labour.	
	External: Meeraben's livelihood is affected by changes in economic conditions of increased competition in the market, accompanied by swift changes in technology used in the production of such goods.	

Nature of determinant	Level of relation	Outcome determined
Political	Personal: Lack of awareness about the political support for small artisans, such as government programmes, subsidies and state-organised exhibitions makes Meeraben lose out on opportunities.	IMPACT: Her work not only supports her family but also contributes to preserving a cultural tradition. However, this impact is challenged by changing market dynamics.
	Relational: Even though the government does a range of skill development programmes and self-help group formation, her limited time availability restricts her ability to channel efforts into enrolling in such programmes.	
	External: Despite public support systems available for artisans such as Meeraben, the delivery infrastructure and last-mile penetration remains limited, compromising the effectiveness of the available schemes.	
Infrastructural	Personal: While selling online could be an alternative, her inability to purchase and use a smartphone inhibits her capacity to grow her business. She also has limited education, compromising her financial literacy in engaging with competitive markets and digital literacy in accessing newer opportunities.	
	Relational: As a self-employed individual, her financial capacity is constrained due to the limited presence of formal financial institutions in the village and their unwillingness to lend without formal credit scores and collateral. This need is thus met by the exploitative terms of moneylenders, due to prevailing power asymmetries in negotiating with them.	
	External: Remote location, and limited connectivity with existing networks dominated by exploitative middlemen constrain her ability to sell her goods to wider markets. Market access and connection to diverse consumer bases that would enable her art to reach better markets, remain compromised.	

Summary: Meeraben's agency in this context involves her ability to sustain and adapt her traditional craft in the face of modern market pressures. Her agency is challenged by external economic forces and the shift in consumer preferences. However, she also has the potential to influence and perhaps revitalise interest in traditional crafts through innovation, community engagement, and accessing new markets.

Use Case 4: Pooja, a housewife

Pooja was born and raised in a middle-class family in Jaipur. She had dreams of pursuing a career in finance after completing her degree, but life took a different turn when she got married to Arjun, a software engineer, at the age of 24. Pooja embraced her new role as a wife and soon became a mother. Due to demands of her responsibilities at home, she had to put her career aspirations on hold. Arjun’s job involves long hours, and the family relies on his income to meet their financial needs. Pooja faces the challenge of balancing the household budget on a single income. Despite her desire to contribute financially, she is unable to pursue a career outside home at the moment due to the responsibilities of raising young children and managing the household. This has led to occasional feelings of frustration and a sense of unfulfilled potential.

Nature of determinant	Level of relation	Outcome determined
Social	<p>Personal: Pooja comes from a middle-class family and the concept of pursuing education comes with additional promises of a better match for marriage after completion. Pooja’s day-to-day experiences give her a unique perspective on household needs and consumer behaviour, which can be invaluable in shaping products or services that cater to families or domestic settings.</p>	<p>IF: No, Pooja does not engage in paid work</p> <p>HOW: She works as a homemaker, and primarily performs unpaid care and domestic work that keeps the household running, such as caring for children and elderly, and cooking/cleaning tasks.</p> <p>VALUE: Her work is not economically accounted for in national statistics due to the invisibility of unpaid and care work.</p>
	<p>Relational: The expectations and responsibilities of care that came along with marriage have led Pooja to drop her decision to work at the moment. As a homemaker, she is often the primary decision-maker for household purchases, positioning her as a key customer whose needs and preferences can drive market trends.</p>	
	<p>External: The segregation of roles within the household is a deeply embedded cultural practice in her environment. Recognising homemakers like Pooja as important stakeholders in policy-making can lead to more inclusive and effective policies that address the actual needs of families.</p>	
Economic	<p>Personal: Born and raised in a middle-class family, she wanted to support her aspirations by completing her degree and working. She also wants to contribute financially to the household as a family member by pursuing a career in finance.</p>	

Nature of determinant	Level of relation	Outcome determined
	Relational: Pooja finds it difficult to negotiate flexible hours, lower workloads, and no work-related travel, which are critical to her participation in the workforce, as hiring managers are mostly unwilling to tailor their vacancies to the lived realities of working mothers.	IMPACT: She looks after the household while supporting her husband and taking care of their children.
	External: Prevailing work arrangements do not account for the context in which women like Pooja – who desire opportunities that can allow them to work while simultaneously meeting their socially mandated roles within the household – are operating. This need is not serviced by intransigent labour markets.	Thus, her labour is indispensable in creating positive social outcomes for her children and family, and also extends to society at large.
Infrastructural	Personal: Pooja is unaware of the use of digital labour platforms that allow flexible work options, where she can put her education to use with simply a laptop and an internet connection.	
	External: Neighbourhood facilities for childcare/ daycare centres are expensive, and she is unable to utilise such options. Limited public transport and safety issues in commuting through a public bus also contributed to her decision to stop working.	

Summary: Pooja's agency is intricately tied to the interplay of social, economic, political, and infrastructural determinants at personal, relational, and external levels. While she faces significant constraints, there are also multiple pathways through which her agency can be enhanced like digital work, education. Addressing these determinants in a holistic and integrated manner can provide Pooja, and women in similar situations, with real choices and opportunities needed to pursue their aspirations and contribute to economic development within their contexts. Her economic agency can be significantly uplifted with infrastructural investments and policies to support women who are entering markets for the first time or after a break.

The four women in the cases above have different aspirations, support needs and outcomes influencing their own agency to change the status quo of the markets, access resources and drive their economic empowerment. The differences in their agency and experience are a complex interaction of social, cultural, political, policy, legacy issues and other environmental factors. The interventions designed for women's economic empowerment are often done to improve agency. However, without a 360-degree view of the complex interactions, we will be unable to understand factors influencing agency and ways to improve labour market outcomes for women. Often, interventions are input-based, but this framework calls for a systemic shift in approaching the interventions to design for the outcome and align that outcome with women. Using this framework, inputs for the desired outcome can be identified, and further one can clearly see the factors which a woman will have to navigate in order to change the status quo.

Conclusion: Applying the Framework to Enable Effective Solutions

The Gender-intentional Livelihoods Design framework enables stakeholders in the ecosystem to understand the underlying and interrelated determinants of a woman's labour and her participation, which operates in the context of local markets, value chains and exist in a continuum. It expresses that the determinants do not exist in siloes, and a complete view should be adopted to drive women's economic empowerment and achieve outcomes resulting from diversity.

The framework can be applied at three levels:

- First, it enables a deeper understanding of the stressors which undermine women's labour and impact their participation and factors which contribute to their agency.
- Secondly, it informs the design of holistic, relevant and contextual solutions across the continuum of economic empowerment of women.
- Thirdly, this framework lays the groundwork for catalysing systemic change by identifying leverage points where interventions can have the most significant and scalable impact.

By pinpointing the specific stressors and supports within the ecosystem of women's labour, the framework guides stakeholders in crafting policies, programmes, and initiatives that not only address immediate barriers but also work towards shifting the underlying structures that perpetuate inequalities. This level of application ensures that solutions are not only effective in the short term but are also sustainable and adaptable to evolving economic and societal contexts, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and equitable economic landscape.

Through the journey taken by Selvi, a floor supervisor facing challenges yet striving for change, we see the framework in action. Her story is more than an anecdote; it is a microcosm of the broader landscape of women's labour. By addressing both immediate and structural challenges,

we can create a ripple effect, transforming industries and improving lives. By applying our framework, stakeholders can identify key leverage points—such as extending DEI commitments across the chain and empower the supplier’s capability to nurture talent in an inclusive manner, targeted programmes to advance women in the chain, build competitiveness of the MSMEs and transform the way they work, strengthen and encourage ethical business practices—that can lead to significant improvements in working conditions for women like Selvi.

Call to action for ecosystem stakeholders

The framework provides different stakeholders an **opportunity to design holistic and contextual solutions** to enhance the outcomes of women’s participation by recognising, addressing, and in some cases leapfrogging, root causes to ensure greater impact.

- **Philanthropic organisations:** We encourage use of this framework to adopt a systemic perspective on the needs and challenges women face in the markets (such as alienation from markets, legacy issues, limited access and know-how), **directing investments toward fostering collaborative initiatives that amplify women’s agency.**
- **State and national governments** are positioned to harness this framework as a pivotal instrument in policy development and refinement, aligning economic planning and interventions with the nuanced realities of a diverse female workforce. **At a state level, this framework** can help understand the determinants of labour outcomes for the cohorts of women within the state, and thereby inform how solutions and policies can be customised to achieve the desired WEE goals for population at scale.
- **Indian industries have a significant role in improving the diversity and inclusivity in the markets.** They can leverage the nuanced understanding of the needs of a diverse workforce which the framework articulates. **At a value chain level,** this framework can help understand the entry and growth barriers posed by the determinants of women’s labour, to design targeted interventions for improving inclusivity across the chain.
- **Non-governmental organisations** implement solutions which cater to the needs of individuals, vulnerable groups and communities overall, recognising the root causes of determinants of women’s participation and systemic enablers.

By acknowledging and addressing the full spectrum of determinants affecting women’s labour participation, efforts to cultivate diverse, equitable and inclusive economic growth can be channelised. Linking this approach of understanding the determinants of women’s labour to a theory of change can help elucidate how a project, policy, strategy, programme, or other initiative contributes towards the intended agency outcome through a series of early and intermediate outcomes. The Gender-intentional Livelihoods Design framework is more than a diagnostic tool; it is a blueprint for action. It challenges stakeholders to look beyond immediate barriers, to understand and dismantle the systemic structures that limit women’s economic participation, dignity and freedom.

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