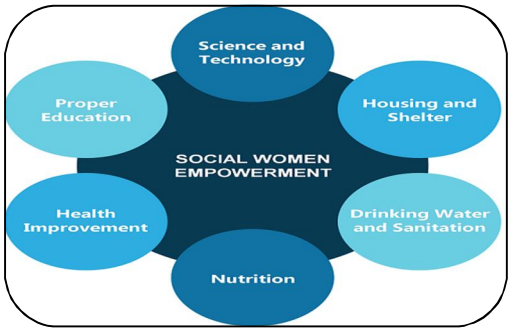
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WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT



Women's participation in social and economic development is essential for achieving inclusive, equitable, and sustainable development in contemporary society. Women contribute significantly to household welfare, education, healthcare, agriculture, employment, entrepreneurship, community development, and national economic growth. However, social and economic inequalities continue to restrict women's opportunities and participation in many areas of life. Limited access to quality education, employment, financial resources, property ownership, healthcare, technology, and decision-making can reduce women's ability to contribute fully to development processes. Gender discrimination, traditional social norms, unequal distribution of unpaid care work, wage disparities, occupational segregation, and limited representation in leadership further influence women's socio-economic position. Education and skill development can improve women's employability, confidence, economic independence, and social mobility. Similarly, access to entrepreneurship, self-help groups, credit, digital technology, financial services, and social protection can strengthen women's economic empowerment. Women's participation in local governance, community organizations, civil society, and political institutions also contributes to greater social inclusion and collective development. The study examines the nature and importance of women's participation in social and economic development and explores the major opportunities and challenges influencing their participation. It also considers the role of government policies, educational institutions, workplaces, non-governmental organizations, families, and communities in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment.

KEYWORDS: *Women's Participation, Social Development, Economic Development, Women's Empowerment, Gender Equality, Education, Employment, Economic Independence, Entrepreneurship, Social Inclusion, Leadership, Sustainable Development.*

INTRODUCTION

Women constitute an essential part of society and play a significant role in social, economic, cultural, and national development. Their participation extends beyond household responsibilities to education, employment, agriculture, entrepreneurship, healthcare, community activities, public administration, and leadership. The development of any society depends considerably on the effective participation of women in decision-making and productive activities. Historically, however, women have faced various forms of social and economic inequality that have restricted their opportunities and limited

their participation in development processes. Gender discrimination, traditional social norms, unequal access to education, limited employment opportunities, wage differences, restricted ownership of property, and unequal distribution of household responsibilities continue to influence women's socio-economic position. Education has emerged as an important instrument for improving women's awareness, confidence, skills, employment opportunities, and social mobility. Economic participation provides women with income, financial independence, bargaining power, and greater involvement in household decision-making. Women's participation in agriculture, industry, services, informal employment, entrepreneurship, and professional occupations contributes substantially to household income and national economic productivity. At the same time, women's unpaid domestic and care work represents an important but often undervalued contribution to social reproduction and family welfare.

The process of social and economic development has created new opportunities for women through education, technology, digitalization, entrepreneurship, self-help groups, financial inclusion, skill development, and government welfare programmes. Women's participation in local governance, community organizations, civil society institutions, and political activities has also strengthened their role in collective decision-making and social development. Nevertheless, significant barriers remain, particularly for women from rural, poor, marginalized, and socially disadvantaged communities. Limited access to resources, employment insecurity, digital exclusion, workplace discrimination, violence, inadequate childcare facilities, and social expectations can restrict women's participation in economic and public life. The changing labour market and technological development have created new employment opportunities while also requiring women to acquire new skills and digital competencies. Government policies and institutional initiatives aimed at women's education, employment, entrepreneurship, financial inclusion, social security, and political representation are therefore important for promoting gender equality. Families and communities also have a significant role in creating supportive environments for women's participation. The present study examines the nature, importance, opportunities, and challenges of women's participation in social and economic development and considers how greater gender equality and empowerment can contribute to inclusive, equitable, and sustainable development.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Aim:

The main aim of the study is to examine the nature, extent, importance, opportunities, and challenges of women's participation in social and economic development and to understand how women's empowerment, equal opportunities, education, employment, and decision-making can contribute to inclusive and sustainable development.

Objectives:

- To understand the concept and significance of women's participation in social and economic development.
- To examine the changing social and economic status of women in contemporary society.
- To study the role of education in promoting women's empowerment and social mobility.
- To examine women's participation in employment and productive economic activities.
- To analyse the contribution of women to household welfare and economic development.
- To study the role of women in agriculture, industry, services, and entrepreneurship.
- To examine the relationship between women's economic independence and household decision-making.
- To identify major social, cultural, and economic barriers affecting women's participation.

- To examine gender discrimination, wage inequality, and occupational inequalities affecting women.
- To study the role of skill development and vocational training in improving women's employment opportunities.
- To examine the importance of financial inclusion, credit, savings, and access to productive resources for women.
- To study the role of self-help groups and community organizations in women's empowerment.
- To examine women's participation in political, social, and community decision-making.
- To analyse the role of digital technology and digital literacy in expanding women's socio-economic opportunities.
- To suggest appropriate measures for strengthening women's participation and promoting gender-equitable, inclusive, and sustainable social and economic development.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature on women's participation in social and economic development emphasizes that women are important contributors to household welfare, community development, economic productivity, and national progress. Amartya Sen's capability approach highlights the importance of expanding individual freedoms and opportunities, particularly through education, health, employment, and participation in decision-making. Ester Boserup's work drew attention to the economic contribution of women and the unequal effects of development processes on women in developing societies. Bina Agarwal examined women's relationship with land, property rights, and economic resources and demonstrated the importance of ownership and control over productive assets for women's empowerment. Naila Kabeer emphasized the relationship between resources, agency, and achievements in understanding women's empowerment. Research on women's education consistently indicates that improved educational opportunities contribute to greater employment, health awareness, economic independence, and social mobility. Studies have also shown that women's participation in paid employment can strengthen household income and influence decision-making within families. However, literature indicates that women continue to face gender discrimination, occupational segregation, wage disparities, unpaid care responsibilities, and limited access to productive resources. These barriers are particularly significant for rural, poor, and socially disadvantaged women.

Indian studies further demonstrate that women's participation in development varies according to education, caste, class, region, family structure, occupation, and access to resources. Research on self-help groups and microfinance indicates that collective economic activities can improve women's financial awareness, savings, entrepreneurship, confidence, and participation in community affairs. Studies on political participation show that women's representation in local governance can increase their visibility in public decision-making and strengthen attention to community welfare issues. Research on women's labour-force participation also identifies challenges related to informal employment, insecure working conditions, unpaid domestic work, inadequate childcare, and social expectations. Contemporary literature increasingly examines digitalization, financial inclusion, entrepreneurship, skill development, and technology as emerging avenues for women's socio-economic empowerment. International development literature emphasizes that gender equality is not only a matter of social justice but also an important condition for sustainable economic development and human development. The literature therefore suggests that women's participation must be understood broadly, including paid and unpaid work, household decision-making, education, political participation, community leadership, entrepreneurship, and access to resources. Overall, existing studies support the need for policies and social institutions that

remove structural barriers and create equal opportunities for women to participate meaningfully in social and economic development.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study adopts a descriptive and analytical research methodology to examine women's participation in social and economic development. The study is primarily based on secondary sources of information collected from books, academic journals, research articles, government reports, census publications, policy documents, international development reports, and reliable institutional sources. The research examines the social, economic, educational, political, and cultural dimensions of women's participation. Particular attention is given to women's education, employment, entrepreneurship, income generation, financial independence, household decision-making, political participation, community involvement, and access to social security. The study also considers major barriers such as gender discrimination, wage inequality, occupational segregation, unpaid domestic work, limited access to property and productive resources, and inadequate employment opportunities. The role of education, skill development, vocational training, digital literacy, financial inclusion, self-help groups, and entrepreneurship in strengthening women's socio-economic position is also examined. Relevant government policies and programmes related to women's empowerment, employment, education, health, financial inclusion, and social protection are reviewed to understand their contribution to women's development. The study adopts a thematic approach to organize and interpret information obtained from different sources.

The analytical framework examines variations in women's participation according to rural and urban location, educational level, socio-economic background, occupation, age, and access to resources. The study also considers the relationship between women's economic participation and their autonomy, household decision-making, social status, and quality of life. Special attention is given to the participation of women in agriculture, industry, services, informal employment, entrepreneurship, self-help groups, and community organizations. The influence of digital technology and changing labour-market conditions on women's employment opportunities is also examined. Comparative interpretation is used to identify major patterns, opportunities, inequalities, and challenges affecting women's participation. The study recognizes that women's experiences differ considerably across social and economic contexts and therefore avoids treating women as a homogeneous group. The available information is critically examined to identify important trends and gaps in existing policies and practices. The methodology follows principles of objectivity, academic integrity, and responsible interpretation of secondary information. Overall, the research methodology provides a systematic framework for understanding the factors influencing women's participation and for identifying measures that can promote gender equality, economic empowerment, social inclusion, and sustainable development.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Women constitute a significant part of the population and make important contributions to household welfare, economic productivity, community development, and social progress. However, their participation in social and economic development continues to be influenced by persistent gender inequalities and structural barriers. In many societies, women have unequal access to education, employment, property, financial resources, healthcare, technology, and decision-making opportunities. Traditional gender roles and social expectations often place a disproportionate burden of unpaid domestic and care work on women, limiting their participation in paid employment and public activities. Wage disparities, occupational segregation, insecure employment, workplace discrimination, and limited

opportunities for career advancement further restrict women's economic independence. Rural and economically disadvantaged women may face additional challenges because of limited infrastructure, transportation, digital connectivity, financial services, and employment opportunities. Although women's educational attainment and participation in various occupations have increased, these improvements have not always resulted in equal economic and social outcomes. The problem therefore extends beyond women's access to employment and includes their ability to control resources, make decisions, exercise rights, and participate meaningfully in social institutions.

The problem is also connected with women's unequal representation in leadership, governance, entrepreneurship, and community decision-making. Limited access to credit, markets, technology, training, and productive assets can restrict women's ability to establish and expand economic activities. Self-help groups, government programmes, skill-development initiatives, and financial inclusion schemes have created opportunities for empowerment, but differences in implementation and accessibility may limit their effectiveness. Digitalization has created new possibilities for education, employment, communication, entrepreneurship, and financial services, while the digital divide can exclude women who lack access to devices, connectivity, or digital skills. Social norms, family responsibilities, safety concerns, and inadequate childcare facilities may further influence women's participation in the labour market. These challenges demonstrate that women's participation in development cannot be measured only through employment or income but must also include education, health, autonomy, leadership, decision-making, social participation, and access to resources. Therefore, the central problem of the study is to understand the nature, extent, determinants, and barriers of women's participation in social and economic development. The study seeks to examine whether existing social, economic, institutional, and policy measures are creating meaningful opportunities for women and to identify strategies for strengthening gender equality, empowerment, economic independence, and inclusive development.

NEED OF THE STUDY

The study of women's participation in social and economic development is important because women play a central role in household welfare, community development, human capital formation, and economic growth. Despite significant progress in education, employment, entrepreneurship, political representation, and social awareness, women continue to experience various forms of inequality that restrict their full participation in development processes. Gender discrimination, unequal access to education and employment, wage disparities, limited ownership of property, inadequate financial resources, and unequal responsibility for unpaid domestic and care work remain important concerns. Women's participation in productive economic activities can increase household income, improve living standards, strengthen financial independence, and enhance decision-making within families. Education and skill development can further improve women's employment opportunities, confidence, social mobility, and awareness of rights. The study is therefore needed to understand the factors that encourage or restrict women's participation in different areas of social and economic life. It is also necessary to examine the conditions of women from rural and urban areas and from different socio-economic backgrounds. Understanding these differences can help identify inequalities in access to resources, opportunities, services, and decision-making. The study can provide a broader understanding of women's contribution to development beyond conventional measures of employment and income.

The study is further needed to examine the effectiveness of initiatives related to women's empowerment, self-help groups, entrepreneurship, financial inclusion, skill development, education, employment, healthcare, and social protection. Women's participation in community organizations, local governance, political institutions, and leadership positions can strengthen democratic participation and

contribute to more inclusive development. The growing importance of digital technology also makes it necessary to examine women's access to digital education, online employment, financial services, information, and e-governance. At the same time, digital exclusion, workplace insecurity, violence, inadequate childcare, and social restrictions may continue to limit women's opportunities. The study can help policymakers, educational institutions, employers, non-governmental organizations, social workers, and community leaders understand the major barriers affecting women's participation and develop appropriate interventions. Greater participation of women can contribute to poverty reduction, improved family welfare, better education and health outcomes, and stronger community development. The study is therefore essential for understanding how social institutions, economic opportunities, public policies, and supportive environments can promote women's empowerment. Ultimately, examining women's participation is necessary for building a society based on gender equality, equal opportunity, dignity, economic independence, social justice, and sustainable development.

FURTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR RESEARCH

Further research on women's participation in social and economic development should adopt a multidimensional and interdisciplinary approach covering economic, social, educational, political, cultural, and technological dimensions. Future studies may examine differences in women's participation across rural and urban areas, regions, occupations, age groups, educational levels, and socio-economic backgrounds. Longitudinal research can help understand how education, employment, marriage, motherhood, migration, and changing economic conditions influence women's participation over time. Greater attention should be given to women working in agriculture, informal employment, domestic work, manufacturing, services, and emerging digital occupations. Research may examine the relationship between women's employment, income, economic independence, and household decision-making. Further studies are needed on the impact of unpaid domestic and care work on women's labour-force participation and career advancement. Research should also investigate wage inequality, occupational segregation, workplace discrimination, employment security, and access to social protection. The role of education, vocational training, skill development, entrepreneurship, and career guidance in improving women's employment opportunities requires continued investigation. Studies on access to land, property, credit, markets, financial services, and productive resources can provide deeper insights into women's economic empowerment.

Future research should also examine the effectiveness of government policies and programmes related to women's education, employment, entrepreneurship, financial inclusion, healthcare, social security, and political participation. More field-based research is required to understand the experiences of women from disadvantaged and marginalized communities. Studies may explore how self-help groups, cooperatives, microfinance institutions, community organizations, and non-governmental organizations contribute to women's empowerment and collective action. The growing influence of digitalization requires research on digital literacy, online education, digital financial services, remote employment, entrepreneurship platforms, and the gender digital divide. Future studies should also examine women's representation in local governance, political institutions, organizational leadership, and community decision-making. Research on workplace safety, gender-based violence, childcare facilities, maternity support, and work-life balance can further explain barriers to women's participation. Comparative studies across states and countries can identify successful policies and institutional practices that promote gender equality. Participatory and mixed-method research can provide deeper understanding of women's lived experiences, aspirations, and development priorities. Overall, future research should generate evidence-based strategies that strengthen women's autonomy, economic independence, leadership, social

participation, and access to equal opportunities while contributing to inclusive and sustainable social and economic development.

Scope and Limitations

The scope of the study covers the major social, economic, educational, political, and cultural dimensions of women's participation in development. It examines women's involvement in education, employment, agriculture, industry, services, entrepreneurship, household economic activities, community development, and decision-making. The study considers the contribution of women to household income, family welfare, human capital development, and broader economic growth. It also examines factors influencing women's participation, including education, skill development, access to employment, financial resources, property ownership, technology, healthcare, and social security. Particular attention is given to gender discrimination, wage inequality, occupational segregation, unpaid domestic work, workplace barriers, and limited access to productive resources. The study covers women from rural and urban areas and considers differences based on socio-economic background, education, occupation, age, and access to opportunities. The role of self-help groups, entrepreneurship, financial inclusion, digitalization, community organizations, and government programmes is also included. Women's participation in local governance, political institutions, leadership, and community decision-making forms another important area of the study. The scope further includes the relationship between women's empowerment, economic independence, social mobility, household decision-making, and quality of life.

The study has certain limitations that should be considered while interpreting its findings. It is primarily based on secondary sources such as books, research articles, government reports, statistical publications, policy documents, and institutional studies, and therefore the availability and reliability of existing information may influence the analysis. Women are not a homogeneous group, and their experiences differ according to region, caste, class, religion, education, occupation, age, family structure, and economic conditions, making broad generalizations difficult. Official statistics may also differ in definitions, indicators, time periods, and methods of data collection. Some important aspects of women's unpaid work, household decision-making, social constraints, personal experiences, and informal economic activities may not be adequately captured through available statistical data. The study does not include an extensive primary survey covering women from all regions and social groups, and therefore local experiences may require further field-based investigation. Rapid changes in technology, employment patterns, economic conditions, and government policies may also influence the relevance of some findings over time. Despite these limitations, the study provides a broad understanding of women's participation in social and economic development and identifies important areas for policy intervention, empowerment, gender equality, and further research.

Scope of Study

The scope of the present study covers the social and economic participation of women and its contribution to individual, family, community, and national development. It examines women's participation in education, employment, agriculture, industry, services, entrepreneurship, self-employment, informal work, and household economic activities. The study considers the role of education and skill development in improving women's employability, confidence, social mobility, and economic independence. It also examines women's access to income, property, credit, savings, banking services, markets, technology, and other productive resources. The study focuses on the relationship between women's economic participation and their role in household decision-making, family welfare, and social status. It includes issues such as gender discrimination, wage inequality, occupational segregation, unpaid

domestic work, employment insecurity, and barriers to career advancement. The scope also covers women's participation in community organizations, self-help groups, local governance, political institutions, and leadership positions. Differences in women's participation between rural and urban areas and among different socio-economic groups are considered. The study further examines the contribution of government policies, welfare programmes, educational initiatives, financial inclusion schemes, skill-development programmes, and entrepreneurship support to women's empowerment.

The scope also extends to emerging areas such as digitalization, digital literacy, online education, digital financial services, technology-based employment, and women's participation in the changing labour market. It considers the opportunities created by digital technology as well as challenges associated with the gender digital divide. The study examines the role of self-help groups, cooperatives, non-governmental organizations, educational institutions, workplaces, families, and community organizations in creating supportive environments for women. Women's participation in social development is considered through their contributions to education, healthcare, community welfare, social awareness, leadership, and collective action. The study also covers the relationship between women's economic empowerment and poverty reduction, household well-being, social inclusion, and sustainable development. Special attention is given to barriers faced by women from economically and socially disadvantaged backgrounds. The study seeks to understand both quantitative participation and qualitative dimensions such as autonomy, confidence, agency, dignity, and decision-making power. Overall, the scope is designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of women's participation in social and economic development and to identify measures that can strengthen gender equality, empowerment, equal opportunity, and inclusive development.

DISCUSSION

Women's participation in social and economic development is a multidimensional process that contributes significantly to household welfare, community progress, and national economic growth. Women participate in agriculture, industry, services, entrepreneurship, education, healthcare, informal employment, and various household economic activities. Their participation in paid employment can increase household income and strengthen financial independence, while education enhances knowledge, skills, confidence, and social mobility. Women's economic contribution also influences household decisions concerning education, health, nutrition, savings, and investment. However, women's participation remains affected by gender discrimination, wage inequality, occupational segregation, limited access to productive resources, and unequal responsibility for unpaid domestic and care work. Rural women often face additional barriers related to inadequate infrastructure, transportation, employment opportunities, markets, financial services, and digital connectivity. Women from economically disadvantaged and socially marginalized communities may experience multiple forms of inequality. Self-help groups, microfinance, entrepreneurship, skill development, and community organizations have created important opportunities for women to improve their economic position and collective participation. Women's increasing involvement in local governance and community institutions has also strengthened their role in decision-making and social development. These developments demonstrate that women's participation can contribute not only to economic productivity but also to broader social transformation.

The changing nature of technology and the labour market has created new opportunities as well as new challenges for women. Digital literacy and access to digital platforms can support online education, financial inclusion, entrepreneurship, communication, and employment, but the gender digital divide may prevent many women from benefiting equally. Women's participation in leadership, political institutions, community organizations, and professional workplaces can strengthen representation and promote more

inclusive decision-making. At the same time, workplace discrimination, inadequate childcare, safety concerns, career interruptions, and limited organizational support can restrict women's long-term participation. Government programmes related to education, employment, entrepreneurship, financial inclusion, social security, health, and political representation have an important role in reducing these barriers. Families and communities must also support the redistribution of domestic responsibilities and encourage women's education, employment, and leadership. Women's unpaid care work should receive greater recognition because it contributes substantially to household and social well-being. Sustainable development requires women's participation not merely as beneficiaries but as active agents and decision-makers. Therefore, strengthening education, economic independence, access to resources, digital inclusion, leadership, and social protection is essential. Overall, meaningful participation of women can reduce inequality, improve family welfare, enhance human development, and contribute to inclusive, equitable, and sustainable social and economic development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Women's participation in social and economic development should be strengthened through equal access to quality education, skill development, employment, financial resources, and decision-making opportunities. Educational institutions should provide women with relevant academic, vocational, digital, and entrepreneurial skills that improve their employability and economic independence. Employment opportunities should be expanded in agriculture, manufacturing, services, entrepreneurship, and emerging sectors while ensuring equal wages, safe working conditions, and social security. Special attention should be given to women in rural and economically disadvantaged communities through accessible training, transportation, childcare, markets, and financial services. Women's access to credit, savings, banking, insurance, property, land, and productive assets should be improved to strengthen their economic autonomy. Self-help groups, cooperatives, microenterprises, and women-led businesses should receive adequate financial, technical, and marketing support. Government programmes for women's education, employment, health, entrepreneurship, and social protection should be implemented effectively and monitored regularly. Career counselling, vocational training, apprenticeships, and entrepreneurship development programmes should be expanded to connect women with emerging employment opportunities. Workplaces should adopt gender-sensitive policies, maternity support, childcare facilities, flexible work arrangements, and effective mechanisms for addressing discrimination and harassment.

Digital inclusion should become an important component of women's empowerment through affordable internet access, digital literacy, online education, digital financial services, and technology-based employment opportunities. Special efforts should be made to reduce the gender digital divide among rural and disadvantaged women. Women's participation in local governance, community organizations, political institutions, and leadership positions should be encouraged through capacity-building and leadership-development programmes. Families and communities should promote equal sharing of domestic and care responsibilities so that women can participate more actively in education, employment, and public life. Greater recognition should be given to women's unpaid household and care work in development planning and social policy. Government agencies, educational institutions, employers, non-governmental organizations, financial institutions, and community organizations should work together to create supportive opportunities for women. Policies should address the specific needs of women facing multiple disadvantages due to poverty, social exclusion, disability, geographical isolation, or insecure employment. Regular evaluation and gender-sensitive data collection should be used to identify gaps in programmes and measure progress. Overall, development strategies should treat women as active participants and decision-makers rather than merely beneficiaries. Strengthening women's education, economic independence, social

security, leadership, digital access, and institutional participation can promote gender equality, reduce poverty, improve family welfare, and contribute to inclusive and sustainable social and economic development.

CONCLUSION

Women's participation in social and economic development is essential for achieving inclusive, equitable, and sustainable development. Women make significant contributions to household welfare, agriculture, industry, services, entrepreneurship, education, healthcare, community development, and national economic productivity. Their participation in education and employment can improve knowledge, skills, confidence, financial independence, and social mobility. Economic empowerment can also strengthen women's role in household decision-making and improve outcomes related to family health, education, nutrition, and living standards. However, gender discrimination, wage inequality, occupational segregation, unpaid domestic responsibilities, limited access to property and productive resources, and inadequate employment opportunities continue to restrict women's full participation. Rural women and women from economically and socially disadvantaged backgrounds often face additional barriers related to infrastructure, finance, technology, markets, and social mobility. Although government programmes, self-help groups, financial inclusion initiatives, skill-development schemes, and educational opportunities have created important avenues for empowerment, significant inequalities remain. Therefore, women's participation must be understood not only in terms of employment and income but also through education, autonomy, leadership, social participation, decision-making, dignity, and access to resources.

The study concludes that meaningful women's participation requires supportive social institutions, inclusive economic opportunities, effective public policies, and equal access to resources and services. Education, skill development, entrepreneurship, financial inclusion, digital literacy, social security, and safe employment can strengthen women's economic independence and social empowerment. Greater participation in local governance, political institutions, community organizations, and leadership can enhance women's representation and influence in decision-making. Families and communities must also encourage equal sharing of household and care responsibilities and challenge traditional attitudes that restrict women's opportunities. Employers should provide equal wages, safe working environments, childcare support, maternity protection, and opportunities for career advancement. Digital technology should be used to expand women's access to information, education, financial services, markets, and employment while reducing the gender digital divide. Policies should give special attention to women experiencing poverty, social exclusion, insecure employment, or multiple forms of disadvantage. Ultimately, women should be recognized as active agents and decision-makers in the development process rather than passive beneficiaries. Empowering women and ensuring their meaningful participation can reduce inequality, strengthen families and communities, improve human development, and contribute substantially to inclusive, just, and sustainable social and economic development.

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