



Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: Workforce Transformation and Integration for Women in the Unorganised Sector

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Abstract: *Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) as frameworks that can help create more productive, happy and inclusive workplaces and economies. Although DEI is developing into a formal organisational practice, women working in the informal sector are generally excluded from these efforts. In India, for example, 90% of women are in informal and unorganised work, where they regularly face issues that include wage insecurity, lack of social protection, unsafe working conditions, limited mobility, little access to developing skills, and being excluded from using the Internet. This study will examine the application of DEI concepts and principles within the informal sector for the purpose of empowering women workers and supporting a resilient work/living environment for them. The research will combine concepts from modern organisational studies, including research conducted on hybrid organisational models of work, how organisations support employees through communication, and employee well-being, with global academic literature on women and men, labour in the informal sector, and access to the Internet. Through a thematic conceptual analysis, key constructs including flexibility, autonomy, organisational support, communication, digital access, equity and inclusion will be examined in the context of labour in the informal economy. This extended abstract is about Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) from the standpoint of women's work within the unorganised sector. This includes women who work in formal organisations, and therefore by analysing how additional structures (self-help groups, other support groups, cooperatives, NGOs, technology platforms) can be useful to the unorganised sector. Gender-responsive policymaking, digital empowerment and sustainable livelihood programmes are key policy implications outlined in this article. Inclusion and opportunity for women in the workforce can be more equitable and resilient if the principles of DEI are invested into the unorganised workforce.*

Keywords: *Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Integration, Women, Unorganised sector, Wellbeing, Economic Resilience.*

Objectives of the Paper:

1. To understand D.E.I frameworks to respond to women's existing weaknesses in the unorganised sector.
2. To evaluate how women's livelihood security has been influenced by digital/sustainable innovation.
3. To analyse the extent to which D.E.I practices from formal sectors can be applied to informal labour systems.
4. To recommend policy/institutional interventions for the inclusive development of the workforce.

Review of literature:

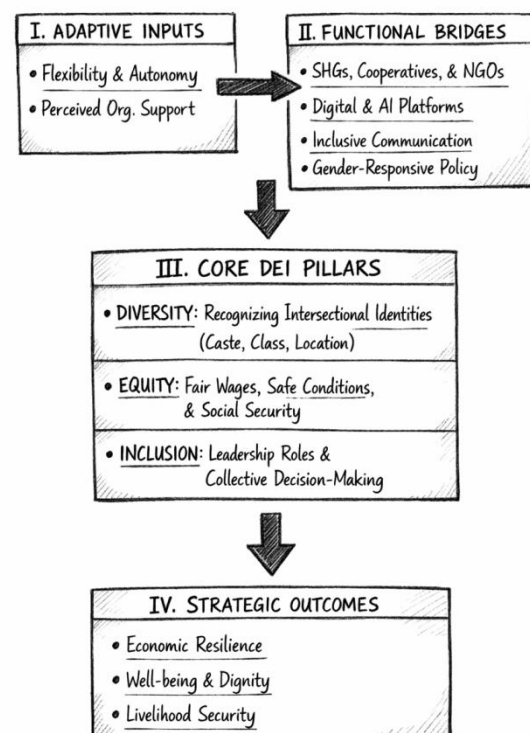
DEI is a pillar to successful and innovative work environments in the literature surrounding the future of work. DEI-oriented organizations produce higher levels of productivity, employee engagement and adaptability when fairness and inclusion are part of organizational practices (Roberson, 2019; Shore et al., 2018). Nevertheless, the development of these frameworks has primarily occurred within traditional employment environments which possess structured HR systems and regulatory oversight. On the other hand, the informal sector is defined as where worker arrangements are informal, where there are few legal protections, and where the vulnerability to exploitation is high (Chen, 2012). Women workers in the informal sector face many compounding

disadvantages caused by a multitude of gender-based norms, non-remunerated care work obligations, limited mobility, and restricted access to education and technology (Kabeer, 2015; Ghosh, 2021). The labour of these women tends to be largely unrecognized, undervalued, and excluded from social security systems (Benería et al., 2015). Recent studies on formal work that utilizes hybrid work designs will shed light on an alternative means for re-thinking how we design work. Findings suggest that flexibility, autonomy, and technology-enabled work environments produce improved work-life balance, decreased burnout, and increased employee satisfaction (Rajan & Devi, 2025; Kniffin et al., 2021). Informal workers do not operate according to a hybrid work system; however, the principles of flexibility and autonomy are still applicable for women who have both productive and reproductive roles. There is a large body of literature on the support provided by organisations in increasing employee's outcomes, particularly regarding communication, work conditions and perceived support from their organisations (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011; Putra et al., 2024). Women workers in the informal sector frequently have no formal employer, but informal women's organisations are able to provide the support they need for their work through these types of institutions i.e. Self Help Groups (SHGs), Co-operatives, NGOs and Community-Based Organisations (CBOs). If these institutions are developed using the framework of the Diversity, Equality and Inclusion (DEI) principles, then it is expected to improve the safety and security of women workers, increase their bargaining power, and ultimately improve the well-being of women workers through their ability to participate in these institutions. The literature on Digital Inclusion indicates that technology has the potential to transform gender and socio-economic inequalities. By providing the tools and literacy associated with the digital world, women are able to access and participate in the following activities on the internet: market place participation, access to financial services, acquiring skills and participating in public service systems (Heeks & Renken, 2018; OECD, 2019; Gurusurthy & Chami, 2021). Therefore, technology can be seen as a significant enabler of DEI in the informal economy.

Methodology:

This research uses a conceptual research design, making it suitable for incorporating/creating new frameworks or perspectives through combining existing theories, empirical evidence, and contextual realities. No primary data has been collected; this research synthesizes findings from two empirical research articles: first, the relationship between Hybrid Work Models and Employee Well-Being in the IT Sector, by Rajan & Devi (2025); second, the relationship between Organizational Support & Communication in Formal Banking & MSME settings by Putra et al., 2024. The research also utilizes globally-recognized literature on diversity, equity & inclusion (DEI); informal economies; gender studies; and digital inclusion produced by international organizations and academia. Analyses were undertaken using thematic analysis to identify recurring constructs: flexibility; autonomy; organizational support; communication; digital access; equity; inclusion; and well-being. These constructs were adapted to the socio-economics of un-organized women to create a DEI oriented conceptual framework.

Conceptual Framework: DEI Integration for Women in the Unorganised Sector



Findings and Discussions:

The synthesis of published literature informs how to integrate DEI into DEI principles within the unorganised sector. There were three major conclusions drawn from this research:

The research around hybrid working can inform the principles that apply to the informal sector (i.e. flexibility, autonomy and use of technology), enabling women in informal sectors to balance their domestic responsibilities with earning an income. Digital tools can also give informal women workers access to new sources of income, remote training and reduce their dependence upon exploitative intermediaries. Organisational support is a major determinant of the health and productivity of informal women workers. There are no formal employment arrangements for informal women workers; however, self-help groups (SHGs), cooperatives, NGOs and government programs act as functional equivalents of organisational support. Institutional forms of support based upon DEI principles such as providing multiple ways of communicating inclusively, sharing decision-making power and applying gender-sensitive practices can significantly enhance informal women workers' safety, stability, confidence, and economic security.

The area to be considered through the DEI Framework within the unorganised sector is:

Diversity – the intersectional identities (i.e. gender, caste, class literacy and location)

Equity – fair/value wages, safe working conditions, social security, equitable access to technology and training

Inclusion – actively supports women who are in positions of formal/established women's leadership, participatory decision-making and local governance.

To achieve diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), technological advancement and sustainability must work hand-in-hand. Some examples of how technology advances innovation and sustainability include digital literacy training, mobile applications for providing services, electronic payment systems for conducting business, and artificial intelligence application to provide access to market intelligence.

Each of these technological advancements supports the development of reliable, transparent income sources; and the ability of women to create sustainable livelihoods through projects such as green micro-enterprises and eco-friendly manufacturing reflect the traditional knowledge women have passed from generation-to-generation and contribute to sustainable environmental development.

Implications:

Recommendations for policy: Broadened labour/regulations and Provisioning of social security benefits to informal, female employees so as that informal female employees receive the same protections offered through formal employment contracts (e.g., disability insurance, pensions, and maternity leave).

Organizational/NGO: Establish/develop DEI-based SRHS systems through SHGs, NGOs and cooperatives to establish effective support systems for women's access to digital platforms in their native languages; improving communication and training or continue supporting ongoing development of strong women leaders by creating a supportive environment.

Social implications: To change cultural norms about women's freedom to move and participate in an economy and to create greater solidarity and collective action around such cultural norms will enhance the value of unpaid/informal work; support and contribute to building inclusive community development.

Conclusion:

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) should be integrated Repeats as one of the top priorities within the unorganised sector through ongoing lessons learned from hybrid work and organisational support practices that can be applied to informal labour systems will: a) improve women's livelihoods; b) enhance women's dignity; and c) support women's ongoing participation in the economy in a sustainable manner. The extended abstract highlights the need for policy players to coordinate action, innovate institutions, and empower digitally in order to assist women workers as a whole since they represent the

majority of India's total economic and social development.

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