

From Data to Action: How the WEE Index is Shaping Women-Inclusive Governance in Uttar Pradesh

"One of the most important things to say about the gender data gap is that it is not generally malicious, or even deliberate. Quite the opposite. It is simply the product of a way of thinking that has been around for millennia and is therefore a kind of not thinking. A double not thinking, even: men go without saying, and women don't get said at all. Because when we say human, on the whole, we mean man."

— Caroline Criado Perez, Invisible Women: Data Bias in a World Designed for Men



Gender Data Gap is a universal issue that hinders informed policymaking, economic planning, and social development. Without gender-disaggregated data (GDD), targeted interventions for women's empowerment and progress measurement remain ineffective. While governments worldwide are making significant strides in recognizing the needs and contributions of women, there is still a long way to go in making women equal participants in the economy. The Udaiti Foundation (TUF) conducted a comprehensive landscaping study in Uttar Pradesh, India to foreground the systemic issue of GDD impacting the implementation of government schemes aimed at skilling and economic upliftment. The study mapped the economic participation of women across five key levers: skilling and higher education, mobility and safety, digital and financial inclusion, entrepreneurship support, and emerging opportunities. The landscape study revealed critical gaps in the availability and use of GDD across various government programs and policies, leading to poor economic participation of women.

For instance, in entrepreneurship, the study found that lending institutions lacked GDD on loan applicants, making it difficult to track the reasons for rejection and improve women's access to credit. Similarly, the study highlighted that while women formed a large share of trainees under skilling initiatives, their transition to self-employment or enterprises was not effectively tracked. In terms of digital and financial inclusion, the study found that only 46% of women in Uttar Pradesh own and use mobile phones, with internet access and digital literacy being significantly lower than the national average. Safe accommodation for working women was another concern, with only 8 out of 41 sanctioned working women's hostels functioning in the state. While female labor force participation has been rising both nationally and within the state, there remain structural barriers that hinder women's full economic inclusion.

Despite these challenges, the **Government of Uttar Pradesh recognizes that in order to achieve its ambitious goal of becoming a \$1-trillion (OTD) economy by 2027, the participation of women is necessary.** It also recognizes that one of the key challenges is the lack of GDD, which limits the ability of policymakers to design and implement targeted interventions. Improving women's economic participation, access to resources, and progress across various economic sectors requires systematic data collection, analysis and gender appropriate planning by governments. Without this, efforts to close gender gaps will remain fragmented and ineffective.

Conceptualizing the WEE Index: A Data-Driven Approach



In response to the above stated challenges, the Planning Department of Government of Uttar Pradesh has recognized the need for a structured mechanism to track and address these gaps. The Women Economic Empowerment (WEE) Index can be an effective pan government mechanism to solve the issue of gap in GDD and strengthen policymaking to ensure economic participation of women. The WEE Index is currently being designed to institutionalize data-driven decision-making, enabling the government to improve women's participation in jobs, entrepreneurship, and to further enhance the enabling environment for economic empowerment.

The WEE Index will integrate non-survey indicators (i.e. indicators for which administrative data is available), providing a district-wise assessment of WEE. This will allow the government to compare progress across regions, identify high-impact interventions, and refine existing schemes to better serve women. The Index will consolidate GDD across different sectoral indicators, identify performance gaps across districts, and provide insights for targeted policy interventions. By leveraging GDD, the index will provide a structured approach to identify key bottlenecks and inform policy decisions at the district and state level. By aligning with the state's economic priorities, the index will ensure that gender considerations are integrated into governance frameworks at all levels.

Opportunity to develop roadmaps for the future

A critical aspect of the WEE Index will be its role in guiding the development of annual **Gender Action Plans (GAPs)** for various government departments of Uttar Pradesh. These plans will serve as strategic frameworks to improve women's participation in flagship schemes, enhance gender-responsive data collection, and set measurable targets for women's economic inclusion. By embedding gender considerations into planning, GAPs will ensure that their programs are tailored to address specific barriers faced by women.

Each department will be required to develop a customized GAP based on insights from WEE Index. These plans will drive GDD collection at micro level, establish targeted outreach platforms and create accountability mechanisms. To ensure effective implementation, the action plan will follow a robust Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) framework over a time period. For e.g., in order to improve women's workforce participation in the transport sector, the Transport Department of GoUP may set a target of hiring 33% women in the leadership positions such as Institutional head at Automated Testing Stations, Assistant Regional Transport Offices (ADTRs), Regional Transport Officers (RTOs). Further targets can be set to recruit women in operational roles (conductors, drivers, ticketing, security and maintenance staff) as well. To ensure that these targets are met, an effective Monitoring and Assessment framework can be embedded in the department which can keep track of the number of women trained and placed in the department along with tracking of their retention rate as well. This data driven approach will strengthen policy responsiveness and promote transparency and enable flexibility to maximize impact. By integrating gender-responsive metrics into the state's governance framework, the WEE Index strengthens policy responsiveness and promotes sustained improvements in women's economic participation.

Way forward for Effective Governance



The WEE Index serves as a powerful framework for driving WEE, offering both measurement and actionable insights. Beyond assessment, it can act as a catalyst for effective governance by enabling data-driven policymaking and targeted interventions. By systematically tracking women's economic progress, the index will enable evidence-based decision-making and ensure that gender considerations are embedded within state policies. The index will support annual reviews to identify best-performing districts, highlight priority areas for intervention, and facilitate targeted policy actions to enhance women's workforce participation. Meaningful progress requires more than policy commitments—it demands a robust mechanism to track, analyze, and respond to gender disparities across economic sectors. By institutionalizing GDD collection and embedding it within governance frameworks, the WEE Index ensures that WEE remains a priority at every level of policymaking. As Uttar Pradesh moves forward, leveraging this index will be crucial in unlocking the full potential of half its population, driving inclusive and sustainable economic growth for the state.
