



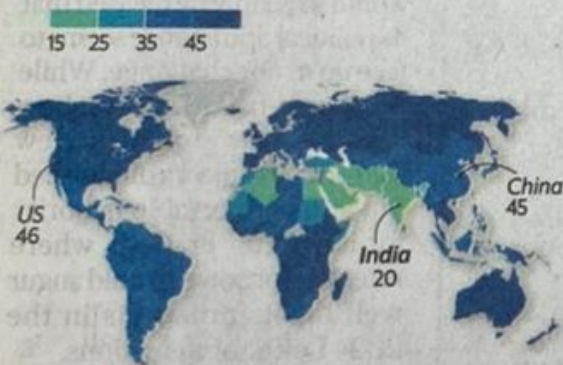
Economic well-being of women, in 5 charts

BY NITI KIRAN

Every year, International Women's Day on 8 March gives us a lot to cheer. At the same time, it gives us even more to introspect about. Economic well-being and financial independence remain distant dreams for Indian women, despite the gradual gains made over the decades, as this has been continually hindered by structural and societal barriers. As we celebrate the successes of women, here is a status check to remember why progress at a snail's pace is not enough:

1 Uneven housework load leaves India's labour force unusually skewed on gender

Share of women (%) in each country's labour force



Labour force refers to people aged 15 years or more who supply labour for the production of goods and services in a given period. It includes those currently employed as well as those unemployed but seeking work.

Source: World Bank

1 All Work, No Pay

INDIAN WOMEN may be creating headlines in leadership roles, but their workforce participation is unusually dismal by global standards. Just a dozen countries fare worse. In the last three decades, workforce participation of Indian women has continuously declined, despite better education and opportunities. This was driven by the rural sector where the participation has almost halved. Economist Mitali Nikore attributes this to mechanization and automation in agriculture.

Conservative norms dictate that women should shoulder the burden of unpaid household labour instead of going out to work. Women spend seven hours a day on such work, compared with 2.9 hours for men, showed a 2019 Time Use Survey. No wonder, the pandemic hurt women workers disproportionately.

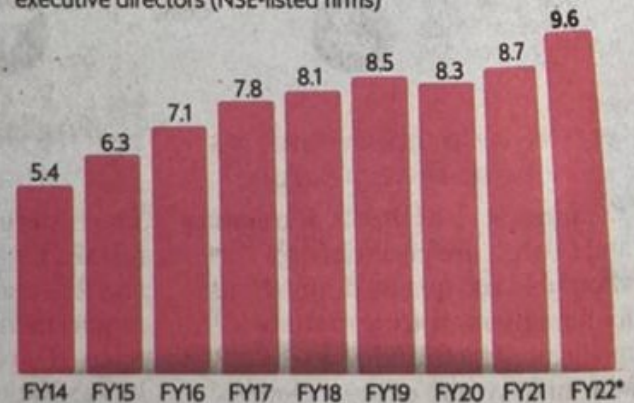
A policy focus on relieving women from such duties could help. Nikore sees solutions in formalizing affordable care services and resolving infrastructural issues such as safe mobility.

2 Skewed At Top

WOMEN ARE also grossly underrepresented in the top echelons of corporate leadership. Just 9.6% of the non-independent executive directors in India's listed companies are women, rising from 5.4% in 2014, shows a *Mint* analysis. The progress has been too slow for a period that has seen increasing demand for parity. Nearly one-fourth of the gains come from sectors such as banking and finance, fast-moving consumer goods, and healthcare. The disparity in compensation is also stark. The pay gap widens as women rise in their careers, shows research by Promila Agarwal, an associate professor at Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad. Women at lower rungs earn 2.2% less than men, but the deficit rises to 6.1% at executive levels, showed Agarwal's review of an analysis by salary data company Payscale. She suggests that companies need conscious effort to redesign compensation systems to check pay gaps.

Company boards still overwhelmingly male despite gradual progress for women

Women's share (%) among non-independent executive directors (NSE-listed firms)



*For FY22, data is as of 24 February 2022. All other figures as of the end of financial year.

Source: primeinfobase.com; Mint analysis

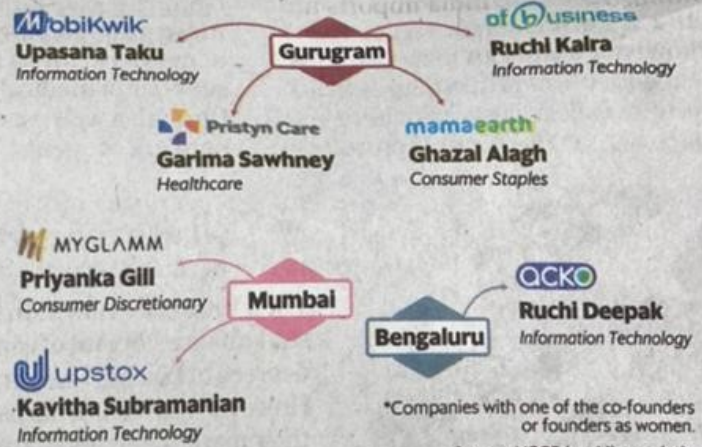
3 Funding Filters

THE BIASES also play out adversely for enterprising women who try to rise by themselves. Though 2021 saw more women-led startups reaching \$1 billion in valuation than ever before, less than 15% of India's unicorns are run by women, shows *VCCEdge* data. "It's not a matter of supply and we have unequivocally proven that," says Nruithya Madappa, director at 3one4 Capital, an early-stage venture capital (VC) firm. "It's a matter of how we systemically enable these brilliant women to continue to build and scale."

Just 7% of the total private equity and VC funds in emerging markets goes to women-led firms, says a 2019 report by International Finance Corporation. VCs with women partners are twice as likely to invest in firms with gender-diverse management, research from the US shows. "But there are so few of us in leadership positions, making investment calls," Madappa said.

India has few women entrepreneurs, but women-led startups are also turning unicorns

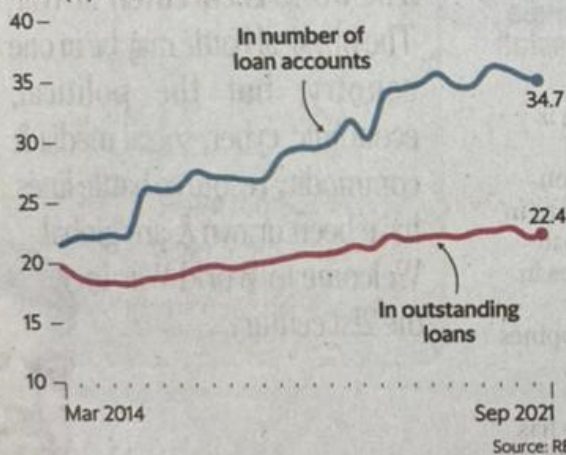
Select women-led* companies that turned unicorns in 2021



*Companies with one of the co-founders or founders as women.
Source: VCCEdge; Mint analysis

Gender disparity in accessing financial resources has reduced in recent years

Share (%) of female borrowers



4 Financial Freedom

FINANCIAL INCLUSION of women can play a key role in economic empowerment, and this has picked up in recent years. The share of women among individual borrowers has risen to 34.7% as of September 2021 from 27.5% five years ago, while their share in total loan amount rose to 22.4% from 19.5%, shows data from the Reserve Bank of India.

The main catalysts for the growth have been credit predominantly given to women on subsidised rates under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, and increasing share of microfinance in credit, where the main customers are women-led groups, says Revati Kasture, senior director at CareEdge. "In general, women borrowers have a much higher propensity to save and willingness to repay loans," she says.

Notwithstanding these developments, further progress needs to be made to achieve greater financial equality and inclusion of women.

5 Women Traders

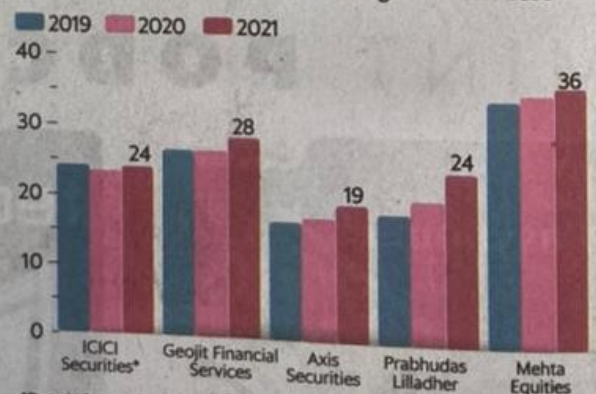
ON THE bright side, more women are now dabbling in stock markets, which have traditionally been a male bastion. Female participation in capital markets has grown and analysts estimate that women now account for almost 25-30% of the traders' tribe. The number of new women investors has more than doubled every year since 2019, primarily led by smaller cities, shows ICICI Securities data. Younger women (aged 25-35) are leading investment trends, as the pandemic has helped catalyse investors' transition to stock markets.

"Women tend to be more patient and risk-averse than men and can become excellent investors in the long run," says Vijay Chandok, managing director at ICICI Securities. As women become financially independent they will channelize their savings and investments into the market, analysts say. The government can do some heavy lifting by offering incentives, but the market ecosystem has to raise awareness.

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More women are entering stock markets, which used to be a male bastion

Share (%) of women clients in brokerages' investor base



Source: Various brokerages

AHMED RAZA KHAN/MINT