



Women Workforce in Information Technology and Inclusive Economic Growth: Insights from Pune

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Abstract:

The Information Technology (IT) sector has emerged as a major driver of economic growth in India, generating employment, innovation, and urban development. Within this rapidly expanding sector, women's participation has gained increasing attention due to its implications for inclusive economic growth and gender equity. This qualitative study explores the role of the women workforce in the IT sector in contributing to inclusive economic growth, with special reference to Pune city, one of India's prominent IT hubs. Using in-depth interviews with women IT professionals, human resource managers, and industry experts, the study examines employment experiences, skill development, career progression, workplace challenges, and socio-economic outcomes. The findings reveal that women's participation in the IT sector significantly enhances household income, human capital formation, and urban economic resilience. However, structural barriers such as gendered career paths, work-life balance pressures, limited leadership opportunities, and organizational biases continue to constrain the full realization of women's economic potential. The study argues that inclusive economic growth in knowledge-driven economies requires not only increased female labor participation but also supportive institutional frameworks and gender-sensitive organizational practices. The paper contributes to the literature on gender, technology, and development by providing context-specific insights from Pune and offers policy recommendations for fostering gender-inclusive growth in urban IT ecosystems.

Keywords: Women Workforce, Information Technology Sector, Inclusive Economic Growth, Gender Inclusion.

Introduction:

The transformation of the global economy in the twenty-first century has been marked by the rapid expansion of knowledge-intensive industries, particularly the Information Technology (IT) sector. In developing economies such as India, the IT industry has played a pivotal role in accelerating economic growth, creating high-skilled employment, enhancing export earnings, and positioning cities as global service hubs. Alongside this economic transformation,

questions of inclusivity and equity have gained prominence, especially concerning the participation of women in the modern workforce. Women's engagement in the IT sector is increasingly viewed as a critical determinant of inclusive economic growth, as it influences income distribution, human capital development, and social mobility.

India's IT sector has evolved from a niche service industry in the 1990s into a global powerhouse, employing millions of professionals

across software development, IT-enabled services, data analytics, and emerging digital technologies. Cities such as Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Chennai, and Pune have emerged as major IT clusters, attracting domestic and international investment. Pune, in particular, has witnessed rapid growth due to its strong educational base, proximity to Mumbai, and favorable industrial ecosystem. As the city's IT sector expands, the participation of women professionals has increased, reshaping traditional labor market structures and gender roles.

Despite the growing numerical presence of women in IT, concerns remain regarding the quality of employment, career advancement, wage equity, and leadership representation. While employment in the IT sector has enabled many women to achieve financial independence and professional identity, structural and cultural barriers continue to limit their full economic contribution. These barriers have implications not only for individual women but also for broader economic outcomes, as underutilization of female talent constrains productivity and innovation.

Inclusive economic growth refers to a growth process that creates opportunities for all segments of society and ensures equitable access to economic resources and benefits. In this context, women's participation in high-growth sectors such as IT is crucial. Women professionals contribute to economic growth through their labor, skills, creativity, and consumption patterns, while also influencing intergenerational outcomes such as education and health. Therefore, understanding the experiences and contributions of women in the IT sector is essential for designing policies that promote sustainable and inclusive development.

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to examine the contribution of women workforce in the IT sector towards inclusive economic growth, with special reference to Pune

city. By focusing on lived experiences, workplace dynamics, and socio-economic outcomes, the study provides nuanced insights that go beyond quantitative employment statistics. The research seeks to address the following objectives:

1. To examine the role of women professionals in Pune's IT sector in contributing to economic growth.
2. To analyze how women's participation in the IT workforce supports inclusive economic outcomes at the household and urban levels.
3. To identify challenges faced by women in the IT sector that limit their economic potential.
4. To suggest policy and organizational measures to enhance gender inclusion in the IT-driven growth process.

Conceptual Framework: Women Workforce and Inclusive Economic Growth:

Inclusive economic growth emphasizes both the pace and the pattern of growth. While rapid economic expansion is important, its sustainability depends on the extent to which growth benefits are equitably distributed across social groups, including women. Women's participation in the workforce is widely recognized as a key factor influencing inclusive growth, particularly in sectors characterized by high productivity and innovation.

The IT sector represents a knowledge-intensive industry where human capital, skills, and creativity are central to value creation. Women professionals contribute to this sector not only through direct economic output but also through indirect channels such as skill transmission, organizational diversity, and enhanced decision-making. The inclusion of women in IT workplaces has been associated with improved problem-solving, innovation, and organizational performance, thereby reinforcing economic growth.

From a conceptual perspective, the contribution of women workforce in the IT sector to inclusive economic growth can be understood through several interrelated dimensions:

- **Employment Generation:** Women's employment in IT increases labor force participation rates and reduces gender gaps in formal employment.
- **Income and Consumption:** Stable and relatively high incomes earned by women IT professionals contribute to household welfare and stimulate urban consumption.
- **Human Capital Formation:** Continuous skill development and professional training enhance women's productivity and long-term employability.
- **Social Inclusion:** Economic independence enhances women's bargaining power within households and society, promoting gender equality.
- **Urban Economic Development:** Concentration of women professionals in cities like Pune supports service demand, real estate growth, and local economic multipliers.

However, the realization of these benefits depends on institutional support, organizational practices, and socio-cultural norms. Barriers such as gender bias, unequal caregiving responsibilities, and limited access to leadership positions can weaken the link between women's participation and inclusive growth.

Review of Literature:

Women in the Information Technology Sector: Global Perspectives:

A substantial body of literature has examined women's participation in the IT sector across developed and developing economies. Studies highlight that while women's representation in IT has increased over time, they remain underrepresented in technical and

leadership roles. Research indicates that gender stereotypes, occupational segregation, and workplace cultures contribute to women's marginalization within technology-driven industries.

Scholars have emphasized that the IT sector offers both opportunities and challenges for women. On one hand, flexible work arrangements, merit-based promotion systems, and global exposure create avenues for professional growth. On the other hand, long working hours, performance pressures, and male-dominated organizational cultures often discourage women's retention and advancement.

Women Workforce and Economic Growth:

Economic theories have long recognized the role of labor force participation in driving growth. Feminist economists argue that excluding or underutilizing women's labor leads to inefficiencies and suboptimal growth outcomes. Empirical studies demonstrate a positive relationship between women's employment and economic growth, particularly when women are engaged in high-productivity sectors.

Women's earnings contribute significantly to poverty reduction, improved nutrition, and education outcomes. In urban contexts, women's participation in formal sectors such as IT enhances economic resilience by diversifying income sources and strengthening middle-class growth.

Inclusive Economic Growth and Gender Equality:

Inclusive growth frameworks emphasize gender equality as both a means and an end of development. Gender-inclusive labor markets promote fairness while also improving economic efficiency. Literature suggests that economies that invest in women's education, skills, and employment experience more sustainable growth trajectories.

However, inclusion is not limited to access to employment; it also encompasses quality of work, equal pay, career mobility, and decision-making power. Studies caution that mere numerical inclusion without addressing structural inequalities may result in “partial inclusion,” limiting the transformative potential of women’s workforce participation.

Indian Context: Women in IT and Urban Growth:

In India, the IT sector has been relatively more inclusive compared to traditional industries, attracting a large number of educated women. Research indicates that IT employment has enabled women to delay marriage, invest in education, and achieve financial independence. Cities like Pune have benefited from this trend through increased human capital and urban development.

Nevertheless, Indian studies also highlight persistent challenges such as career interruptions due to marriage and motherhood, wage disparities, and underrepresentation in senior management. These challenges underscore the need for context-specific research that captures women’s experiences within localized IT ecosystems.

Research Gap:

While existing studies provide valuable insights into women’s participation in the IT sector and its economic implications, there is limited qualitative research focusing on city-level experiences in emerging IT hubs such as Pune. Most studies rely on quantitative indicators, which often fail to capture the nuanced ways in which women’s work contributes to inclusive growth. This study addresses this gap by offering a qualitative, experience-based analysis of women professionals in Pune’s IT sector.

Research Methodology:

Research Design:

The study adopts a **qualitative research design** to explore the experiences, perceptions, and contributions of women working in the IT sector in Pune city. Qualitative methods are particularly suitable for understanding complex social and economic phenomena, as they allow for in-depth exploration of individual narratives and institutional contexts.

Data Collection Methods:

Primary data were collected through:

- **In-depth semi-structured interviews** with women IT professionals working in software development, IT services, project management, and support functions.
- **Key informant interviews** with human resource managers and industry experts to understand organizational policies and sectoral trends.

Interviews focused on employment history, skill development, workplace experiences, income contribution, career progression, and perceptions of economic empowerment.

Sampling Technique:

A **purposive sampling method** was used to select respondents with diverse professional backgrounds, age groups, and years of experience. This approach ensured rich and varied perspectives relevant to the research objectives.

Data Analysis:

Interview data were analyzed using **thematic analysis**, involving coding, categorization, and interpretation of recurring themes. This method enabled the identification of patterns related to women’s economic contribution, inclusion, and challenges within the IT sector.

Findings and Thematic Analysis:

This section presents the findings derived from in-depth qualitative interviews with women professionals employed in the Information Technology sector in Pune city, along with insights from human resource managers and industry experts. Using thematic analysis, the study identifies key patterns that explain how women's participation in the IT workforce contributes to inclusive economic growth and the constraints that limit their full economic potential. The analysis is organized into major themes reflecting employment outcomes, income contribution, skill development, workplace inclusion, and socio-economic empowerment.

Employment Opportunities and Labor Market Inclusion:

One of the most prominent findings of the study is the role of the IT sector in expanding formal employment opportunities for women. Respondents consistently emphasized that the IT industry provided access to stable, salaried employment that was often unavailable in traditional sectors. Many participants reported entering the workforce immediately after completing higher education, highlighting the sector's capacity to absorb skilled female labor.

Women professionals described the IT sector as comparatively merit-oriented, where educational qualifications and technical skills played a decisive role in recruitment. This characteristic was perceived as particularly empowering, as it reduced overt gender discrimination at entry-level positions. Several respondents noted that campus placements and transparent recruitment processes enabled them to secure employment without reliance on informal networks.

From an economic perspective, increased female participation in formal employment enhances labor force utilization and reduces gender gaps in workforce participation. At the

city level, Pune's growing pool of women IT professionals contributes to a diversified and resilient labor market, supporting sustained economic growth. However, respondents also indicated that inclusion at entry levels does not automatically translate into long-term career progression, suggesting a need to examine employment quality beyond numerical participation.

Income Generation and Household Economic Security:

The contribution of women IT professionals to household income emerged as a significant theme. Most respondents reported that their earnings constituted a substantial share of household income, particularly in dual-income households. Women emphasized that stable monthly salaries enabled them to support family expenses, invest in housing, and contribute to savings and financial planning.

Several respondents highlighted that their income provided economic security during periods of uncertainty, such as job loss or health emergencies affecting other family members. This financial resilience underscores the broader role of women's employment in strengthening household-level economic stability, which is a core dimension of inclusive growth.

In addition to direct income contributions, women professionals reported increased financial autonomy and decision-making power within households. Many participants stated that earning an independent income allowed them to participate more actively in decisions related to education, investments, and consumption. These findings align with the argument that women's employment in high-paying sectors such as IT has multiplier effects that extend beyond individual earnings.

At the urban economy level, women's consumption patterns also contribute to local economic activity. Respondents reported

spending on housing, transportation, education, healthcare, and leisure, thereby stimulating demand across various sectors. This consumption-driven growth reinforces Pune's position as a dynamic urban economy shaped by its IT workforce.

Skill Development, Human Capital Formation, and Productivity:

Continuous skill development emerged as a defining feature of women's participation in the IT sector. Respondents emphasized the importance of technical upskilling, certification programs, and on-the-job training in maintaining employability and career relevance. Many women described actively investing time and resources in acquiring new skills to adapt to evolving technologies.

This process of skill accumulation contributes to human capital formation, which is central to long-term economic growth. Women professionals viewed their work not merely as employment but as a pathway to professional identity and expertise. Several respondents noted that exposure to global projects and multinational clients enhanced their technical competencies and problem-solving abilities.

From an inclusive growth perspective, human capital development among women strengthens the overall productivity of the IT sector. Industry experts interviewed in the study highlighted that diverse teams, including women professionals, bring varied perspectives that improve innovation and organizational performance. Thus, women's skill development not only benefits individual careers but also enhances firm-level and city-level productivity.

However, respondents also pointed out disparities in access to advanced training and leadership development programs. While entry-level training was widely available, opportunities for strategic skill enhancement were perceived as

less accessible to women, particularly those balancing professional and family responsibilities. This limitation constrains the long-term contribution of women to high-value segments of the IT sector.

Career Progression and Leadership Representation:

Despite positive experiences in entry-level employment and skill acquisition, respondents consistently highlighted challenges related to career progression and leadership representation. Many women reported slower career advancement compared to male colleagues, particularly after mid-career stages. Factors such as extended working hours, frequent travel requirements, and informal networking were perceived as barriers to promotion.

Women professionals expressed concern over the underrepresentation of women in senior management and decision-making roles. Several respondents noted that while women constituted a significant portion of the workforce, leadership positions remained predominantly male-dominated. This disparity limits women's influence on organizational strategies and workplace policies, thereby affecting the inclusivity of growth outcomes.

From an economic standpoint, limited career progression represents an underutilization of skilled human resources. When women are unable to advance to leadership roles, organizations and the broader economy lose potential contributions in terms of innovation, strategic decision-making, and mentorship. Respondents emphasized that inclusive economic growth requires not only employment but also equitable access to advancement opportunities.

Work-Life Balance and Gendered Responsibilities:

Work-life balance emerged as one of the most critical challenges affecting women's sustained participation in the IT sector.

Respondents frequently cited long working hours, tight project deadlines, and performance pressures as sources of stress. These demands were often compounded by gendered expectations related to household and caregiving responsibilities.

Many women described experiencing career interruptions due to marriage, maternity, or childcare, which negatively affected career continuity and promotion prospects. While some organizations offered flexible work arrangements, respondents indicated that utilizing these options sometimes resulted in reduced visibility and slower career growth.

The findings suggest that work-life imbalance acts as a structural barrier limiting women's long-term contribution to inclusive growth. When women reduce working hours or exit the workforce due to caregiving responsibilities, the economy loses skilled labor and potential productivity gains. Respondents emphasized the need for organizational policies that normalize flexible work without penalizing career advancement.

Workplace Culture and Gender Inclusion:

Workplace culture plays a significant role in shaping women's experiences and economic outcomes in the IT sector. Respondents reported mixed experiences, with some describing supportive and inclusive environments, while others highlighted subtle forms of gender bias. Instances of exclusion from informal networks, lack of mentorship, and stereotyping were reported by several participants.

Women professionals emphasized the importance of supportive leadership and gender-sensitive human resource policies in fostering inclusion. Organizations that actively promoted diversity and inclusion were perceived as enabling better career outcomes and job satisfaction. Conversely, unsupportive cultures contributed to disengagement and attrition among women employees.

Inclusive workplace cultures are essential for translating women's participation into broader economic benefits. Respondents noted that when women feel valued and supported, they are more likely to remain in the workforce, invest in skill development, and contribute effectively to organizational goals. Thus, workplace inclusion is a key determinant of the quality of economic growth generated by the IT sector.

Social Empowerment and Changing Gender Norms:

Beyond economic outcomes, women's participation in the IT sector has broader social implications. Respondents reported that professional employment enhanced their social status and challenged traditional gender norms. Many women described gaining confidence, independence, and recognition within their families and communities.

Several participants highlighted that their professional identity influenced younger generations, particularly girls, by serving as role models. This intergenerational impact contributes to long-term inclusive growth by encouraging female education and labor force participation.

The findings suggest that women's employment in the IT sector has transformative effects that extend beyond income and productivity. By altering perceptions of women's roles in society, IT employment contributes to a more inclusive social and economic framework.

Discussion:

The findings of this study provide important insights into the relationship between women's participation in the IT workforce and inclusive economic growth in Pune city. Consistent with existing literature, the study confirms that women's employment in high-growth sectors enhances labor force participation, income security, and human capital development. However, the qualitative evidence highlights that

inclusion remains uneven and constrained by structural and cultural factors.

Women's contribution to economic growth operates through multiple channels, including household income, consumption, productivity, and social empowerment. These contributions reinforce the argument that gender inclusion is not merely a social objective but an economic imperative. However, barriers related to career progression, work-life balance, and leadership representation limit the full realization of these benefits.

The Pune case demonstrates that urban IT hubs offer significant opportunities for women's economic participation, but inclusive growth requires supportive institutional frameworks. Organizational policies that address gendered constraints can enhance retention, productivity, and leadership diversity, thereby strengthening the growth process.

Policy Implications and Recommendations:

The findings of this qualitative study highlight the significant role played by women professionals in Pune's IT sector in fostering inclusive economic growth. However, the persistence of structural, organizational, and socio-cultural barriers indicates that the potential of women's workforce participation is not fully realized. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated interventions at multiple levels, including government policy, organizational practices, and societal norms. This section outlines key policy implications and recommendations derived from the study's findings.

Government-Level Policy Interventions:

At the macro level, public policy plays a crucial role in shaping labor market inclusion and gender equity. Governments can strengthen women's participation in the IT sector by

investing in education, skill development, and supportive infrastructure.

First, targeted skill development programs aimed at women, particularly in emerging digital technologies such as artificial intelligence, data analytics, and cybersecurity, can enhance employability and career progression. Public-private partnerships involving IT firms and educational institutions can facilitate access to industry-relevant training and certification.

Second, policies that support work-life balance are essential for retaining women in the workforce. Expanding access to affordable childcare facilities, promoting parental leave for both genders, and encouraging flexible work arrangements can reduce the disproportionate caregiving burden borne by women. Such measures not only support women's employment continuity but also promote shared responsibility within households.

Third, gender-sensitive labor regulations and monitoring mechanisms are necessary to address wage disparities and workplace discrimination. Regular audits, transparent reporting, and enforcement of equal pay policies can enhance accountability and fairness within the IT sector.

Finally, urban development policies should recognize the role of women professionals in shaping city economies. Investments in safe transportation, housing, and public services can improve women's mobility and quality of life, thereby strengthening their economic participation.

Organizational Strategies for Gender Inclusion:

Organizations within the IT sector are central actors in translating women's participation into inclusive growth outcomes. The study's findings underscore the need for firms to move beyond symbolic inclusion and adopt substantive gender-inclusive practices.

One key recommendation is the development of transparent and gender-neutral promotion and performance evaluation systems. Clear criteria for advancement can reduce bias and enhance trust among employees. Mentorship and sponsorship programs tailored for women can also support career progression by providing guidance, visibility, and professional networks.

Organizations should also normalize flexible work arrangements without penalizing career advancement. Flexible hours, remote work options, and phased return-to-work programs after maternity leave can help women balance professional and personal responsibilities while maintaining productivity.

Leadership commitment to diversity and inclusion is critical. Senior management must actively champion gender inclusion, set measurable targets, and integrate diversity goals into organizational strategies. Women's representation in leadership roles can influence workplace culture and policy decisions, creating a virtuous cycle of inclusion.

Role of Education and Skill Institutions:

Educational institutions and training providers play a foundational role in shaping women's entry and progression in the IT sector. Strengthening linkages between academia and industry can ensure that curricula remain aligned with evolving skill requirements.

Encouraging women's participation in STEM education from an early stage is essential for expanding the pipeline of female IT professionals. Career counseling, role models, and scholarships can motivate young women to pursue technology-oriented careers. Continuous learning opportunities for working women can further support skill upgrading and career resilience.

Societal and Cultural Interventions:

Beyond policy and organizational reforms, broader societal change is necessary to

achieve inclusive economic growth. The study highlights the enduring influence of gender norms on women's career trajectories, particularly regarding caregiving responsibilities.

Promoting shared domestic responsibilities and challenging traditional gender roles can enable women to sustain long-term careers in demanding sectors such as IT. Media, civil society organizations, and community initiatives can play a role in reshaping societal perceptions of women's work and leadership.

Conclusion:

This study examined the contribution of women workforce in the Information Technology sector towards inclusive economic growth, with special reference to Pune city, using a qualitative research approach. The findings reveal that women professionals play a multifaceted role in driving economic growth through employment generation, income contribution, human capital formation, and social empowerment. Pune's IT sector has emerged as a significant platform for women's economic participation, offering opportunities for professional development and financial independence.

However, the study also highlights persistent challenges that limit the full realization of women's economic potential. Barriers related to career progression, leadership representation, work-life balance, and workplace culture continue to shape women's experiences in the IT sector. These constraints not only affect individual career outcomes but also have broader implications for productivity and inclusive growth.

The research underscores that inclusive economic growth in knowledge-driven economies requires more than increased female labor force participation. It demands supportive institutional frameworks, gender-sensitive organizational practices, and societal change that collectively

enable women to contribute fully and equitably to economic development.

By providing context-specific insights from Pune, this study contributes to the literature on gender, technology, and development. It emphasizes that cities aspiring for sustainable growth must integrate gender inclusion into their economic strategies. Harnessing the full potential of women workforce in the IT sector is not only a matter of equity but also a strategic imperative for long-term economic resilience and competitiveness.

Limitations of the Study:

While this study offers valuable qualitative insights, it is subject to certain limitations. The findings are based on a purposive sample of women IT professionals and industry stakeholders in Pune city and may not be generalizable to other regions or sectors. The qualitative design prioritizes depth over breadth, limiting the ability to quantify economic contributions.

Additionally, the study relies on self-reported experiences, which may be influenced by personal perceptions and contextual factors. Despite these limitations, the qualitative approach provides rich, nuanced understanding of women's workforce participation and its implications for inclusive growth.

Scope for Future Research:

Future research can build on this study by adopting mixed-methods or quantitative approaches to measure the economic impact of women's participation in the IT sector more precisely. Comparative studies across different IT hubs in India or internationally can offer broader insights into regional variations in gender inclusion.

Longitudinal research tracking women's career trajectories over time can further enhance

understanding of retention, advancement, and leadership outcomes. Exploring intersections of gender with other social dimensions such as class, caste, and education can also enrich the analysis of inclusive growth.

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