

Women workers in informal economy: a study of brick kiln in Haryana

by Santosh Nandal^[a] & Parveen Kumar^[b]

Abstract

Women constitute half of the population and contribute much share for social and economic development of society. In spite of this fact, they are most excluded group from mainstream occupation and majority of them are engaged in the informal sector. The informal economy constitute informal (unorganized) sector and its workers plus the informal workers in the formal sector constitute the informal economy. To know the problem of brick kiln workers, the study is carried out in Jhajjar district of Haryana. It is found that women play an important role in economic activity of family but this fact is not acknowledged by their family members. Women do not receive wages of work performed by them and wages are collected by their husbands. Main problem of the backwardness of women workers is low level of education.. There is no facility of education at the kiln. Education can play an important role to improve the position of brick kiln workers, so the government should give more focus on education of women and the children of workers at the kiln.

Keywords: Women workers, informal economy, brick kiln, economic development

<p>^[a] Santosh Nandal, Professor & Head, Department of Economics, Maharshi dayanand university, Rohtak, Haryana, India. Email: santoshnandal@yahoo.in</p>	<p>^[b] Parveen Kumar Junior research fellow, dept. of Economics, M.D University, Rohtak, Haryana, India. Email: parveen.yadav281@gmail.com</p>
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1. Introduction

Women constitute half of the population and contribute much share for social and economic development of society. In spite of this fact, they are most excluded group and majority of them are engaged in the informal sector. Informal sector extracts much from women and contribute less to them. International Labour Organization also justifies this statement and explains the true picture of women. Women constitute:

1. 50 per cent of the population.
2. 30 per cent of the labour force.
3. Perform 60 per cent of all working hours.
4. Receive 10 per cent of world's income, and
5. Own less than 1 per cent of the world's property.

Regarding decision making on participation at political level they make up just over ten per cent of the world's parliamentary representative, and consistently less than 4 per cent of cabinet minister or other position of executive authority.

Status of Women and Work

Status of women in every economic system plays an important role in economic activities in both developed and developing country. The family income in developing country is very low and it can be increased by employing women in economic activities. In India, labour activities depend on sex and age. Employing children (especially girls) and aged persons are taken as morally wrong in our society. Employment of adults is based on gender. Males are expected to perform difficult and home away tasks. Females perform household activities and other activities which are near home and less difficult or light works. But in present social system, there has been a change in above mentioned division of labour force. Today women are playing very important and supportive role in economic activity of society and they have achieved success in different fields of economic activities. But after all these changes, their importance in economic activity is very insignificant as compared to role of males. But good thing is that their role in economic activities is getting pace and importance over the time.

Informal Economy

The informal economy constitutes informal (unorganized) sector and its workers plus the informal workers in the economy. The term unorganized is defined as those workers who are not able to organize themselves to pursue their common interests due to certain constraints like casual nature of employment, ignorance and illiteracy, small and scattered size of establishment, etc. However, in order to take care of the social security and welfare of unorganized workers, two-pronged strategy, i.e. legislative and implementation of welfare scheme and programs have been followed so far. The legislative measure include the Minimum Wage Act, 1948, the Workmen’s Compensation Act, 1961, the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976, the Contract Labour (regulation and Abolition) Act 1970, the Inter-State Migrant Workmen (regulation of employment and conditions of service) Act, 1979, the Building and Other Construction workers (regulation of employment and conditions of service) Act, 1996, etc.

The National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector (NCEUS) set up by the government of India in September 2004 to consider various aspects of the matter and defined the unorganized sector in the following manner:-

“The unorganized sector consists of all unincorporated private enterprises owned by individuals or households engaged in the sale and production of goods and services operated on a propriety or partnership basis and with less than ten total workers.”

Size of Informal Economy

The National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) carried out a sample survey in 2004-05 and its result showed that out of total workforce of 475.5 million, only 62.6 million workers are employed in the organized sector and remaining are in unorganized sector.

Table-1

Employment of Workers

(In millions)

Category of sector	Unorganized workers	Organized workers	Total
Unorganized sector	395.5	1.4	394.9
Organized sector	29.1	33.45	62.6
Total	422.6	34.9	457.5

Source: NSSO 61st round (2004-05), employment-unemployment survey: Computed by NCEUS

Table-1 shows the distribution of total employment in different segment of economy according to the NSSO employment-unemployment survey 2004-05. Total employment in both the sectors of Indian Economy was 457.5 million. Total employment in unorganized sector was 394.9 million, while employment in organized sector was only 62.6 million. Unorganized workers were 422.6 million, while organized workers were only 34.9 million. Number of unorganized workers in unorganized sector was 395.5 million. But organized workers in unorganized sector were only 1.4 million.

Women Workers In Informal Economy

Unorganized workers are in a very disadvantageous position vis-à-vis the organized sector workers but unorganized women employees, in particular, are in an extremely delicate situation. In the absence of security of employed and other forms of social security in the unorganized sector, poor woman workers become victims of the vagaries of the market system. The size and nature of the unorganized sector, including the diversity of employment and the geographically dispersed nature of work place poses real challenges. This sector is more widespread and scattered and more difficult to organize or to better one's condition. The problem is more acute for women employees in unorganized sector.

In so far as the organized sector is concerned, in March 2004, women workers constituted 18.7 per cent of the total organized sector employment in the country, as computed to 18.4 per

cent in the previous year. As on March 2004, there were about 49.34 lakh women workers employed in the organized sector. Of this, nearly 28.12 lakh were employed in community, social, and personnel services sector. Plantations and factories were also important for employment of women. Women constituted only 5 per cent of the work force in the mines sector.

Women in Brick Kiln Industry

In India, the brick kiln industry is significant one confined mostly to rural and semi-urban areas. The socio-economic condition of women employees in brick kilns suggests that, generally, they come from the poorer sections of the society. Most of the women employees are either from the scheduled castes or backward castes earning a meager amount, which is not enough to support their families.

In all the brick kilns, abusing and rebuking the women employees in general and tribal women employees in particular is a very common phenomenon. Beating, threatening with dire consequences and other types of physical torture of women employees even in the presence of their male relations, is not uncommon in brick kilns. Most commonly, the unmarried young women employees are used as a private property by the Sardarin, Munshi, and other associates of the employer.

Brick Kiln Industry in Jhajjar District

There are 452 brick kiln in this district. All kilns have same kind of work process. On the basis of quantity of bricks prepared, there are three kinds of brick kilns. First type brick kiln prepares 40000 to 50000 bricks per day. Second type brick kiln prepares 70000 to 80000 bricks per day. Third type brick kiln prepares 80000 to 100000 bricks. Most of the brick kiln in Jhajjar district fall under second category. Working period of these kilns is from October to June. During monsoon period kilns remain closed and most of the workers return their native places.

2. Objectives of the Study:

The purpose of present study is to investigate the role of women workers in informal economy. It further elaborates the condition of women workers in Brick Kiln industry. For this, following objective are taken

- 1) To study the socio-economic condition of women workers in brick kiln.
- 2) To analyze the extent of unpaid women worker at kiln.

3. Review of Literature

Nair (1993) explained the relationship between law and unorganized sector labour. In unorganized sector most of the workers are female. Though there are many laws for unorganized sector. But these laws are not implemented completely.

Dharmalingam (1995) studied the condition of brick kiln labour in a south Indian village. The number of brick kiln in south Tamilnadu has increased in recent past years. The benefits which arise in kiln sector are not distributed equally between labour and capital.

Reena (1998) showed the need of social security in unorganized sector. Our country has 317 million working population. Of them 290 million workers are in unorganized sector, which constitute a large share in employment i.e. about 92 per cent. These workers don't have permanent income and they are not benefited from social security system.

Chopra (1998) studied condition of bonded labour in Muzaffarnagar brick kiln industry. Brick kiln labours are mainly from Muzaffarnagar and Meerut and most of them are from schedule caste (*chamar*). Among 340 respondents, 250 are from *chamar* caste, which is about 75.4 per cent. Muslim weavers are also in great number. They are 75 in total sample which is about 22.2 per cent of sample. 75 weavers are illiterate. Weaver and *chamar* were dependent on landlords of that area, who mainly belongs to *Gujjar, Jats, Tyagi, Pathan, Rajput* and *Baniya* caste.

Eapen (2001) explains the condition of female workers in informal sector in Kerala. Females get employment in informal sector. Female workers work more but they are paid very less remuneration. But this unpaid share is included in real income of the family.

Gupta (2003) examined the condition of brick kiln worker in North India. Workers of brick kiln industry come under unorganized sector. No labour law is applied on unorganized sector. This is seasonal industry

Neetha (2007) explained the problem faced by unpaid women worker in unorganized sector. Unpaid workers are one fourth of total unorganized sector worker. Being such a big part, they don't fall in the category of workers. Condition of workers is worst in informal sector of unpaid workers. Among unpaid workers, females are in large numbers.

4. Research Methodology

According to definition of NCEUS, brick kiln sector is organized sector. But all workers in it are unorganized. So researcher have selected brick kiln for study of “Women Workers in Informal Economy”.

The present study is descriptive in nature. Descriptive research studies aim to describe the fact and situation as they are. Study is based on primary data and this data is collected by using interview schedule. The population size taken in study is finite because number of women worker in Jhajjar district and number of kilns in Jhajjar district are finite.

The sampling used in the study is unrestricted probability sampling as every kilns in Jhajjar district have equal chances of selection. Conditions of women worker in all brick kilns are almost homogeneous, so researchers selected only one Brick Kiln in Jhajjar district (Haryana). At that Brick Kiln, there were 89 women wokers, therefore, researcher have taken 89 respondents.

5. Data Analysis

Age of Women Workers

Table-2

Distribution of Women Workers on the Basis of their Age Group

Age of women workers(Years)	Number of women workers	Percentage of women workers
15-25	33	37
25-35	29	33
35-45	23	26
45-55	4	4
Total	89	100

Source: Field Survey

Table-2 shows the distribution of women workers at kiln according to their age. Out of total 89 women workers, most of them are from age group of 15-25 years. Number of women workers of this age group is 33 years. In age group of 45-55 years there are only 4 women workers. Table shows that, as age group of women workers increases, their number as worker decreases. Age is main factor of productivity of labour. No women at sample kiln is above 55 years of age and 37 per cent women are in the age group of 15-25 years, 33 percent women are from age group of 25-35 years, 26 percent women are from age group of 35-45 years and only 4 percent women workers are from age group 45-55 years.

Marital Status of Women Workers

Table-3

Distribution of Women Workers on the Basis of Marital Status

Marital status	No. of workers	Percentage
Married	83	93.26
Unmarried	0	00.00
Widow	5	5.62
Divorced	1	1.12
Total	89	100.00

Source: Field Survey

Table-3 shows the marital status of women workers at kiln. Maximum numbers of women workers are married. The numbers of married women workers are 83 and their percentage is 93 percent. In the sample, all women workers are married. In present study, the respondents below the age of 15 years are not included as they fall in category of child labour. All women worker are above the age of 15 years. Numbers of widows and divorce women workers are 5 and 1 respectively. Percentage of widow and divorce women workers is 6 and 1 respectively. So the highest women workers are married and only 1 woman worker is divorced.

Education of Women Workers

Table-4

Distribution of Women Workers on the Basis of their Educational Qualification

Educational Qualification	No. of respondents	Percentage
Illiterate	45	50.56
Below 5 th (Primary)	24	26.97
5 th (Primary)	19	21.35
8 th (Middle)	1	1.12
Total	89	100.00

Source: Field Survey

Table-4 shows the distribution of women workers on basis of their educational qualification. Most of the women workers are illiterate. Number of illiterate women workers are 45. Only 1 woman worker has passed 8th standard (Middle). It is evident from table that 19 women workers have passed 5th standard (Primary). So it is evident from table that most of women workers are illiterate and only 1 percent women worker have passed 8th standard (Middle). In table-4, it is clearly shown that as the education level of women workers increases, their participation in brick kiln work decreases.

Table-5

Earning of Women Worker’s Unit in a Day

Income (in Rs.)	Number of respondents	Percentage
600-700	2	2.25
700-800	24	26.97
800-900	41	46.07
900-1000	14	15.73
1000-1100	6	6.74
1100-1200	1	1.12
1200-1300	1	1.12
Total	89	100.00

Source: Field Survey

Table-5 shows the earning of women worker’s unit in a day. The earning of a unit is taken Rs. 600-1300. No respondents earn less than Rs. 600 at kiln. Maximum number of respondents (41) earn between Rs. 800-900. Twenty four worker’s unit earn between Rs. 700-800. Only two respondents earn between Rs. 600-700. Six respondents earn between Rs. 1000-1100 and only one respondent in each in both income level of Rs. 1100-1200 and Rs. 1200-1300 respectively. In these categories, the workers in Grader category earn low income and the workers in Loader category earn high. Table shows that 46 per cent worker earn between Rs. 800-900. Two per cent workers earn between Rs. 600-700 and only 1 per cent earns maximum income of Rs. 1200-1300.

Extent of Unpaid Women Workers

In present study, Unpaid women workers are defined those worker who work at Brick Kiln but their payment of work is paid to their husbands or male members of family. They contribute economically but their work is not recognized. Therefore unpaid work is perhaps the biggest contribution that women make to the economy. However the Census of India gathers

information on the basis of economically productive work. The work done by women is largely in and for the household, inter alia, collection of fuel, fodder, water, agriculture, weaving, cattle rearing, cooking, childcare, and caring for elderly family members. All this does not always get counted as economically productive work. As a result, the work participation rate for women in India has been low compared to men. There are all economic activities, which in developed societies are often recognized because they are increasingly being delegated by women and performed through paid contracts. The fact is that unpaid work is as much a part of the monetary economy as paid work. Yet, precisely because it is unpaid, and unpaid work has long been overlooked and undermined in economic equations. The percentage of time spent by women in unpaid activities was highest in Haryana (86 per cent).

Table-6
Member of a Unit Who Collects Wages

Member who collects wages	Number of respondents	Percentage
Women workers (widow and divorce)	8	8.99
Husband of women workers	80	89.89
Other member in a unit	1	1.12
Total	89	100.00

Source: Field Survey

Table-6 shows the number of members in a unit who collect wages. Eighty women respondents reported that wages are collected by their husbands. Only 8 respondents collected wages themselves. These are mostly the cases of widow and divorced women. 1 women worker reported that wages are collected by other male member in a unit. Table shows that in 90 per cent cases, wages are collected by husband of a woman worker.

Table-7
Earning of Women Worker’s Unit in Whole Season at Kiln

Income of one unit (amount in thousand Rs.)	Number of respondents	Percentage
120-140	22	24.72
140-160	38	42.70
160-180	25	28.08
180-200	4	4.50
Total	89	100.00

Source: Field Survey

Table-7 shows the earning of women worker’s unit in whole season. The unit of 22 workers earns Rs. 120000-140000 and unit of 38 workers earns Rs. 140000-160000. Table shows that 42 per cent worker’s unit earn between Rs. 140000-160000. Only 4 per cent worker’s unit earn between Rs. 180000-200000. Loader category worker falls in higher income group because of the use of their own means of production. They use mule cart for loading and cost of mule cart is between Rs. 40000-100000. So, it makes the difference in their income level.

Table-8
Advance Amount Taken by Women Worker's Unit

Advance amount (in Rs. thousand)	Number of respondents	Percentage
10-20	14	15.73
20-30	35	39.33
30-40	23	25.85
40-50	12	13.48
50-60	3	3.37
60-70	2	2.24
Total	89	100.00

Source: Field Survey

Table-8 explains the advance amount which worker's unit gets before the start of work. Unit of 35 workers get in advance Rs. 20000-30000. Only 2 respondent's units get Rs. 60000-70000 in one season. Twenty three respondent's unit gets Rs 30000-40000 and 12 respondents get Rs. 40000-50000 in advance. Table-8 shows that 39 per cent respondents get Rs. 20000-30000 and only 2 per cent worker's unit get Rs. 60000-70000 in advance.

Table-9

Number of Workers Taking Advance Amount

Response	Number of respondents	Percentage
Yes	89	100
No	0	0
Total	89	100.00

Source: Field Survey

Table-9 shows that 100 per cent worker get some amount in advance. They get advance amount from owner of Brick Kiln before start of work.

Expenditure Pattern of Women Worker

Table-10

Monthly Expenditure of Worker's Unit

Monthly expenditure (In Rs.)	Number of respondents	Percentage
4000-6000	49	55.06
6000-8000	33	37.08
8000-10000	4	4.49
10000-12000	3	3.37
Total	89	100.00

Source: Field Survey

Table-10 shows monthly expenditure of worker’s unit. The Expenditure of 49 worker’s unit falls between Rs. 4000-6000 and second largest number of respondents are 33 and their expenditure falls between Rs. 60000-80000. Only 3 respondents unit’s expenditure falls between Rs. 10000-12000. It is evident from table-10 that maximum 55 per cent worker’s unit’s expenditure fall between Rs. 4000-6000.

Table-11

Daily Consumption of Articles by Women Workers at Kiln

Consumption of articles	Number of respondents	Percentage
Grain	89	100
Pulses	80	89.89
Vegetable	82	92.13
Milk	69	77.53

Source: Field Survey

Table-11 shows the daily consumption of articles by women workers at kiln. It is evident from table that all women workers consume grain, 89 women workers use pulses for consumption, 82 workers use vegetables and 69 women workers use milk for consumption

Bonded Labour

Bonded labour refer to a long term relationship between the employee and the employer cemented through a loan, by custom or by force which denies the employees various freedoms including freedom to choose his or her employer, to enter into a fresh contract with the same employer or to negotiate the next generation. Firm estimate of labour bondage are not available but the extent of bondage can be gauged from the fact that in a number of industries, a large proportion of workers suffer from unfreedom and are paid wages lower than the minimum wages.

Table-12

Bonded Labour

Response	Number of respondents	Percentage
Yes	0	0
No	89	100
Total	89	100

Source: Field Survey

Table-12 shows that there is no bonded labour at kiln.

Work during off Season

Table-13

Women Worker’s Occupation at Native Place during Off-Season

Type of work	Number of respondents	Percentage
Agricultural labour	44	49.43
Construction labour	37	41.57
Domestic servant	9	10.11
Cattle rearing	18	20.22
No work	35	39.32
Other	0	0

Source: Field Survey

Table-13 explains occupation of women workers during off season. Most of women workers (44) depend on agriculture sector during off season. Construction work is also main source of employment during off season and 37 respondents are engaged in construction work. 35 respondents don not get work during off season.

6. Findings

- 1) Most of women workers at kiln belong to age group of 15-35 years.
- 2) 93 per cent women workers at kiln are married.
- 3) 85 per cent women workers belong to Schedule Cast (SC) and Backward Cast (BC) category. And separately 44 per cent women workers belong to BC category.
- 4) Majority of women workers at kiln are illiterate. Only one per cent women worker has passed middle (8th standard).
- 5) In all three categories i.e. Moulder, Loader and Grader, majority of women (83 per cent) belong to Moulder category.
- 6) 83 per cent workers used the equipment provided by their owner. Only 17 per cent workers used their own equipment and specifically Grader and Loader category worker used their own equipments. The equipment used by Loader category are costly than the equipments used by Grader category.
- 7) 74 per cent women workers have bicycle, 57 per cent workers have sewing machine and 56 per cent workers have mobile. Other assets that the worker has vary from 5 to 34 per cent.
- 8) 91 per cent women workers have no agriculture land holding and only 9 per cent women worker have agriculture land holding.
- 9) Majority of women workers have *Kachcha* houses and only 33 per cent women worker have *Pucca* houses.
- 10) 43 per cent women workers don't have electricity in houses at native place.
- 11) 93 per cent women worker reported that there was no electricity facility at Kiln.
- 12) 67 per cent women workers are working at kiln since last ten years.
- 13) Majority of women workers have the facility of ration card at kiln. Only 7 per cent workers have not ration card facility at kiln. Because these belong to nearby village and majority of them are from Loader category.
- 14) 75 per cent women workers work up to 8 to 10 hours in a day.
- 15) 72 per cent women workers have no account in Bank or Post office. Only 28 per cent women workers have account in bank or post office.
- 16) 65 per cent women worker work eight to nine months in a year.

- 17) 71 per cent women worker is satisfied with their present work and 29 women worker are not satisfied with their work.
- 18) The income of women worker's unit is varies from Rs. 600 to 1200. 73 per cent worker's units earn Rs. 700 to Rs. 900.
- 19) 90 per cent women worker reported that their wages are collected by their husbands.
- 20) Mode of payment at kiln is fortnightly.
- 21) Payment of wages in one installment varies from Rs. 2000 to 5500. Majority of women (76 per cent) get Rs. 2000 to 3000 in one installment.
- 22) One unit earns income of Rs. 1,20,000 to 2,00,000 in whole season. 43 per cent worker's unit earn Rs. 1,40,000 to 1,60,000 in a season. Loaders get highest wages in all three units, because they use their equipment in production. Cost of equipments used by Loader category fall between Rs. 40,000 to 1,00,000. Grader also uses their own equipment. The cost of their equipment falls between Rs. 2000 to Rs.3000.
- 23) All workers at kiln get advance before starting of work.
- 24) Monthly expenditure of one unit of worker varies from Rs. 4000 to 12000. The monthly expenditure of 92 per cent worker's unit is Rs. 4000 to 8000. Monthly expenditure of workers depend upon two factors, first size of unit and second is category of work. The monthly expenditure of Loader is also high in all three categories because of the extra expenditure on mule cart, which is used in production.
- 25) Majority of workers use grain, Pulses, vegetable and milk.
- 26) Majority of women worker said that they are members of trade unions.
- 27) 51 per cent women worker get medical facility and 49 per cent worker don't get medical facility at Kiln.
- 28) Before start of work there is an agreement of work and advance between workers and owners of Brick Kilns and normally all workers take advance payment of their work. But if any worker wants to break the agreement and wants to work anywhere, they are free to work after making the payment of advance to the owner of that kiln.
- 29) There is no bonded labour at kiln.
- 30) During off-season 50 per cent workers engaged in agriculture, 42 per cent workers engaged in construction work and 35 women workers had no work.
- 31) Most of women worker have no means of recreation at kiln.

- 32) 47 per cent respondent reported that their husband take family decision and 43 per cent respondents reported that they decide these jointly.
- 33) 93 per cent women workers don't cast their vote in election. Only 7 per cent women workers cast their vote in election which belongs to loader category and they are from nearby villages.
- 34) Main Reason of migration at kiln is poverty, indebtedness, unavailability and irregularity of work at native place.
- 35) 99 per cent women workers has no insurance policy.
- 36) 83 per cent women workers have knowledge about mid day meal scheme.
- 37) 61 per cent women workers reported that government nominee visited at kiln.
- 38) 99 per cent women workers have no knowledge about any labour laws.
- 39) Majority of women workers consider that government is doing something for their welfare.

7. Suggestions

- 1) Most of women workers belong to SC, ST and BC. So information should be given to them about the policies and schemes run by government for their welfare.
- 2) Illiteracy rate is very high among women workers. They should be given elementary education and special care should be taken for education of their children.
- 3) Women workers should be provided good housing facility with proper sanitation and drinking water.
- 4) They should be provided electricity facility at kiln.
- 5) There should be compulsory bank account for every worker so that they can take proper benefit of government schemes and can save money for future purpose.
- 6) Work at kiln is available only for seven to nine months. During remaining months they go back to their native places. There should be proper arrangement of work for remaining period so that they can get regular work.
- 7) Most of the women workers are not satisfied with present working condition. There must be proper counseling of working condition and the problems of these workers should be solved on priority basis.

- 8) Wage should be given directly to women workers instead of their husbands. So they can become more independent.
- 9) Knowledge should be given to women workers about hygienic food.
- 10) Workers should be aware about trade unions so that they can be unionized and protect their interest.
- 11) There should be proper medical facility. Special care should be taken for pregnant women workers.
- 12) Agreement laws should be more favorable to workers because owners are the strong party.
- 13) There should be good facility of recreation means at kiln at the cost of owners, like weekly movies on TV. It will help to increase their productivity.
- 14) They should be informed about the importance of vote.
- 15) Insurance policy is an important instrument for welfare of workers and it is not available to women workers. Therefore, social security system must be strengthened.
- 16) Government nominees should take proper counseling of workers and they should listen their every problem and must report these to the concerned authority.

8. CONCLUSION

Women constitute half of the population and contribute much share for social and economic development of society. In spite of this fact, they are most excluded group and majority of them are engaged in the informal sector. Brick Kiln Industry is one of the sectors of Informal Economy. Women workers in this industry live in poverty. At work place, they are exploited; equal pay for equal work labour law does not apply on them. . It is surprising that in spite of so many laws, women still continue to live under stress and strain. To ensure safety, security and status for our women we still have miles to go.

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