

1. Breaking the Glass Ceiling: Systematic Engagement of Women in Enterprise Key to Achieve \$5 Trillion Target

Context:

- A path-breaking 2010 McKinsey study, “Women Matter”, found out that companies with a higher proportion of women in leadership positions posted about 41% higher returns on equity, and 56% better operating results.
- This revelation is yet to make an impact on the Indian ecosystem, where the ground realities are quite different.

Statistics about Women Entrepreneurs:

- As per the 2018 MasterCard Index of Women Entrepreneurs (MIWE), only **11% of businesses in India are owned by women.**
- Additionally, the index specifically identifies India as a country where the opportunities available to women to become business leaders or professionals, are the least.
- Venture Capital funding for women-led enterprises has been one of the biggest challenges, both globally and even more so in India, with less than 20% of all the VC investments across the globe directed towards women-led start-ups.

Gender Inequality – Challenges face by Women:

- Gender inequality goes beyond the sphere of enterprise and is deeply entrenched in India’s traditional socio-economic power structures. Some of the common challenges faced by women are:
 - ✓ **Social Barriers** delimited by patriarchy (such as lack of family support)
 - ✓ **Lower Access to finance** and networks
 - ✓ Safety concerns and resultant lower-confidence.
 - ✓ Additional deterrents to female participation include the **absence of successful precedents**
 - ✓ lack of Education
 - ✓ **Unequal distribution of domestic responsibilities** (women are expected to be the primary homemakers and caregivers).
 - ✓ Women are not only denied access to financial capital and networks with potential partners, but are also subjected to the reality of unsafe work environments and discriminatory industry practices.

- These conditions directly inhibit the participation of women in entrepreneurship and also result in the low labour workforce participation.

Measures taken to realise India's \$5 Trillion Economy Vision:

- India's \$5 trillion economy vision will be possible **only when women are actively brought into the fold**. This will require the glass ceiling to be broken, and will necessitate its complete dismantling.
- While some of these challenges are inter-generational and improvements will **require larger societal behavioural change over time**, others can be implemented in a short span.
- Gender gaps in economic participation and missed opportunities can be addressed with strategic policies and programmes, curated to address the existing inadequacies.
- There are efforts underway to better understand these factors through initiatives, **NITI Aayog's Women's Index for Socio-Economic Opportunities**, which will be used to develop actionable policy interventions, at the state and central levels.
- For women entrepreneurs, who are able to overcome the typical social challenges, the barrier to entry still remains high. Despite the substantial government and private initiatives, women who actually need these services are not able to benefit **due to information asymmetry**. Thus several of these initiatives and programs often remain under-subscribed, as beneficiaries can't access information timely and methodically.
- At the same time, women entrepreneurs continue to face **business-compliance issues** without the correct information or access to services. Women entrepreneurs often **miss out on the right kind of mentoring support** in addition to other challenges.
- **Women Entrepreneurship Platform, a flagship initiative NITI Aayog** was launched on March 8, 2018 as an **aggregator platform that brings together all relevant information** required by existing or prospective entrepreneurs in their quest to establish and promote their enterprise.
- WEP adopts a **multi-pronged approach** to address critical needs of a women entrepreneur, such as access to networks, information, learning resources, services and mentoring by sharing information seamlessly.
- The gap of not showcasing effectively women role models is also being addressed through efforts made to recognise the efforts and achievements of women entrepreneurs through awards such as the Women Transforming India Awards.

Conclusion:

- Indian society is at the cusp of change, and the role of women is one that is radically changing. There has been a slow but steady rise of women's agency and autonomy, and as a result there has been all round positive change.
- But the most impactful changes are yet to come, as women slowly take up their rightful place in building India's economy.
- Programs and initiatives like WEP can champion the cause of women, thus taking the lead in ushering in a new India.

