



According to the 11th CEDAW article, states must take all necessary measures to stop discrimination against women in the employment and working sector, ensuring that men and women have equal rights.

Issue

In Sri Lanka, women in various sectors face significant economic and social discrimination, including low wages without benefits, especially in Free Trade Zones and the agriculture and fisheries sectors. Many women, particularly those in marginalized communities, are subjected to exploitative labor practices, lack of legal protection, and limited access to essential services like housing. Social norms restrict their participation in activities like fishing and agriculture, while unequal pay persists even when doing equivalent work; per hour, women's wages are lower by 50 rupees. Women-headed households face additional barriers due to restrictive eligibility criteria for social security and other government support, along with negative social attitudes. Marginalization continues in sectors like fishing, where there is little government support for post-harvest technologies which would allow women to develop their livelihoods. Furthermore, large producers have a very dominant position over the markets, making it difficult for women to sell their products. Additionally, military land seizures contribute to the deprivation of agriculture and animal husbandry livelihoods for women-headed households since the ownership of the land is typically in the husband's name. Inadequate legal protections for domestic workers exacerbate servitude, while families facing economic challenges contribute to high dropout rates and child labor, such as domestic or store labour, which exposes them to violence and exploitation.

Recommendations

Financial Assistance

- To help women in rural areas and free trade zones start businesses, offer financial assistance through loan programs and low-interest credit options.
- Support women's groups in working together to access affordable financial help, improving their economic stability and community development.

Programming

- Facilitate technical training on value-added skills and business planning.
- Aid women in directly selling their products to reduce their reliance on middlemen. Similarly, build networks that connect women with local and international markets for more competitive prices.

Advocacy for Changes to Government Policy

- Advocate for a national policy which recognizes women in agriculture, fisheries, and labor-intensive industries, with subsidies and technical aid to support their development.
- Advocate for better conditions for women working in Free Trade Zones:
 - Implement and enforce living wage and decent work standards.
 - Introduce role designation letters for women workers to enhance safety and security.
 - Conduct regular safety audits to uphold occupational health standards focused on female workers.
 - Improve women's access to healthcare with extended hospital care for maternal, reproductive, and general health needs, including periodic exams and specialist treatment.
 - Establish affordable daycare centers nearby with qualified caregivers to support working mothers.