

DEVELOPMENT OF SKILLS IN WOMEN: CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES

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ABSTRACT

The 12th five year plan (2012-17) has accepted India's dire and urgent need to skill millions of formal and informal workers in the next ten years. The Government of India has set a target of skilling 500 million people by 2022 as only 4.69 percent of India's total workforce has undergone formal skill training (Census 2011). Women form a significant proportion of this work force in India; the concentration of female workforce is very huge in favor of informal sector, engaged in vocations characterized by low earning, low productivity, poor working conditions and lack of social protection. There are higher number of unskilled workers in rural than in urban areas, and more number of women do not have any skills, compared to men. It is to be noted that the initiatives required to skill the workforce, cannot be assumed to be the same for both men and women, as women and men face very different social and economic circumstances in India.

Low social value is attached to girl's education, and as they are considered secondary income earners, lower importance is given to training of girls for employment. The gender roles defined for women, expect them to primarily devote their time to household chores and child rearing, while time devoted to skill training and economic activities is conditional and limited. Hence, a sustainable skill development programme would aim to take on board, both women's as well as men's concerns and experiences. These should form an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and the programs on skill training and development. The key strategy for women's empowerment and gender equality is to combine policy and institutions at the local level. It is also urged that for skill development to be more effective, training needs to bend towards developing the kind of skills women already know. The aim of skill development, particularly in case of women, is not merely to prepare them for jobs, but also to improve the performance of women workers by enhancing the quality of work in which they are engaged. This will encourage higher self-esteem among women and overall personality development.

Key words: Unskilled worker, Women empowerment, Skill development, Women workforce, Women employment.

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INTRODUCTION

Skills and knowledge are the driving forces of economic growth and social development for any country. India currently faces a severe shortage of well-trained, skilled workers. It is estimated that only 4.69 % (Census 2011) of the workforce in India has undergone formal skill training as compared to 68% in the UK, 75% in Germany, 52% in USA, 80% in Japan and 96% in South Korea. Large sections of the educated workforce have little or no job skills, making them largely unemployable. Therefore, India must focus on scaling up skill training efforts to meet the demands of employers and drive economic growth. Countries with higher and better levels of skills adjust more effectively to the challenges and opportunities of world of work. Potentially, the target group for skill development comprises all those in the labour force, including those entering the labour market for the first time, those employed in the organized sector and those working in the unorganized sector.

Women form a significant proportion of this work force in India, however, they are largely concentrated in the informal sector, engaged in vocations characterized by low earning, low productivity, poor working conditions and lack of social protection. The following Table 1 presents the current scenario of women workforce in India, one can clearly observe the huge concentration of female workforce in favor of the informal sector. Furthermore, Table 2 presents the percentage of skilled women and men in rural and urban areas in terms of marketable skills. Both, women and men, whether urban or rural, are majorly unskilled compared to having some skills. There are higher number of unskilled workers in rural than in urban areas, and more number of women do not have any skills, compared to men with no skills. The table reflects the urgent need that prompted the government to take serious note of this dire situation in training and skill education.

Table 1: Female Workforce in India (in Million)

Female workforce in India	148
Female workforce in Informal sector	135
Female workforce in Formal sector	13
Market every year in Informal sector	3.5
Market every year in Formal sector	0.2

Source: Cited by Mr Dilip Chenoy, Power point presentation, slide no 5, at Gender and Economic Policy Discussion (GEPD) forum II, 2012

Table 2: Distribution of Persons with Marketable Skills (in Percentage)

Skill Status	Rural		Urban	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
No Skill	89.9	93.7	80.4	88.8
Some Skill	10.1	6.3	19.6	11.2
Total	100	100	100	100
Sample Size	183464	172835	109067	99283

Source: Cited by, Mr. Chenoy from National Skill Development Council (NSDC), at GEPD forum II, India Habitat Centre, April 2012

OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER

- To understand the meaning of women empowerment.
- To analyze the situations of skilled workforce in India.
- To analyze the issues and challenges associated with the women workforce.
- To analyze the pitfalls of skill development programmes for women.
- To find out the possible suggestions to skilling women workforce.

KEY ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

As noted earlier, the aim of skill development, particularly in case of women, is not merely to prepare them for jobs, but also to improve the performance of women workers by enhancing the quality of work in which they are engaged. The NSDC has identified a few of the major challenges, which need to be addressed for building a conducive ecosystem, of skill development for the women workforce. These are as follows,

- i. The large number of women who need to be trained since currently only 2% of the female workforce is formally trained,
- ii. Inadequacies in the quality and relevance of TVET (technical and vocational employment training in India),
- iii. Inadequate Infrastructure, acute shortage of trained women workers, poor quality of training,
- iv. Lack of mechanisms to judge and certify quality,
- v. Inequity in access to TVET for women,
- vi. Low level of education of potential women trainees that limits training of women in the formal sector,
- vii. Lack of recognition of prior learning of potential women trainees
- viii. Relatively high opportunity cost of learning involved for training women.

The major challenges noted here are few in number but represent a complexity of issues involved. Additionally, it is argued that the empowerment practice has to go beyond its focus on women to gender. A focus on gender would imply an emphasis on strategic needs such as leadership and advocacy, rather than a simple focus on basic needs. The concept of gender will also, encourage an understanding and an analysis of power relations, and enforces the idea of developing capabilities rather than simply skills.

Another important point that cannot be left out is the potential advantage of “demographic dividend” that India has over many other countries. “The demographic dividend arises as an asset for India due to expected decline in dependency ratio in the country. The dependency ratio (ratio of dependent to working age population) of India has declined from 0.8 in 1991 to 0.73 in 2001, and is declined to 0.59 in 2011. Low dependency ratio gives India a cost advantage and helps in improving India’s competitiveness.” This demographic dividend is expected to last until around 2035. Hence, India has to act now and get the training and skill development right to benefit from

this demographic dividend, to create a global pool of skilled persons. However, if the demographic dividend is not turned into an opportunity now, and if India fails to deliver, this demographic dividend in about 25 years may actually become a handicap.

Besides the demographic dividend, another factor that adds to the urgency for improved skill development is the increasing number of newly educated youth, especially women, who would like to seek employment in the service sector. The education and skill development sector has not adequately responded to this emerging need, making it imperative to provide skill development and training in marketable skills and services. It is therefore clear, that there is a dire and urgent need for a paradigm shift in the skill development sector, in favor of innovations, improvements and high quality training. It is also observed, that the concept of training and skill development needs to move beyond the conventional goal of imparting technical and managerial competencies, to playing a broader role of even including basic literacy, numeracy, critical social and political awareness, awareness about gender, and enhancing life skills.

Such interventions by their nature will encourage higher self-esteem among women and overall personality development. It is also urged that for skill development to be more effective, training needs to bend towards developing the kind of skills women and men already know. Or, in other words, the need is to enhance or adapt traditional skills to aspirational skills. However, focus on upgradation need not be at the cost of developing new skills, especially in the case of women who otherwise may get further entrenched in traditional skills and roles.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT AND IMPLICATIONS FOR CHANGE

There are several suggestions and implications for the overall improvement of the TVET and skill development programme in India, with particular focus on concerns related to women's skill development, that were highlighted at the GEPDF Forum II. Below are some of the main suggestions, clubbed under the following heads:

(A) Policy level changes, (B) Societal changes (C) Local level changes, including changes required in the training institutions (D) Monitoring & Evaluation.

A. Policy level changes

- **Gender sensitive policy:** There is a need to further develop HRD and training policy from a gender perspective, with an understanding of local customs and traditions. It also implies focus on improvements in access to education and training for girls, including the provision of services, such as transport, hostels, scholarships, and other incentives to encourage women to enroll for education and training. Women are seriously under-represented in many occupations, thus, policies are needed to fight exclusions in the labour market by reducing the incidence of discriminatory practices.

- **Skill development programmes to be run by one ministry:** The entire national skill development system should be put under the umbrella of one ministry, rather than running them

under the leadership of two key Ministries (MOLE and MHRD) and several other Ministries. This will lead to better focus and coordination between different initiatives.

- **Revisiting the Apprenticeship Act:** the government enacted the Apprenticeship Act in 1961 to connect job seekers and industrial units. It made obligatory for employers in specified industries to provide both basic skills and job training according to a certain set of prescribed standards. There is a pressing need for radical improvements in the 1961 Act according to the changed times. The circumstances and challenges faced by youth, particularly women, are very different from what existed in India at the time of formulation of the act. There have been dramatic changes in the employment scenario and the skills required to meet the industrial demand for skilled labour.

- **Up gradation of the craftsmen training scheme:** The main institutions under the craftsmen training scheme in India are public Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and private Industrial Training Centers (ITCs). The aim of the ITIs and the ITCs is to provide skilled workers to the informal sector; however, evidence shows that both the institutes have performed poorly on their mandate. ITIs have been criticized for offering training in trades that are out dated and not relevant for the modern day employment requirements. Furthermore, “the share of ITI graduates who entered self-employment or became employers was not much greater than 10 per cent while only around 5 percent of ITC graduates joined the unorganized economy. The main reason is that running a small business requires much more than simply possessing a particular occupational skill. It requires the ability to run a small business, which requires a person to be multi-skilled. This sort of training is not imparted in the ITIs and ITCs.”

- **Expansion of training institutes and provision of basic infrastructure:** There has been a steady expansion of ITIs in the country as reflected in figure 1, however further expansion is needed mainly in the ‘backward’ regions of the country. Besides the expansion, it is equally crucial to build basic infrastructure especially in remote areas, making ITIs more accessible, particularly for women.

- **Provision of vocational training in schools:** The dropout rate from schools is high usually after the 8th standard. Most often, the dropouts from schools at this stage have very little technical skills, and have no option but to join the informal sector. It is therefore recommended that vocational education be introduced at the level of secondary education, or from 9th standard onwards, to attract students who may drop out, to skill them and as a result provide them with better livelihood opportunities. The National Vocational Education Qualifications Framework (NVEQF), currently being developed, will encourage integration of vocational and general education.

- **Making the private sector responsible for skill development in the country:** Germany has one of the most mature TVET systems in the world, one of the reasons contributing to the country’s manufacturing edge over other countries. The key to success of the TVET system in Germany is that it is led by the private sector. Of the total financing for training and skill

development in Germany, only 16 percent is borne by the government, while rest of the 84 percent is contributed by the private sector. While in India the ratio of government- private sector contribution in the skill development sector is about the reverse. If India has to benefit from the demographic dividend, the private sector has to take a responsible position in the skill development sector. Two policy level changes that could be undertaken are: (a) As more investments are crucial for skill development sector, one innovation that is suggested for India, is taxing of medium and large industries to contribute to a fund for reinvestments in skill development. Such a provision which is successfully in place in 61 countries, not only substantially supports the skill development efforts of the country, but also helps in meeting the demand for skilled persons from the industry. And (b) Local industry needs to become members of the governing body of ITI, to guide them about the new and emerging needs of the industry.

B. Changes at the level of society

- **Identifying and making efforts to change basic and nuanced socio-cultural values** with a view to eliminate existing biases that women in the country face when seeking employment. Greater efforts are needed in the form of awareness programmes, counseling of families to assuage their fears with regards to training of women, and investment in personality development of women to be able to analyze and challenge discriminatory practices. It is equally important to recognize the structural changes in the Indian economy and changing gender norms of our society indicating slowly but steadily changing life-style aspirations of youth, both men and women.

C. Changes at the level of provision of training and skill development

- **Gender sensitive training:** women face complex ground realities, including low levels of literacy, discriminatory social customs and traditions, limited hours available for training and work, and limited exposure and unfamiliarity with new technology. Hence, the need to make the skill development process accommodating and flexible to encourage women to enroll. "The training may have to incorporate teaching of basic skills such as numeracy, problem solving, communication, learning to learn, and teamwork and, other deeply impacting skill such as behavioral skills, including building self-esteem, self-organizational and negotiating capacity for employment purpose. Issues of identity, autonomy, leadership, rights and responsibilities, entrepreneurial and business management skills, increasing awareness on gender are to be relevant issues not only for women but also for men." One method of encouraging participation in skill development is the identification of skills that are already known and up gradation of the same. In case of women, such an approach would increase the acceptability of the training being offered. It is also equally important to provide training after identification of changing norms and aspirations of women. As noted earlier, to make training programmes actually accessible to women, it would be crucial to provide additional basic services and facilities such as, safe and secure transport, toilets, etc.

• **Accessible and affordable training:** with poor infrastructure, accessibility continues to be a major problem for men and more so for women. It is crucial to build and fund modern institutes of training, which are made easily accessible for women and men by building additional infrastructure for instance in terms of safe and secure roads. To enable and encourage individuals belonging to low income groups to join vocational training programmes, it is important to provide quality training at an affordable cost with the option of availing loans and scholarships. Additionally, channeling training through the existing local institutions of governance can prove to be very fruitful. Local institutions include the gram panchayats, where women have a stipulated representation of 33 percent seats. Women from the gram panchayat may be assigned the role of identifying the most desired needs of the women in the village.

• **High quality training that matches the changing needs of the market:** one of the main criticisms of skill development and training programmes is their inability to match up to the acceptable market standards in terms of the quality and type of skills required. "The relative supply of workers with technical/vocational skills has declined throughout this period while their relative wages have also come down since the early 1990s. This may be due more to the fact that workers with technical/vocational qualifications do not have skills that meet the labour market (often because of the poor quality of training provided) than that there is little demand for skilled workers." It is proposed, that the government ITIs need to be upgraded as Centers of Excellence on an urgent basis. A decentralization of decision making in the ITI system and, as noted earlier, participation of employers in decision making processes, may help in the absorption of trainees and make the training more responsive to the needs of local industry. The industries may fill the gap of qualified trainers at the training institutes by providing latter with qualified trainers, instructors and teachers. It further implies that the Industry needs to participate in designing of the curriculum for training in different institutes. However, NSDC has been trying to collaborate with major corporate such as, Bharti, NIIT and even NGOs such as Pratham, to provide training and contribute in developing skill of thousands of individuals. Besides the already existing apprenticeship system, provision of internship in different industrial sectors is equally important. Furthermore, it is imperative to develop a standard certification system by recognizing and including quality skills acquired through any informal system of learning. Industries could undertake the assessment and the certification of training programmes, which will facilitate placements after the completion of the training course.

• **Support services beyond training:** providing employment opportunities to trainees after the completion of training will go a long way in assuring sustainable livelihood options and economic independence, especially in case of women. By ensuring that NSDC funded organizations place at least 70% of its trainees, NSDC has been able to facilitate employment of many workers to a large extent. But the target of productively employing workers is gigantic in India, and these efforts need to continue and achieve goals at a high rate to have any impact.

D. Monitoring and Evaluation

Enrolment in training and providing employment opportunities alone would not be sufficient. It is crucial to evaluate the progress and the quality of training provided in order to check discrepancies, whether it is between the needs of the trainees and the nature of training provided, or between the kind of skill being imparted and the demand from the local industry. A proper monitoring and evaluation system consistent with gender equality perspective would help in informing corrections needed in time and assure quality of training for sustainable skill development.

CONCLUSION

Closeto 90 percent workers in India engage in informal work associated with low productivity. Provision of modern skill training programmes may substantially help in increasing the productivity of this workforce. However, it is to be noted that the initiatives required to skill the workforce, cannot be assumed to be the same for both men and women, as women and men face very different social and economic circumstances in India. Gender differences abound right from the access to and the availability of education and training, to the conduct of training programmes. Low social value is attached to girl's education and they are considered secondary income earners, lower importance is given to training of girls for employment.

Hence there is a need for sustainable skill development program which would aim to take concern of women empowerment and gender equality. There is a need to further develop HRD and training policy from a gender perspective, with an understanding of local customs and traditions. Expand training institutes mainly in the remote regions of the country and to build basic gender specific infrastructure, making ITIs more accessible, particularly for women.

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