

THE ROLE OF SKILL DEVELOPMENT IN WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

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ABSTRACT

The Indian Constitution not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favor of women so that women can improve their livelihood. Women empowerment is a fundamental women's right to enabling women to have control over their lives and put forth influence in society. Women often face discrimination and gender inequalities, with some women experiencing multiple discrimination and exclusion because of factors such as background or caste. Skill is the bridge between job and workforce. Women often have different training needs than men, since they are more likely to work as contributing family workers, subsistence farmers, home-based micro entrepreneurs, or low-paid seasonal laborers, in addition to handling their domestic work and care responsibilities. Skills development is a key to improving household productivity, employability and income-earning opportunities for women and also for enhancing sustainable rural development and livelihoods. This paper studies about skills development of women through different training programmes with various measures such as Pradhan Mantri Kausal Vikas Yojna, National Skills Development Corporation, National Skills Development Mission.

Keywords: *Women empowerment, skill development, rural development, employment, etc.*

INTRODUCTION

Women constitute about 48% of the total population of the country. According to India's constitution, women are legal citizens of the country and have equal rights with men. Because of lack of acceptance from the male dominant society, Indian women suffer immensely. Women are responsible for bearing children, yet they are malnourished and in poor health. Women are also overworked in the field and complete all of the domestic work. Most Indian women are uneducated. Vocational Training programmes aim women. The key lies in women empowerment through economic self-sufficiency and higher awareness levels on social, political and legal issues through mobilization. There is also a need to recognize and emphasize the diverse roles of women such as reproductive, productive and community management. Women should be organized and strengthened at the grass root level to end their subordination. Skills and knowledge are the engines of economic growth and social development of any country. Countries with higher and better levels of knowledge and skills respond more effectively and promptly to challenges and opportunities of globalization. India is in transition to a knowledge based economy and its competitive edge will be determined by the abilities of its people to create, share and use knowledge more effectively.

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA

The Indian Constitution not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favor of women so that women can improve their livelihood. Within the framework of a democratic polity, our laws, development policies, Plans and Programmes have aimed at women's advancement in different spheres. From the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-78) onwards there has been a marked shift in the approach to women's issues from welfare to development and then from Eighth Five Year Plan emphasis was shifted from development to empowerment. Declaring 2001 as the Year of Women's Empowerment (Swashakti), the Government of India (GoI) passed the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women which has the goal to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women.

The National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW) was launched by the GoI with the aim to strengthen generally processes that promote all-round development of women. It has the mandate to strengthen the inter-sector convergence; facilitate the process of coordinating all the women's welfare and socio-economic development programmes across ministries and departments. One of the key strategies of NMEW is - investment in skill and entrepreneurship development, microcredit, vocational training and SHG development for economic empowerment of women. This finely conveys that mere imparting literacy would not be sufficient; the women need vocational training or skills also to be able to stand on their feet and be the earning members of the family. Women have been taking increasing interest in recent years in income generating activities, self-employment and entrepreneurship that also lead to property rights, political representation, social equality, personal right, family development, market development, community development and at last the nation development.

SKILL DEVELOPMENT POLICIES FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

To address the specific needs of both rural women and men different skill development policies should be implemented:

- Targeted gender responsive education and training strategy should be there. Clear objectives should be set and there should be proper collection of sex disaggregated statistics and qualitative data on rural and urban women and men education and skill training to evaluate the progress.
- Gender responsive learning environment should be provided by including safe school facilities and proper separate sanitation facilities. There should be proper time table and curriculum responding to rural realities.

- There should be different scholarships in order to encourage girls to study technical subjects. Employment opportunities to trainees after the completion of training will attract the women and girls to take training.
- Number of women trainers and agricultural extension workers should be increased so that rural women can access formal and non formal vocational training in better way.
- In the present scenario of digital India, more knowledge about accessing science and technology education and ICTs such as mobile phones, computer and internet facilities should be provided so that they can get quality education and training such as distance learning.
- In Cambodia, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, supported by UNICEF, in the mid 2000s, launched the „Child-Friendly Schools Initiative“ to promote gender equality.
- In Asia and Africa, TREE (Training for Rural Economic Empowerment) which is an ILO community-based training programme is established to provide employment to disadvantaged women by skill development.
- In India Deen Dayal Upadhyay Kaushalya Vikas Yojana (DDU-KVY) concentrates on providing skill development to poor women and making them ready for getting employment in different sectors.
- Another programme called, STEP (Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women) which focuses on women empowerment by providing skill development training and grants during training period. Amongst the states, Manipur received the maximum funding under the scheme, followed by Madhya Pradesh and Assam. A total of 24,037 women beneficiaries have been impacted under the scheme.

ROLE OF GOVERNMENT TO DEVELOP WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN INDIA

The Government of India has also formulated various training and development cum employment generations programs for the women to start their ventures. These programmes are as follows: In the seventh five-year plan, a special chapter on the Integration of women in development was introduced by Government with following suggestion:

- **Specific target group:** It was suggested to treat women as a specific target groups in all major development programs of the country.
- **Arranging training facilities:** It is also suggested in the chapter to devise and diversify vocational training facilities for women to suit their changing needs and skills.
- **Developing new equipments:** Efforts should be made to increase their efficiency and productivity through appropriate technologies, equipments and practices.

- **Marketing assistance:** It was suggested to provide the required assistance for marketing the products produced by women entrepreneurs.
- **Decision-making process:** It was also suggested to involve the women in decision-making process. The Government of India devised special programs to increase employment and income-generating activities for women in rural areas.

The Government of India has introduced the following schemes during Ninth Five-Year Plan for promoting women entrepreneurship because the future of small scale industries depends upon the women-entrepreneurs:

- Trade Related Entrepreneurship Assistance and Development (TREAD) scheme was launched by Ministry of Small Industries to develop women entrepreneurs in rural, semi-urban and urban areas by developing entrepreneurial qualities.
- Women Component Plan, a special strategy adopted by Government to provide assistance to women entrepreneurs.
- Swarna Jayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana and Swarna Jayanti Sekhari Rozgar Yojana were introduced by government to provide reservations for women and encouraging them to start their ventures.
- New schemes named Women Development Corporations were introduced by government to help women entrepreneurs in arranging credit and marketing facilities.
- State Industrial and Development Bank of India (SIDBI) has introduced following schemes to assist the women entrepreneurs. These schemes are:
 - (i) Mahila Udyam Nidhi
 - (ii) Micro Credit Scheme for Women
 - (iii) Mahila Vikas Nidhi
 - (iv) Women Entrepreneurial Development Programmes
 - (v) Marketing Development Fund for Women Further, the tenth five Year Plan aims at empowering women through translating the recently adopted National Policy for empowerment of Women into action and ensuring survival, Protection and Development of women and children through rights base approach. Consortium of Women entrepreneurs of India provides a platform to assist the women entrepreneurs to develop new, creative and innovative techniques of production, finance and marketing. There are different bodies such as NGOs, voluntary organizations, Self-help groups, institutions and individual enterprises from rural and urban areas which collectively help the women entrepreneurs in their activities. The following training schemes especially for the self employment of women are introduced by government:

- Support for Training and Employment Programme of Women (STEP)
- Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA)
- Small Industry Service Institutes (SISIs)
- State Financial Corporations
- National Small Industries Corporations
- District Industrial Centres (DICs)

SIDBI has developed this fund for the entrepreneurial development of women especially in rural areas. Under Mahila Vikas Nidhi grants loan to women are given to start their venture in the field like spinning, weaving, knitting, embroidery products, block printing, handlooms handicrafts, bamboo products etc. In 1993, Rashtriya Mahila Kosh was set up to grant micro credit to poor women at reasonable rates of interest with very low transaction costs and simple procedures.

CHALLENGES

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 (Nikita and Tauffiqu, 2015). A few of the major challenges, which need to be addressed for building a conducive ecosystem, of skill development for the women workforce are:

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

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT AND IMPLICATIONS FOR CHANGES

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 GEPD 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 labor 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 labor.

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 Institutes.

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 per cent 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.

Provision of vocational training in schools: The dropout rate from schools is high usually after the 8th standard. Most often, the drop outs 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.

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. The training may have to incorporate teaching of basic skills such as numeracy, problem solving, communication, learning to learn and team work 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.

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.

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 labor 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.

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.

CONCLUSIONS

Women are willing to take up business and contribute to the nation's growth. Their role is being recognized and steps are taken to promote women entrepreneurship. Resurgence of entrepreneurship is the need of the hour. Women entrepreneurs must be molded properly with entrepreneurial traits and skills to meet changing trends and challenging global markets, and also be competent enough to sustain and strive in the local economic arena. Skill development will be the key factor for empowering the women.

Empowerment of women is necessary for socio-economic development. Increasing literacy rate among women helps in better development of children. If women are given the opportunities they can excel themselves. Gender equality has to be established as a crosscutting issue in international development. Many private sector actors have placed working with women as core objective of their business and corporate social responsibilities. Since girls and women represent 50% of the world population, enabling them to participate in their local economics help broaden the employment pool. It is well said by Bringham Young, “You educate a man; you educate a man. You educate a woman; you educate a generation.”

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