



Institute of Social Studies Trust

POLICY BRIEF

SKILLING WOMEN IN NON-TRADITIONAL LIVELIHOODS

PATHWAYS TO WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

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The Policy brief is based on the findings of the ISST study entitled:

BEYOND THE NORM

Scope Of Non-traditional Livelihood Skilling
For Women In Achieving Women's Economic Empowerment

INTRODUCTION

Skilling is an important tool to achieve women's economic empowerment. The framework of skilling women is important to achieve The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) related to decent work and gender equality. In 2015 the Union government launched the National Skill Development Mission, which in its policy document emphasises that women constitute half the demographic dividend and skilling could be the key to increasing their participation in the country's labour force.¹ The Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojna (PMKVY) is the flagship program of Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE)² strives to promote increased participation of women in the workforce through appropriate skilling and gender mainstreaming of skills. Close to 50% of the candidates enrolled and trained under PMKVY are women. From a policy point, in 2015, the National Skill Development Policy focuses on inclusive skill development, with the objective of increased women participation for better economic productivity. To achieve this, emphasis has been laid on creating additional infrastructure both for training and apprenticeship for women; flexible training delivery mechanisms such as mobile training units, flexible afternoon batches along with on local need-based training to accommodate women; and ensuring safe and gender sensitive training environment, employment of women trainers, equity in remuneration, and complaint redressal mechanism. The most recent development in 2022 has been the expanding the mandate of 'Beti Bachao Beti Padoo' scheme (Ministry of Women and Child) by including skilling of girls in non-traditional livelihood (NTL) options in its flagship programme. This would mean focussing on increasing the enrolment of girls in secondary education, particularly in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) subjects in secondary schools.

GENDERED SKILL GAP

The proportion of working-age women receiving any form of vocational training over the past decade has been increasing at a nominal rate from 6.8% in 2011-12 to 6.9% in 2018-19, vs. a slightly better increase from 14.6% to 15.7% for men. However, women continue to be skilled in feminized sectors - courses for women under PMKVY, for instance, have concentrated on areas like apparel, beauty, wellness, and healthcare – sectors which are low-paying.³ Only 37 percent of female enrolments between 2014 and 2018 were in the priority sectors identified by the MSDE—i.e., those expected to generate the maximum jobs in the future. There were hardly any women taking courses in sectors such as construction and real estate, transportation and logistics, electronics, IT hardware, the auto industry, or the pharma industry. Initiatives such as Skill India and Make in India have quotas to include women, yet they struggle to recruit women, place them in jobs, and keep them in jobs once they are placed.⁴

¹ Sunaina Kumar, "The Skilling Imperative in India: The Bridge Between Women and Work," ORF Issue Brief No. 529, March 2022, Observer Research Foundation.

² PMKVY is the flagship scheme of the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE) and is implemented by the National Skills Development Corporation (NSDC). The objective of this scheme is to enable a large number of Indian youth to take up industry-relevant skill training that will help them in securing a better livelihood. The scheme aims to train them on skills based on the National Skill Qualification Framework (NSQF) and industry-led standards.

³ Sunaina Kumar, "The Skilling Imperative in India: The Bridge Between Women and Work," ORF Issue Brief No. 529, March 2022, Observer Research Foundation.

⁴ Rohini Pande, "Get the Policies Right First: How to get India's Women Into the Workforce," March 17, 2017, Business Standard, https://www.businessstandard.com/article/opinion/rohini-pande-getting-india-s-women-into-the-workforce-117031601398_1.html

Historically, women across societies and cultures have been kept out of formal (and technical) the knowledge systems. This would mean encouraging women towards certain specific trades that the society feels would be in-sync with their “nurturers” and “caregivers” identity as opposed to others which symbolizes ‘higher and more specialized skills’⁵. Women’s unequal burden of unpaid work and care work which results in time poverty, coupled with restrictive gender norms around mobility and property rights, access to resources isolates women, restricting their ability to seek skilling opportunities. Further, women do not have access to networks and information systems which further restricts their access for skilling or up-skilling.

It is not mystery that women’s agency in selecting their skill courses are often dictated by their members of the family, as was evident in the present study; skills that were “socially acceptable for women”. Non-existential or poor infrastructure also impede women’s ability to continue in skilling programmes. Women cited multiple challenges they faced while undertaking vocational training at ITIs: travelling to the remote locations of ITIs; absence of adequate, functional toilets at the institutes; lack of counselling and orientation for course selection; difficulties in dealing with course work alongside family responsibilities; and the perception of ITIs as male-dominated, with many more male instructors than female. Design, duration and distance of the skilling programme are important factors for women when enrolling for skilling courses.

ABOUT THE RESEARCH & METHODOLOGY

This policy brief is based on the findings of the research: Beyond the Norm: Scope of NTL skilling for women in achieving women’s economic empowerment. This research was undertaken by Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST) in partnership with selected member organisations of the Non-traditional livelihoods Network in India⁶. The qualitative study used a 360-degree case study method to understand the processes and challenges of NTL skilling and its impact on agency, aspirations and manifestations of empowerment or disempowerment in women’s life. This study foregrounds itself in Kabeer’s (1999) framework of women’s economic empowerment which she envisages as a process of change which occurs through the three inter-related dimensions – resources, agency and achievement. In addition, the study also makes use of the evaluation framework of “Small Wins”, in each of the case narrative, to look at the various levels of small wins that can over time be compounded to result in transformative change through non-linear processes (Termeer and Dewulf 2018) and feed into process of change as described by Kabeer (1999).

The case studies were selected and analysed using a gender responsive and intersectional approach. These case studies were vastly different from each other in terms of the location, intersectional identity of the participant, types of skilling engaged in and the structure and motive of the skill imparting organisation and hence are not to be compared. The case narratives were analysed vis-a-vis the impact felt from the interaction of the four institutional space (espoused in the Care Diamond) - family, community, market and state. This research, however, in addition looked at the role of the organisation in terms of availability of resources, the skilling process, building of aspiration and the eventual formation of agency and achievements of the individual journey towards empowerment via NTL skilling experience.

⁵ ICRW 2020

⁶ Non-traditional livelihoods Network...

SKILLING WOMEN IN NON-TRADITIONAL: RESOURCES, AGENCY AND ACHIEVEMENT

In this study, the case narratives point towards the agency women used against all odds to access these skills for bettering their lives. **The organisations (NGO, CBO, skilling unit, etc.) played an important role in developing an aspiration to move from the 'traditional' forms of skilling to a 'non-traditional' form of skilling for women in low-income families and communities. It is an essential source of resource which helps women in their process of change.** Besides the technical skilling, the gender just curriculum of imparting information of gender, sexuality, legal discourse, financial literacy, etc., are vital for women to be able to complete her skilling process and move towards a decent livelihood.

The study recognises that there is a shift in perception and personality between the before, in-skilling and after the skilling journey of the woman. However, various factors can curtail her agency in terms of the barriers she may face in her life from any or together from the various institutional spaces. **While the organisation and skilling program have equipped women with ability to negotiate with family and community, the women are still not able to push their agency in the market given the neo-liberal economy one resides in and hence 'informality' continues even though there are efforts to provide decent jobs to women who are part of the NTL skilling process.** Similarly, negotiation with the state is still done at an organisational level and voices and representation from ground up is at a varied stage across the Network.

Women's unequal share of care and unpaid work are a major barrier for women's participation in skilling courses. Studies have indicated how **women's unpaid and care work result in time poverty and time stretching which inhibits them for pursuing decent work, skilling and up-skilling opportunities.**⁷ There is a strong correlation between lack of public infrastructure and services and higher time poverty owing to women's role in providing unpaid and care work. **In addition, gender norms around mobility, risk aversion, lack of resources, non-familiarity with tools and machines, gender digital divide, among other reasons, also act as barriers towards any transformative change in lives of women.**

Organisations must invest time in laying the ground with the family and communities to bring women till the skilling center, even before the technical training begins. Consequently, this makes **skilling for women and especially in NTL, time and resource intensive which may not result in big figures. Hence, achievements in terms of numbers would not be conclusive and one needs to unpack and understand what level of agency has been achieved by the woman through the skilling process to define success.**

Support from the private industry and state interventions are essential for omitting gender roles in the market and mainstreaming NTL for women, Policy provisions such as reservation of seats in Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs), and schemes such as Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushal Yojana (DDU-GKY)⁸, are some positive steps taken by the step in this direction. Besides, women's concentration in stereotypical types of training, lack of decent job opportunities closer to home, threat of gender-based violence, lack of social security mechanisms, etc. continue to keep the few women who may be part of NTL skilling, out of employment.

As such, inter and intra institutional interaction and action and creation of decent job opportunities, along with supportive mechanisms such as childcare creches, safe workplace, better social security benefits, etc. would be required for mainstream and scaling up of NTL initiatives for women. For example, while government skilling schemes are at best gender aware, technical inputs from CSOs who have years of experience and have developed models of successful NTL skilling systems can help make these initiatives more gender responsive and eventually gender transformative.

⁷ Zaidi, M, Chopra, D and Roelen, K. (2017) 'My Work Never Ends': Women's Experiences of Balancing Unpaid Care Work and Paid Work through WEE Programming in India. IDS Working Paper 494

⁸ a placement-linked skills development programme for rural youth implemented by the Ministry of Rural Development

RECOMMENDATIONS

To enhance women's employability, policies and programmes need to create an enabling environment at the workplace for women. This would require focussing on decent work conditions, equal remuneration, adequate social security benefits, paid maternity leaves, violence-free workplace, working women hostels, etc. Drawing from the findings of this study, some recommendations are placed below to enhance women's access and participation in NTL skilling which would help in achieving women's economic empowerment.

A gender-just curriculum and gender-transformative programming

The curriculum followed by most government and corporate skilling endeavours are gender-blind and limiting for women owing to their portrayal as nurturers, carers, and such. A gender just curriculum⁹ using a gender transformative approach¹⁰ is crucial in designing skilling programmes. At the same time, it is important to design gender-specific skilling programmes for vulnerable and disadvantaged communities which are transformative in nature. Skilling for women, especially from marginalized groups and communities need a Skill++ approach which does not only provide technical training but also shapes their agency, voice and personalities to be able to negotiate their personal and professional struggles.

Vocational Training for girls in schools:

The National Education Policy (2020) stresses the need for vocational training to bridge the skill deficit in the industry and increase employability; there is especially need for digital competence and industry-based skills. It is important that girls have access to these vocational trainings in schools which can pique their interest in non-traditional livelihoods.

Recognition, Reduce and Redistribution of Women's unpaid and care work:

It is imperative for all institution spaces (from the Care Diamond: family, community, market and state) to recognize, reduce and redistribute of women's unpaid and care work; this would include provision of vital public goods and services, universal and accessible childcare centres by state and markets, programming around changing gender norms around care work and masculinities, violence free homes and public spaces, etc.

Adequate funding and convergence of schemes and programmes:

There is a need to boost funding for supportive mechanisms to enhance women in skilling and employment, such as creches, working hostels, maternity benefits, etc, which have been decreased considerably over the years. There is a need for greater political will to enhance NTL skilling for women in to come converge their various schemes and funds for better utilization and reduce duplication of programmes to have a robust goal setting in terms of programming for skilling for women and girls.

Creating decent work opportunities in NTL for women:

While one sees greater thrust for NTL skilling for women, there is a huge gap in attainment and retention in NTL. Serious policy and market intentions are required for enabling women to be recruited and sustained in male-dominated livelihoods. These would include, equal wages, equal market opportunities, violence free workspaces, social security benefits, supportive mechanisms such as working women hostels, affordable and quality creches, etc, with an over-arching aim towards dismantling gender norms and roles at the workplace and in the market.

⁹ Gender just curriculum contains modules which aim to eliminate the current reality of deeply ingrained gender-based discrimination in society and create a safe and harmonious environment for all individuals and groups. The curriculum is progressive and aims to equip women with knowledge and strategies that boosts their confidence and understanding which results in overall personality development of the women.

¹⁰ Gender transformative approaches seek to challenge gender inequality by transforming harmful gender norms, roles and relations, while working towards redistributing power, resources, and services more equally.

There is also need for creating campaigns to 'normalize' women in NTL through various mediums and channels. Enhance women's participation in digitization and automation: With Industry 4.0 upon us, it is imperative to bridge the wide gendered digital divide. If girls and women are not to be left behind in ever growing digitalization and automation of livelihoods, it is imperative to work around programmes focussed on digital literacy, increase smartphone ownership of women, bridge the gendered gap in internet connectivity, Greater public-private collaborations (through funding, cheaper smartphones, design skill programmes, job placements, etc.) can help in achieving this.

Gender blind/aware to gender transformative skilling programmes:

Most schemes for skilling women continue to be in the domain of feminised forms of work. In case of technical and better employable skills, these are designed from a male perspective and is often blind or at best aware of women's unequal position in the society. Policy makers need to work with civil society organizations working on skilling for women to discuss, learn and evaluate their present skilling schemes to move from gender blind/aware to gender transformative programmes which provide full and fair opportunities to women girls for skilling and up-skilling.

Safe mobility for women and girls:

Women and girls face issue of safety in public transports and this inhibits most women to access skilling programmes (especially professional skilling courses) and jobs which are positioned at a distance. Ensuring safe transport stops and vehicles is therefore an important tool to ensure greater participation of women and girls in skilling opportunities. This would include having women drivers in the public transport systems, regular frequency and adequate and cheap options of public transport, provision of para-transit options for last mile connectivity, etc.

ⁱ https://www.orfonline.org/research/the-skilling-imperative-in-india/#_edn29

ⁱⁱ PMKVY is the flagship scheme of the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE) and is implemented by the National Skills Development Corporation (NSDC). The objective of this scheme is to enable a large number of Indian youth to take up industry-relevant skill training that will help them in securing a better livelihood. The scheme aims to train them on skills based on the National Skill Qualification Framework (NSQF) and industry-led standards.

ⁱⁱⁱ ICRW 2020



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