



KEY ISSUES IN SKILLING WOMEN IN INDIA

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KEYWORDS :

1. Introduction:

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 National Skill Development Corporation (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. It is argued that the empowerment practice has to go beyond its focus on women to gender. A focus on gender would imply as emphasis on advocacy rather on simple focus on basic needs. The concept of gender will also, analysis of power relations, and enforces the idea of developing capabilities rather than simply skills. Women are seriously underrepresented in many occupations, thus, policies are needed to fight exclusions in the labour market by reducing the incidence of discriminatory practices. With this background, it is important to ensure women empowerment in the development programmes and thereby strive to have a conducive atmosphere for their effective participation. The strategy for women empowerment programme is addressed through gender sensitization among other sections of the community, capacity building to enhance their efficiency and contribute to economic development and ensure equality and status in the society. The 11th five year plan (2007-12) has recognized India's massive need to skill millions of formal and informal workers in the next ten years¹. In response, the government developed an ambitious scheme "of increasing the proportion of formal and informal skilled workers in its total workforce from a mere 2 per cent now to 50 per cent by 2022, thus creating a 500 million strong resource pool"²

2. Key Issues and Challenges in Women Skill Development

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 2per cent 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"³. The major challenges noted here are few in number but represent a complexity of issues involved.

3. Suggestions for Improvement

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 are mentioned here. Below are some of the main suggestions, clubbed under the following heads: (i) policy level changes, (ii) societal changes (iii) local level changes, including changes required in the training institutions.

I) Policy level changes**a. Gender sensitive policy**

There is a need to further develop Human Resource Development (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 training⁵. 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.

b. 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, Viz; Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) , Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE) and several other Ministries. This will lead to better focus and coordination between different initiatives.

c. 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 meeting the industrial demand for skilled labour.

d. 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 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."

e. 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.

f. 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.

II) Changes at the level of society**g) Identifying and making efforts to change basic and nuanced socio-cultural values**

With a view to eliminate existing biases that woman 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.

III) Changes at the level of provision of training and skill development**h) 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, there is need to make the skill development process accommodating and flexible to encourage women to enroll⁶. "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." 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 women⁷. 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.

j) High quality training that matches the changing needs of the market

one of the main criticism 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.

Conclusion

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.

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