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Skills development of women through vocational training

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Abstract

Skills and knowledge are the driving forces of economic growth and social development of any country. The economy becomes more productive, innovative and competitive through the existence of more skilled human potential. Women are the most vibrant and dynamic segment as well as potentially most valuable human resources. However, despite phenomenal capabilities, India is seriously handicapped with a very weak and narrow knowledge and skills base, with 12.3% gross enrolment ratio, as compared to 21% in China, 54.6% in developed countries and the world average of 23.2%. This paper represents the concept and Meaning of Vocational Education and Training by linking it to lifelong learning. The importance of VET for under-privileged, marginalized groups and women has been pinpointed, as it is a powerful weapon against poverty and hunger, and for women's empowerment. By focusing on the need for VET for women, it was felt that VET can make a big difference for many of the rural poor and women by improving household productivity, employability and income-earning opportunities and also for enhancing food security and promoting environmentally sustainable development and livelihoods.

Keywords: Skills, Knowledge, Social development, Economy, Vocational Education, Training, Women empowerment, Employability, Food security, Sustainable development.

1. Introduction

General and academic education is seen as that which builds analytical skills, knowledge and critical thinking, while VET develops craftsmanship, practical experience and practical problem solving. Venn (1964) explains the etymology of the term 'vocational' as a sort of 'calling'. He refers to it as education aiming at a stable job and a stable career in a recognized profession, pinpointing its emergence somewhere in the 19th century industrial revolution. Moodie (2002) analyses existing definitions in four dimensions - epistemological, teleological, hierarchical and pragmatic. He argues that a definition is needed on all four levels, stating that 'one may consider vocational education and training to be the development and application of knowledge and skills for middle-level occupations needed by society from time to time'. 'Technical and Vocational Education' is used as a comprehensive term referring to those aspects of the educational process involving, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences, and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life' (UNESCO, 2001, p. 2). Vocational training is defined as 'supplementary to initial training which is part of an ongoing process designed to ensure that a person's knowledge and skills are related to the requirements of his/her job and are continuously updated' (FAS, 2006). Vocational Education or Vocational Education and Training (VET), also called Career and Technical Education (CTE), prepares learners for jobs that are based in manual or practical activities, traditionally nonacademic and totally related to a specific trade, occupation or vocation, hence the term, in which the learner participates. It is sometimes referred to as technical education, as the learner directly develops expertise in a particular group of techniques or technology. Vocational education and training designed to advance individuals' general proficiency, especially in relation to their present or future occupations. The term does not normally include training for the professions. At a higher level, the technical education and vocational training system in India produces a labour force through a three-tier system:

- Graduate and post-graduate level specialists (e.g. Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT) and engineering colleges) trained as engineers and technologists.
- Diploma-level graduates who are trained in polytechnics as technicians and supervisors.

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c) Certificate-level craft people trained in ITIs as well as through formal apprenticeships as semi-skilled and skilled workers.

2. Review Literature

The level of participation in formal education continues to remain lower for women than for men and this article examines a number of reasons for the persistence of this gender gap. The author also investigates the low impact of formal education on the status of women in society and suggests that formal education institutions and non-formal programs of adult education and training can help to eliminate this inequality

2.1 Beti Bachao Beti Padhao: Realizing the gravity of this issue, it was highlighted in the Address to the Joint Session of the Parliament by the President in June, 2014 and thereafter, in the Budget Speech of the Government. Since coordinated and convergent efforts are needed to ensure survival, protection and empowerment of the girl child, Government has announced *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao* initiative. This will be implemented through a national multimedia campaign and focused multi sectoral actions in 100 selected districts, low in CSR, covering all States and Union Territories. Further, it has been decided by the Government that Ministry of Women and Child Development shall be the Nodal Ministry for implementing this joint Scheme which will be implemented in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and Ministry of Human Resource Development

Empowering the girl child through education and creating an enabling environment that provides equal access to education, health, employment/skill development etc. is another critical component

2.2 Promoting equal access of girls/women to technical and vocational education

UNESCO's policy to promote the equal access of girls and women to technical and vocational education is based on the Organization's normative instruments: the Revised Recommendation concerning Technical and Vocational Education (1974) and the Convention on Technical and Vocational Education (1989). As these instruments indicate, the continued persistence of inequality in this field calls for specific action in respect of girls and women taking into account their particular needs and the obstacles to be overcome.

3. Objectives

1. To enhancing women employability (wage/self-employment) and ability to adapt changing
2. Technologies and labor market demands
3. To Improving productivity and living standards of the women.
4. To Strengthening competitiveness of the country.
5. To develop a high-quality skilled workforce/entrepreneur relevant to current and emerging employment market needs.
6. To create opportunities for all to acquire skills throughout life, and especially for youth, women and disadvantaged groups.

4. Skill Development and Women Workers in India: a brief overview

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 years. 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% now to 50% by 2022, thus creating a 500 million strong resource pool." 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. 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 National Skill Development Mission, headed by the Prime Minister, was launched in 2008, and a Co-ordinate an action Plan for Skill Development was formulated with a three tier structure that includes, (a) the Prime Minister's National Council on Skill Development, as the apex body for advice on policy and interventions, (b) the Skill Development Co-ordination Board to device detailed strategies, guidelines and instructions based on the advice of the council, and (c) the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), a non-profit company registered under the Companies Act of 1956. The role of the corporation is to identify the full range of skill development needs, develop processes with special emphasis on excellent standards and certifications, training of trainers, and proper delivery of training. Historically, vocational training has been primarily coordinated by Directorate General of Employment and Training (DGET) under Ministry of Labour and Employment (MOLE), Government of India; while technical training falls under the Ministry of Human Resource Development. "The main objective of vocational education and training (VET) is to furnish the technical and management skills and help develop appropriate attitudes for specific occupations and jobs." However, this traditional objective is being widened now to include approaches and interventions that promote capacity building and empowerment, and not just training p. The present focus is to develop and achieve sustainable improvements in the livelihoods of the poor.

5. Key Issues and Challenges in Brief

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 expected to further decline to 0.59 by 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 2035.16 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.

6. Vocational Training for Women

Skill development for employability will be used as an agent of change in promoting women’s employment. Women face a multitude of barriers in accessing skills and productive employment, remaining on the job due to effect of globalization or otherwise and advancing to higher level jobs, as well as returning to the labour market after a period of absence spent, for example, in raising children.

- a) A policy of non-discrimination will be pursued vigorously to provide equal access for women to skill development and employment.
- b) This Policy will aim to raise women’s participation to at least 30% by the end of the 11th Plan.
- c) Proactive measures that overcome barriers and facilitate participation, such as hostels for women, scholarships, transport, training materials and loans, will be made available on a large scale.
- d) The Women’s Vocational Training Programme will be expanded and the institutional network providing training

facilities exclusively for women, so that they can obtain skills with high wage and self-employment potential will be greatly expanded.

- e) In order to promote skills and employability of women, the sectors which employ a large number of women will be identified. These may include construction based traditional crafts or piece rate work, financial and health service as well as agricultural sectors.
- f) Gender stereotyping in vocational courses will be eliminated to encourage women’s participation in non-traditional occupations, including existing and emerging technological fields.
- g) Skill development for self-employment will be an important component in these skill development efforts in rural areas. Post-training support, including mentoring for access to markets, credit and appropriate technologies, is an important part of skill development strategy for self-employment.
- h) Training modules will incorporate specific needs of target groups, e.g. literacy, the level of education and the local language. The delivery of training will be flexible in terms of hours and duration to encourage participation, particularly among women.
- i) In general, there is a regional imbalance in training opportunities and some parts of the country are quite deficient in skill development institutions. In order to provide more equitable access across the country, special efforts will be mounted to establish training facilities in deficient regions.

7. A Case Study on Vocational Training

Can a woman who is unlettered and from a poor family dare take on the dangerous forest mafia in a fiercely male dominated society? Kalavati Devi Rawat, a resident of Bacher, a remote village in Uttarakhand border district of Chamoli dared and succeeded. Now in her mid-forties, Kalavati Devi was barely seventeen when she took on the timber criminals, out to destroy the forests of Bacher. She tamed the out-of-control alcoholics in the mountain village, once a prototype of Uttarakhand brutally male-dominated hill society. Devi’s success lies, perhaps in her inherent honesty. “I am absolutely unlettered, I can’t read or write and my parents were too poor to send me to school,” she admits rather disarmingly. The same unlettered but fiercely passionate Devi went on to win the Women’s World Summit Foundation’s prestigious ‘Prize for women’s creativity in rural life.’

The secret behind the success story of this peasant woman, as one soon discovers, is her open-mindedness and inherent keenness to learn. She considers ‘Chipko’ leader Chandi Prasad Bhatt her inspiration. The Chipko movement, the world’s pioneering green campaign, began in Uttarakhand sometime in 1970. It presented a unique sight with the hill women hugging trees to save forests from the forest mafia’s onslaught. Kalavati Devi’s crusade against timber criminals was inspired by the same campaign. But she discovered only later that a ‘Chipko’-like non-violent struggle could also help humble the forest mafia.

She had the realization during her informal training as a budding social activist when she went about trying to solve the day-to-day problems of the village.

The first problem she confronted when she arrived in Bacher after getting married was the lack of electricity. Power was yet to reach the remote village and caused discontent among residents.

“We started looking for a solution and, one day, my village sarpanch and I trekked 25km to Gopeshwar where we met Bhattji (Chipko leader) at his residence and discussed our

problem with him”, recalls Devi. He took them to the officer concerned and reasoned with him.

In a few days, the entire village was bathed in light; it had been connected to an electrical grid. “I had learnt my lessons: Never give up and keep pursuing things doggedly,” says Kalawati Devi animatedly.

Experiences such as these were, in fact, gradually preparing her for future challenges, she says. One such challenge presented itself soon. The year was 1985. One morning, a group of women from Bacher set out on the five-km trek up to the panchayat forest of Taantri to bring fodder. “As we entered the jungle we were shocked to see a strange sight,” recalls Devi.

“The foresters present there had marked rows and rows of dead trees for felling. They were around 1000 in number”, she adds. “That’s the last thing we wanted”, recalls Radha Devi Rawat, a village forest panchayat member. “For, in the absence of deadwood, we would be forced to cut green trees for fuel and our forests — the only source of sustenance for us—would be finished,” she adds. The foresters were, therefore, repeatedly urged to not fell trees, but to no effect. There was a heated exchange of words between both sides. “The foresters tried all tricks to browbeat us”, recalls Kalavati Devi. “They tried to offer us a bribe and even threatened to kill us but we refused to be cowed down.” As the impasse continued, the village women decided to launch an agitation in favor of their demand.

“One morning, we women set out on a 25-km hilly trek to the district headquarters’ town (Gopeshwar) chanting slogans ‘Chipko Andolan Jindabad’ (Hail the Chipko Movement), Ped Lagao, Desh Bachao (Plant Trees, Save the Nation)”, recalls Radha Devi.

A 12-hour dharna later, the administration acquiesced. Trees won’t be felled in the Taantari forest, the district magistrate announced. A war had been won.

But a bigger problem persisted: the nexus between the forest mafia and the ‘alcoholics’ of Bacher. It continued to torment the women. “Kalavati Devi had a novel solution to that problem too”, recalls Chandi Prasad Bhatt. “She knew the only way to break this nexus was by controlling the village forest Panchayat,” he adds.

The then sub-divisional magistrate did put up some resistance to Kalavati Devi’s demand that women be allowed to contest the Panchayat election. “The official concerned fell in line when I forcefully argued that women had been legally empowered to contest the Panchayat elections”, she recalls.

Kalavati Devi was, in fact, referring to the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments enacted in the early nineties. The Panchayat polls were soon announced. The long tormented women of Bacher contested and literally swept the village forest Panchayat election.

Since then, their hold over the local body has been intact. Now, armed with power, the women act tough with the alcoholics. “Earlier, the women confined themselves to breaking their crude distilleries. After their entry into the Panchayats, they became tougher... and started hitting them with stinging nettle grass”, says Kalavati Devi who has been the president of the Mahila Mangal Dal, (an all-women group) of her village for the past three decades.

“Almost all our men folk have now given up liquor,” she adds with her trademark smile, “There is also no trace of the timber mafia.”

8. Conclusion

Women are not less than men in any perspective. They compete men in every field of work whether it may be pilot, loco pilots, engineers, doctors, labour, etc. Irrespective of gender discrimination equal opportunities and training is to be provided to women to make them and our country’s economy more efficient. Skill development through vocational training will be very effective to women especially in case of rural women who perform traditional crafts or manual labour work. Government of India has provided effective measures to promote and provide vocational training to women. Skill development through vocational training is must because it enhances the economic empowerment of women. Realizing that the process of social development has to take into account the needs, interests and viewpoints of both men & women alike; and looking at the situation of women, gender inequalities and inequities that existed, special gender specific programmes were formulated and organized to mainstream women into economic activities. The women’s vocational training programme at ministry of labour & employment, directorate general of employment and training, was designed and launched in 1977. The programme attempts to promote the women employment in industry (mainly organized sector) as semi-skilled/skilled & highly skilled workers by increasing their participation in skill training facilities under Craftsmen Training Scheme and Craft Instructors Training Scheme. Programme also offers higher skill training for the Instructors of various skill training organizations. To achieve these objective women exclusive Institutes have been set up. As 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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