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Bridging the Skills Gap of Women Workers of Informal Sector in India for Sustainable Development

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ABSTRACT

The informal sector of India faces a major challenge of skill development and acquisition because 93% of the workforce is in informal/unorganised sector. At present, women are contributing only a meagre 24% whereas the GDP of India can increase by another 4.2% if women workers may get employment and contribute their full potential to Indian economy. The present study identifies the gaps in the present quality standards of formal and informal skills training imparted to females undergoing training and female workers working in informal sector and suggests a skill mapping model to reduce and bridge the gap between the existing level of training of skills and the desired level of training of skills amongst them. The framework suggested in this study has also integrated the outcome aspect of the skills training process, thus it is based on the input-outcome approach which shall lead to sustainability and minimize the structural unemployment. The framework includes the quality of Inputs provided to the trainees, the quality of the training processes (both for formal and informal training), the output in the form of quality of the skills acquired would be assessed and finally the outcome would be appraised. The implications of skills training to women workers working in informal sector would have a wider scope ranging micro level at the female worker level to the policy implications pertaining to monitor the outcomes of skills training institutions and ensuring quality for long term sustainability of female workers in their employment and further make greater contributions towards their family, society and nation.

Keywords: Skills gap, Women workers, Informal Sector, Sustainable development, Training needs.

1. INTRODUCTION

The driving forces attributing to economic growth, social and technological development of a country are skills, education at different levels (from primary to post-graduate level) and value system of the population. It has been brought forward by various reports globally that the nations having higher and advance level of skills, education adapt to challenges more effectively and efficiently. They also are able to harness the opportunities of the dynamic and changing macro environment and moving way forward towards sustainable development.

India faces a huge challenge skilling its workforce as only 4.69% of the total workforce in India has undergone formal skill training when it is compared to countries like 68% in UK, 75% in Germany, 52% in USA, 80% in Japan and 96% in South Korea. The experts in their study on skill gap conducted by NSDC (National Skill Development Corporation) over 2010-2014 have deliberated on the quantum of the skill requirement in the various sectors identified along with the job roles. This study also highlighted the market of the skilled workforce (demand and supply side). It stated that India has an additional requirement of 109.73 million skilled workforce by 2022 in the twenty four key sectors identified for skilling India. Taking into consideration the workforce participation rate of 90 percent for males and 30 percent for females, assumption is that approximately 16.16 million persons will join the workforce. This shall exclude those persons who are opting for higher education and need to acquire skills. If this process of skilling becomes a reality, it shall add another 104.62 million persons to be skilled in the next 7 years. The challenge for India does not stop here because there shall be 104.62 million fresh entrants to the workforce over next seven years (by 2022) who will be required to be skilled. To meet the skilling requirement of the trainees, we as a country need to create training facilities like Centres, Trainers, Sectoral Divisions, Spatial Disbursement, Monitoring of employability etc.

The informal sector of India faces a major challenge of skill development and acquisition because 93% of the workforce is in informal/unorganised sector. As the informal sector engaging the men and the women workforce is prevalent in medium and small industries and is outside the ambit of the legal framework making it difficult to map existing skills and measure the skilling requirement with respect to industry. The emphasis at the macro level in India with respect to the employment generation is more in informal sector as compared to the formal; sector. The participation of women in urban workforce has declined from 17.8% to 15.5% and in rural workforce from 33.3% to 26.5% from the year 2004 to 2011 as defined in census data. The contribution of informal sector to the national GDP (Gross Domestic Product) cannot be ignored as this sector has high economic contribution in Textiles, Food Processing, Export Houses, ITeS etc. These are the areas which also have export orientation. Thus, the requirement is of imparting proper skills to make the industry efficient in all respects of output and ensure sustainable development.

It is a well known fact that women our country are mainly working in the informal sector which where the jobs are paid poorly. Working in the informal sector makes the women workforce ending up in a vicious cycle where the skill acquisition is low and of inferior quality, there are no social security benefits as well as the wage rates are also generally limited to minimum daily wages. Due to the lack of requisite industrial skills, the women workers have few employment opportunities which lead to their low participation in the workforce besides poor working conditions. At present, most of the women workers working in informal sector are lacking in skills and formal education.

In India, the female workforce participation rate is significantly less than the male workers. The Gender wise comparative data shows that 74.4% of male workforce and 25.8% of the female workforce in the age group of 15 years and above are in need of employment or are available for employment. In comparison to many developing economies, where the female workforce participation rate is above 50%, in India this rate is very much below 50%. To enhance productivity and accelerate the rate of economic growth, there is a dire need to mainstream gender roles by imparting them skills in non traditional roles along with enhancing gender sensitivity in workplace. The certification of the skills of women workforce in the informal sector will further strengthen women participation and will also lead to inclusive growth and development thereby paving the way towards sustainable development.

The women workers are one of the main pillars of Indian workforce but the number of women active in labour workforce is decreasing. The women workforce participation decreased in 2000 from 39 percent to approximately 30 percent in 2010. In China 82% and in Brazil 72% women in the prime age group of 25 to 45 years were economically active, whereas in the same age group only 39.5% women were economically active in India. As there is decrease in women workforce participation in our country, they are under-represented in the workforce. As a result of this, it would be a major challenge to harness the potential of this young working age population of Indian women.

These facts further indicate the requirement of skills trainings for women that may contribute towards regular incomes, constructive work outcomes and make them partners who can contribute significantly towards economic growth of the country.

The Economic Survey conducted in November 2014 by OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) proves that India ranks low in women economic participation. At present, women are contributing only a meagre 24% whereas the GDP of India can increase by another 4.2% if women workers may get employment and contribute their full potential to Indian economy. Therefore, the pace of economic growth can be speed up by providing more and better employment opportunities for women workforce. A more educated and skilled female workforce would be more sensitive towards attaining sustainable development goals.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The population of India is considered to be one of the youngest working age population in the world where 62% of the people are in the working age group of 15-59 years as well as more than 54% of its total population is below the age of 25 years. To avoid this demographic dividend (which is expected to be there for the next 25 years) from converting into demographic nightmare, it is crucial to equip this workforce with employable knowledge and skills and ensure their substantiate contribution towards social and economic development. Against this backdrop, their skills should be mapped with the priority areas of the 'Make in India' and 'Skills India' initiatives of the Government.

Increased economic participation of women as workforce can be an important step in this direction and it can be achieved to a major extent through emphasizing on their quality of education and advancement, acquisition of skills that are pertinent in the macro-economic environment. The challenge is not only limited to the large expansion of training facilities for skills training, but it is also likewise necessary to elevate the quality of skills training in India.

However, despite various efforts made by NSDC in the past few years, the women workforce in Indian informal sector is still facing a large number of challenges like inferior skills quality, low output, lack of access to higher education due to economic constraints, gender constraints, geographic immobility constraints, inadequacy of good quality skills training etc. For unfolding the potential of women workforce participation in India, there is immediate requirement of bringing about a revolution in the area of employment, along with an educational and skill development revolution. Increase in the educational level of women would automatically increase their economic participation in the workforce due to their higher social and economic aspirations. By 2025, the initiatives and efforts of the NSDC and other business and NGOs (Non-Government Organizations) are not going to be sufficient in meeting the skills gap of if the qualities of skills imparted to female workers are inferior in nature.

Further, the quality component in skills training needs to be looked at a more comprehensive level by higher education, vocational and other training institutions/centres. Hence, the need of the hour is to identify the right skill gap and impart quality skills to female workforce so that they become competent to join the formal sector and be part of the mainstream employment which would lead to sustainable livelihood.

Further to this, the present initiatives towards skilling females need quality centric approach with a judicious combination of education, guidance and social support. However the present skill development initiatives and efforts need to bridge the gap in imparting the range and quality of skills that are crucial for their employability. It becomes imperative for the nation to take proactive measures for bridging skill gap and quality in skilling females working in the informal sector also so that they acquire the right skills and enjoy the benefits of regular employment, equitable wages, and social security benefits as well as other benefits.

The present study will identify the gaps in the present quality standards of formal and informal skills training imparted to females undergoing training and female workers working in informal sector and will suggest a skill mapping model to reduce and bridge the gap between the existing level of training of skills and the desired level of training of skills amongst them.

3. REVIEW & OVERVIEW OF LITERATURE

Renana Jhabvala & Shalini Sinha (2001) : Described in their research paper that due to the entry of large domestic companies as well as multinational companies with huge investments and state of the art technology in the food-processing sector, they are compelling small and unorganized units to close down business. The food processing sector in India is the fourth largest employer of women workforce in the country. Approximately 3.10 lakhs women workers (0.35 per cent of total women workforce) are employed in food-processing sector, mostly in the informal sector of the industry. The small units in food processing sector are unable to get access to latest technology and modern quality control facility due to financial constraints. These units are unable to launch new innovative products for attracting a large customer base as well as they are not able to meet the high quality standards required in the industry. The rate of participation of women workforce in the total workforce has been on decline since 1981 but it shows a minor increase in 1992 and 1993. In the same way, the female/male proportion also has been declining. The average number of women workers per manufacturing unit is also portraying a decline from a figure of 21.7 in 1981 to 14.8 in 1982. These facts clearly indicate that the modernization of food processing industry is going to more negatively affect the women workforce in comparison to their male counterparts.

World Bank Project Report, 2007 : Defined about India that at the base of the training systems there are Industrial Training Institutes run by the Government and Industrial Training Centres run by private sector. These institutes and centres offer courses up to 24 months in different trades. A major criticism of these has been limited employability due to curriculum rigidity and weak market responsiveness following upon poor industry-institution linkages. A World Bank tracer study conducted in 2006 showed that less than 30 percent of ITI graduates found employment, and that employers wanted different technical skills and stronger ‘soft’ skills, teamwork and innovativeness.

Monk, Sandefur and Teal (2008) : Compared the impact on participants’ income earnings who had participated in traditional apprenticeship and vocational schemes with non-participants. Their findings revealed that the schemes had a more significant impact on male participant earnings than female earnings, although it contributed significantly towards the likelihood of women participants finding a job. The reason of women’s lower incomes can be contributed towards the fact that they were made to work in less productive forms of training such as tailoring or hairdressing while the men participants were trained to work in more productive areas such as carpenters, mechanics, metal workers, tailors and craft workers.

Elizabeth Katz (2008) : Illustrated that Latin America adopted a new approach towards motivating women to join workforce. There, the youth employment programme offering vocational course training collaborated with decentralized training entities and inspired beneficiaries to enroll for vocational training. The content of the training curriculum was based on the needs and demands of the local firms. The training consisted of both on-the-job training as well as classroom teaching. As these programmes were extremely well targeted and were based on the demand of labour in private sector, they were successfully able to promote and attract women towards employment. The various benefits offered by these programmes to women youth workers in the form of training in non-traditional skills sectors, equal opportunity and the additional stipend provided for childcare. This new model of vocational training has been able to attract large number of women workers thereby increasing their rate of employment and earnings in many “Latin American” countries.

Törnqvist and Schmitz, (2009) : Have described in their study that education acts as catalyst and an important tool leading to women empowerment. It equips women with skills, information, confidence and knowledge which are essential for the women seeking economic by being gainfully engaged. Incentivizing the young girls financially by giving subsidies on fees has improved their enrollment effectively and minimized the dropouts leading to high completion rates. Other factors that also encourages effective enrollment of girls are: the location of the school building is close to the communities, school engages quality teachers, congenial and safe physical environment and adequate sanitary facilities for girls. The study brought forward that vocational training enhances the payments at work and prevents the concentration of the women engagement only in low wage and low skill work.

Chakravarty et al. (2014) : In his study depicted that the two step training programme for women in Liberia comprised of classroom based training in six trades and emphasized on the components of job placements. The findings of the study stated that the training increased the employment and the earnings of the respondents significantly in the post study period. The respondents were the apprentices both men and women who were under training across a large range of occupations.

Cuberes and Teigner (2014) : Brought forward through empirically analysis the gender gaps in the workforce participation with respect to productivity and living standards. Simulation was carried out on occupational choice model with heterogeneous agents within purview. The agents imposed several constraints on the economic participation of women like low wages, gender gaps in entrepreneurship and reduced per capita income. With reference to India, the gender gap lowered the per capita income by 26% approximately.

Maitra and Mani (2015) : Identified in their study that the women who were engaged and trained in the skill of sewing, had high probability of being employed in India. They had specific characteristics like long working hours and earned more money in short and medium term.

Agenor (2015) : In his study took three phases which were childhood, working and retirement. These phases were put in an overlapping generation model simulating it with the effect of public policies like public investment in infrastructure & efficiency of expenditure incurred on health and education on economic growth and participation. The findings by the author stated that the public policies as stated above increased the female participation rate in labour workforce. This participation could contribute to economic growth of 1.5-2.4% annually.

4. OVERVIEW OF LITERATURE

The formal training institutes like vocational training institutes, polytechnics and informal training institutes and training centres are not churning out professional as expected by the industry. The people who have acquired skills training from these institutes are not deemed fit by industry for employment with specific reference to female workforce. The modernization of technology and infrastructure in food processing industry is leading to structural shift in employment of women workers further contributing to mobility to different informal sectors or else they need to upgrade their skills as per industry requirement to remain gainfully engaged.

Another example is of study conducted on women who participated in a sewing training program in India showed that these women were more likely to be employed, worked more hours and earned more money in the short- and medium term. The literature review indicates that there exists a skill gap between the training institutes and the industry expectations. Hence, there is a need to identify the needs gap and suggest means for overcoming those gaps. The benefit of the skill training through structured pedagogy shall lead to quality inputs of skills, their transformation in terms of equipping the beneficiary, further resulting in the outcome as being better paid, improved living standards of women in particular. The occupational differentiation between men and women economically, socially and environmentally shall also be addressed to a large extent.

5. FRAMEWORK

The Skill Paradox : Skill Building for India is critical from both the socio-economic and demographic viewpoint. It is an important tool for reducing poverty, enhancing competitiveness and employability. Skill Development can play a pivotal role in promoting the government's efforts of 'Skilling India' and to strengthen our Prime Minister's 'Make in India' mission.

With over half of its population being less than 25 years of age, the young workforce presents a tremendous opportunity to harness the country's demographic dividend for the sustainable growth and social progress of the nation. While the surplus young workforce gives India a strategic advantage, the challenge the country faces is that a vast majority of the youth joining the workforce are unskilled and unemployable. In 2014, National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) under Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship conducted a skill gap analysis and brought forward that there would be an incremental requirement of 109.73 million skilled workforce in 24 identified sectors by 2022. The Economic Survey of 2014-15 brings to light this jarring concern by highlighting that while India is adding about 12 million to the job market every year, only a meagre 3% of the workforce underwent training in skills. This gap underlines the pressing need for targeted skill training that can help ready the country's workforce to enter into gainful livelihood and create a significant impact on the nation's economic growth and social stability. Another challenge is that some of the trained workers who could manage to get employment in organized sector further find it difficult to sustain in the industry and needs additional training for upgrading their skills to meet the demands of the industry.

As of 2014, there are 11,964 ITIs in the country, with a seating capacity of 16.92 lakh. The enrollment in these centres is only 9,56,1472 which is an alarming 58.9% of the total training capacity. As of 2010, number of students enrolling in high school (IX, X) is 24 million and those enrolling in higher secondary (XI, XII) is 13 million, while the enrollment in vocational training is less than 1 million (9,56,172).

Although the advantages of skills training are more or less evident, but at the same time we are neither assured of its quality nor the outcomes that it may generate as well as whether it would meet the industry demands or not. This indicates that we need a system that can essentially follow the skills training programme on a regular basis and report the feedback quickly and efficiently to the training institutions and other stakeholders. Apart from this, the training institutions in particular must be responsive enough to adapt themselves as per the industry demands by timely improving the quality of training curriculum, trainers, study material, methodologies and other infrastructural facilities, thus minimizing the skill gap thereby enhancing their rate of employability in organized sector (Public or private) of industry.

Input-Outcome Framework of the Skills Training Process : The conceptual framework of the present study (Figure 16.1) is based on the Input-Outcome Framework that would eventually help us in determining the quality gap of skills training and devising means for overcoming the quality gap to assure sustained employability. Each stakeholder like the trainer and trainee while imparting or acquiring the skills shall have to be quality conscious because only that shall lead to economic gains in the long run.

Initially the Skills training process has been depicted. The process is based on the input-output approach that is being currently followed by most of the skills training institutions. The trainees undertake either formal training through Vocational Institutes, Polytechnics, Engineering Colleges & other systems of certification etc., whereas they may also partake informal training that is passed to them through generations, provided by family members, learning through experience and various skill teaching shops etc. The expected output of the formal or informal training for the stakeholders is in the form of skills acquired that benefits the trainees as well as his family members economically. For industry, it is in the form of employing a trained employee that should be productive from day one of economic engagement/ job and contribute considerably to the profits of the organization by minimizing waste, time and costs.

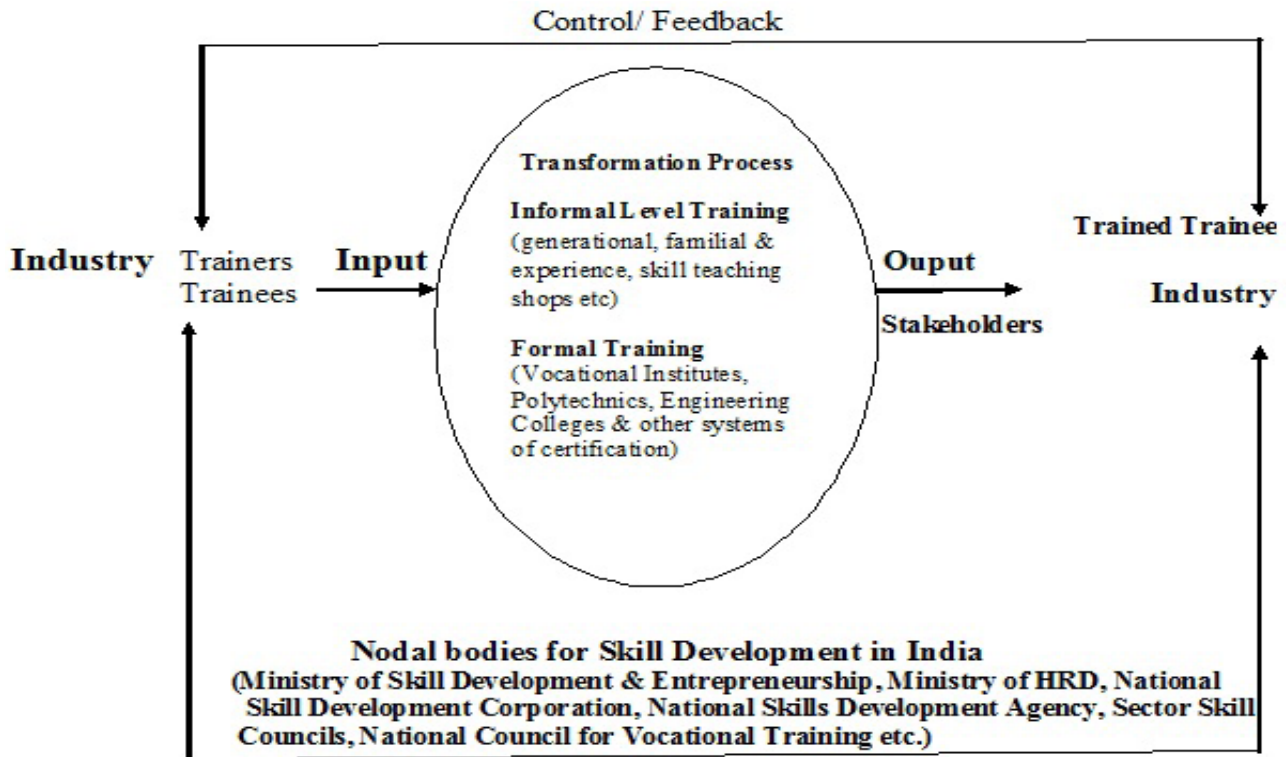


Figure 16.1: Stakeholder of the Skills Training Process

The framework (Figure 16.2) suggested in this study has also integrated the outcome aspect of the skills training process, thus it is based on the input-outcome approach which shall lead to sustainability and minimize the structural unemployment. The framework includes the quality of Inputs provided to the trainees, the quality of the training processes (both for formal and informal training), the output in the form of quality of the skills acquired would be assessed and finally the outcome would be appraised. Depending on the quality of skills training acquired, the outcome shall be in the form of employment in formal sector, informal sector and in case of very inferior quality of skills acquired it may result in no employment also.

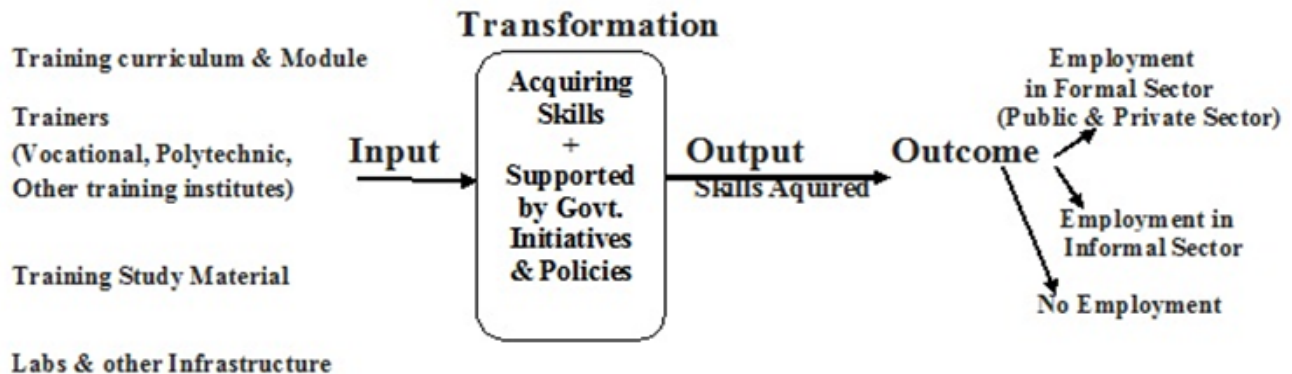


Figure 16.2: The Quality Gap of Skills Training

Thus, integrating quality into the skills training can affect the outcome in a very positive way and may prove a more comprehensive approach for ensuring sustained employability taking into consideration all the stakeholders. The mission of Skill India should not ignore the quality component as it has been observed in the professional degrees that have led to the increased aspirations of the youth with under employment pushing them to informal sectors particularly the women.

The allocation of women in the work force across different informal sectors of the economy depicts some remarkable trends such as 68.4% women workers are employed in agricultural sector and 15.8% in the service sector. In the last two and half decades there has been a considerable shift in the sectors in where the women were employed in the informal sector with the specific characteristic of no skill training requirement to the sectors requiring some form of skills. This shift may be considered to be a contributory factor for the women involved in agriculture sector reduced by 15% at the national level, whereas their involvement has increased in all other sectors. In a similar manner, the proportion of women involved in manufacturing sector have registered an increase of 60% and service sector an increase of 23%. This trend is common to various regions with a few exceptions.

Implications : There are various schemes like Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana, Indira Awaas Yojana, Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana and many others depict the efforts of the government to provide basic level of subsistence through earnings. But the focus of the Skill India needs to take into consideration the industries those are being emphasized for “Make in India”. By conducting a sectoral analysis of the various sectors emphasized in “Make in India” Initiative of the government, the sectors can be categorized into four categories that are depicted in the table-16.1 below:

Sectoral Analysis for providing the Skills

Table 16.1
Matrix depicting the Sectoral Analysis

	<i>Domestic Consumption (C1)</i>	<i>Foreign Consumption (C2)</i>
Foreign Production (R1)	Defence Electronics Aviation / Aerospace	Sourcing destination for other countries Apparels, automobile, electronics, chemical and chemical products
	Achieved through Import Substitution and improving policy /regulations	Global shift and opportunities for India prevails
Domestic Production (R2)	Agriculture Railways Infrastructure Space Hospitality & tourism	Textiles /cotton) IT services Auto Components/ Steel Gems and Jewellery Media and Entertainment Food processing and leather
	Productivity, economies of scale, mechanization, Automation, efficiencies in MSMEs	Export oriented; India has raw material &labour

Taking into consideration C1R1: The sectors like Defence, Electronics, Aviation are primarily dependant on foreign production but the consumption is domestic in nature. The growth in these sectors could be achieved through import substitution and improving the policy and regulations. Therefore these industries should impart skills on documentation processes, optimal usage of the imported technology and its transfer to women to develop their competencies for working in these areas. Considering C2 R1 need different sets of skills in order to generate employment and efficacy as most of the sectors like apparels, automobiles, electronics, chemicals and chemical products, etc could serve as sourcing destinations for other countries. These are the sectors where there is immense scope in terms of global shift from Made in China to Made in India and through the appropriate imparting of skills, quality assurance specially to the women workforce in informal sector. India has the opportunity to shine like Japan and Korea did in mid fifties and then China in mid nineties onwards as the objective of transforming India is multi pronged in approach. The C2R2 Industries and sectors where we are emphasize on domestic production for domestic consumption like agriculture, railways, infrastructure development hospitality and tourism, the skills are to be imparted to increase productivity, adopt mechanization improve the medium and small enterprises through divergent and focused skill education and this should also address structural unemployment. Considering C2R2, in the export oriented industries like textiles, IT services, Gems and Jewellery, Food Processing, the skills are the key to success as India has raw material, competitive labour force in where women are already a main part of the informal workforce with no formal training.

The implications of skills training to women workers working in informal sector would have a wider scope ranging micro level at the female worker level to the policy implications pertaining to monitor the outcomes of skills training institutions and ensuring quality for long term sustainability of female workers in their employment. It will also encourage the female workers to be confident of their skills and further make greater contributions towards their family, society and nation.

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