

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH SKILLS DEVELOPMENT & VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

Rita Singh*

Abstract: *Women empowerment enables women to have control over their lives and put forth their influence in the society. Women are often the victim of gender discrimination and gender inequality. This article discusses how women can give a new meaning to their life through skill development and vocational training. Ministry of Labor and Employment has introduced number of initiatives in the field of skill development and employment. Vocational education and training are essential mechanism to improve one's productivity and income. 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, home-based micro entrepreneurs, in addition to handling their domestic work and care responsibilities. Skills development is a key to improve employability and income-earning opportunities for women and also for enhancing sustainable rural development and livelihoods.*

Keywords: *Women empowerment, Skills development, Vocational Education, Sustainable rural development, Livelihoods, Employability.*

INTRODUCTION

Women constitute about 48% of the total population of the country. According to constitution of India, 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. Vocational Training programme provides skill and confidence to women to help them

* President, Renaissance Education Society, D-10, 20 FT Road, GF Sonia Vihar, Som Bazar, Delhi-110094

achieve economic and social independence. Women have always been marginalized and subjugated in the Indian society. Due to lack of specific implementation of plans, local communities, women have remained outside the scope and benefits of government schemes and programmes. Often rural women are hesitant to participate in the ongoing government plans for vocational training due to lack of economic independence and illiteracy. There is a dire need to address this issue by raising the status of 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.

CONCEPT OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment is the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. Empowerment of women means developing them as more aware individuals, who are politically active, economically productive and independent and are able to make intelligent discussion in matters that affect them. Women empowerment as a concept was defined as redistribution of social power and control of resources in favour of women. In its definition of women empowerment, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNDFW) includes factors such as acquiring knowledge and understanding of gender relations and the way in which these relations may be changed; and developing a sense of self worth, a belief in one's ability to secure desired changes and the right to control one's life.

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 favour of women so that women can improve their livelihood. 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; women needs vocational training or skills also to be able to stand on their feet and be the earning members of the family. Now a days, women are taking interest in recent income generating activities, self-employment and entrepreneurship that also leads to property rights, political representation, social equality, personal right, family development, market development, community development and at last the nation development

WOMEN LABOR

Women form an integral part of the Indian workforce. According to the information provided by the office of Registrar General & Census Commissioner of India, As per Census 2011, the total number

of female workers in India is 149.8 million and female workers in rural and urban areas are 121.8 and 28.0 million respectively. Out of total 149.8 million female workers, 35.9 million females are working as cultivators and another 61.5 million are agricultural laborers. Of the remaining females' workers, 8.5 million are in household Industry and 43.7 million are classified as other workers.

As per Census 2011, the work participation rate for women is 25.51 percent as compared to 25.63 per cent in 2001. The Work Participation Rate of Women has reduced marginally in 2011 but there is an improvement from 22.27 per cent in 1991 and 19.67 per cent in 1981. The work participation rate for women in rural areas is 30.02 per cent as compared to 15.44 per cent in the urban areas. So far as the organized sector is concerned, in March, 2011 women workers constituted 20.5 percent of total employment in organized sector in the country which is higher by 0.1 percent as compared to the preceding year. As per the last Employment Review by Directorate General of Employment & Training (DGE&T), on 31st March, 2011, about 59.54 lakh women workers were employed in the organized sector (Public and Private Sector). Of this, nearly 32.14 lakh women were employed in community, social and personal service sector. In India, women often have limited access to education and to skills because of cultural norms about their role. Other sensitive groups are rural communities and people with disabilities, because of limited access to vocational education and training.

SCOPE OF VOCATIONAL TRAINING AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

Vocational Training programme is introduced to enhance livelihood opportunities of women who are at a disadvantageous position and have a scant exposure to technical skills and knowledge. The vocational training program for women aims to develop entrepreneurial skills among women.

It is widely recognized that the 21st Century will be driven by knowledge, and a nation's competitive advantage in the global economy will be sustained by a focused and innovative education agenda.

To meet the challenges of this century, many countries around the world, and more particularly newly independent developing countries, including India, set their mind on the expansion of educational systems and made heavy investment in education. There was a growing realization that availability of educational opportunities to all sections of the society, irrespective of social status, class, caste, religion and gender, ensures non-discriminatory distribution of educational opportunities and socio-economic and political gains accruing from it.

India's first Prime Minister Late Jawaharlal Nehru and the members of the Constituent Assembly responsible for framing the Indian Constitution (1950) sought to deal with the social and educational inequalities of illiteracy and discrimination by explicitly prohibiting discrimination in education on the grounds of religion, caste, sex, race or birth.

Current educational policy as related to structure and access is based on the objectives of the D.C.Kothari Commission, the recommendations of which form the basis of the 1968 National Policy on Education. The NPE (1968) called for a standard educational structure based on a 10+ 2+3- year model. The first Ten years were to be non-selective and provide a well rounded general education available to all children. After the first ten years of general education the system would become highly selective and provide opportunities in both the academic and vocational streams (Nick Clark: 2006).

There are two commonly used terms in India for the vocational education system one is vocational education and other vocational training. Vocational education is referred specifically to vocational courses offered in school at the level of class 11 and 12 under a centrally sponsored scheme termed „Vocationalization of Secondary Education . Vocational training on the other hand broadly refers to certificate level craft training and is open to students who leave school after completing anywhere from class 8-12. Programmes are offered under the Craftsmen Training Scheme (CTS) and operated by Industrial Training Institute (ITIs), Polytechnics and Industrial Training Centers (ITCs). This scheme falls within the purview of

the Director General of Employment and Training (DGET), under the Ministry of Labour and Employment (MOLE) (Fozdar: 2008).

The Vocational Education Programme (VEP) was started in 1976-77 under the programme of Vocationalization of Higher Secondary Education in general education institutions. The National Working Group on Vocationalization of Education (Kulandaiswamy Committee, 1985) reviewed the Vocational Education Programme in the country and developed guidelines for the expansion of the programme. Its recommendations led to the development of the Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS) on Vocationalization of Secondary Education which started being implemented from 1988.

NATIONAL POLICY ON SKILL DEVELOPMENT

To have broad framework towards sustainable development of trained and skill enriched human resources in India, a National Policy on Skill Development has been formulated by the Ministry of Labour & Employment. The objective is to create a workforce empowered with improved skills, knowledge and internationally recognized qualifications to gain access to decent employment and ensure India's competitiveness in the dynamic Global Labour Market. It aims at increase in productivity of workforce both in the organized and the unorganized sectors, seeking increased participation of youth, women, disabled and other disadvantaged sections and to synergize efforts of various sectors and reform the present system.

VISION FOR THE NATIONAL SKILL DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE IN INDIA

At present the capacity of skill development in India is around 3.1 million persons per year. The 11th Five Year Plan envisions an increase in that capacity to 15 million annually. India has target of creating 500 million skilled workers by 2022. Thus, there is a need for increasing capacity and capability of skill development programs. The skill development initiatives will harness inclusivity and reduce divisions such as male/female, rural/urban, organized/unorganized employment and traditional/contemporary

workplace. The skill development initiatives support the supply of trained workers who are adjustable dynamically to the changing demands of employment and technologies. This policy will promote excellence and will meet the requirements of knowledge economy.

PRIME MINISTER'S NATIONAL COUNCIL ON SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Under the Chairmanship of Prime Minister an apex institution for policy direction and review has been set up. The Ministers for Human Resource Development, Finance, Industries, Rural Development, Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation, Labour and Employment and Micro Small & Medium Enterprises are members. Deputy Chairman, Planning Commission, Chairperson of the National Manufacturing Competitiveness Council, Chairperson of the National Skill Development Corporation and 6 experts in the area of skill development are other members. Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister is the Member Secretary to the Council.

NATIONAL SKILL DEVELOPMENT CO-ORDINATION BOARD

A National Skill Development Co-ordination Board has been set up under the Chairmanship of Deputy Chairman, Planning Commission. Secretaries of Ministries of Human Resource Development, Labour and Employment, Rural Development, Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation and Finance are members. Chairperson/Chief Executive Officer of the National Skill Development Corporation, Secretaries of four States by rotation, for a period of two years, and three distinguished Academicians / Subject Area Specialists are other members. Secretary, Planning Commission is Member Secretary of the Board.

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, home-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.

SKILL DEVELOPMENT FOR THE UNORGANIZED SECTOR

Approximately 93 per cent of the country's workforce is in the unorganized sector. The sector cuts across all economic activities and includes rural and urban areas. It contributes to about 60 per cent of the country's GDP. Strengthening the skill base of the unorganized sector will improve productivity, working conditions, labour rights, social security and living standards.

Separate institutional mechanism will be explored which will inter-alia plan, implement and monitor the skill development efforts for the unorganized sector. The mode of informal apprenticeship and learning will be recognized and accommodated in the NVQF to help in horizontal and vertical mobility.

CONCLUSION

In spite of the huge task ahead with many intrinsic in skill development landscape in India at present, it is believed that the Government of India has been giving a sincere attention on improving the skills of the women as per world standards. The separate ministry for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship schemes also gave the priority for skill development in India. The missions - Skill India and - Make in India shall come to exercise only when all the stakeholders concerned viz. government, training institutions, industry and more importantly, the women work hand-in-hand under a structured format of design – develop – train – assess – certify – and place the skilled workforce as per the industry standards and aspirations of the women concerned. Further, accelerating entrepreneurship and self-employment is also crucial for large-scale employment generation in India. Skill development initiative focusing on specific needs and challenges faced by growing entrepreneurs is the key to promote self-employment among the Indian women.

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