



SKILL DEVELOPMENT FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA: A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Gender equality and empowerment plays an important role in economic development. In India majority of women and men residing both in rural and urban areas are unskilled. However, more number of women residing in the rural areas is unskilled compared to men living in both rural and urban areas. And these unskilled women workers are working in the informal sector facing many problems including lack of skills. The studies reveal that more than 90 per cent of women workers are concentrated in the informal sector. However, the condition of women in the informal sector is miserable, most of time they have to work in extremely low wages and without any job security and social security benefits, apart from these working conditions also unsatisfactory. And for all these problem lack of skill among women is one of the main reasons. Hence, to empower women working in the informal sector and fulfill the dream of Make in India concept of our Hon. Prime Minister there is an urgent need to transform them as 'skilled worker' through suitable programmes and policies. This paper mainly focused objectives like, to discuss the importance of skill development for women empowerment in the informal sector in India, analysis the challenges for women to attain skills, and to suggest suitable policy measures to improve employability of the women workers in the informal sector. The proposed study mainly is descriptive in nature and based on secondary sources. The study suggests that there is a need to further develop HRD and training policy from a gender perspective, with an understanding of local customs and traditions. Besides this, there is a need to make the skill development process accommodating and flexible to encourage women to enroll. 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.

KEY WORDS: *Empowerment, Skill, Gender Gap, Training, Informal*

INTRODUCTION

Gender equality and empowerment plays an important role in economic development. In India majority of women and men residing both in rural and urban areas are unskilled. However, more number of women residing in the rural areas is unskilled compared to men living in both rural and urban areas. And these unskilled women workers are working in the informal

sector facing many problems including lack of skills. According to the Census of India 2011, women constitute 48.46 percent of the total population and about 25.67 percent of them are designated as workers (GoI, 2011). In India the presence of the non-formal economy has been overwhelmingly large with 92 per cent of the total workforce of about 458 million poor and vulnerable workers being part of this economy



(GoI, 2012). The studies reveal that more than 90 per cent of women workers are concentrated in the informal sector. Hence, it can be said that informal sector in India is the women's sector. However, the condition of women in the informal sector is miserable, most of time they have to work in extremely low wages and without any job security and social security benefits, apart from this working conditions also unsatisfactory (Neha Mittal, 2012).

According to the National Sample Survey Office's (NSSO) 68th round (2011-12), 79 per cent of the informal workers do not have a written job contract; 71 per cent are not eligible for paid leave; and 72 per cent are not eligible for any social security benefits (NSSO, 2014). Hence, several international and national commissions, committees, research studies, seminars and discussions in the last six decades have documented the socio-economic conditions of women workers in the informal sector in India. However, still the status of women in the non formal sector is far from satisfactory. And for all these problem lack of skill among women is one of the main reasons. Hence, to empower women working in the informal sector and fulfill the dream of Make in India concept of our Hon. Prime Minister there is an urgent need to transform them as 'skilled worker' through suitable programmes and policies. Against this background the paper is designed with the following objectives.

OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

1. To discuss the importance of skill development for women empowerment in the informal sector in India;
2. To analyse the challenges for women to attain skills;
3. To suggest suitable policy measures to improve employability of the women workers in the informal sector.

This paper is based on the information gathered through available secondary sources and literature reviews. The secondary sources include the reports collected from governmental reports, journals, articles, books, documents of various ministries/departments and organizations, papers and web-sites are used in this study. The proposed study mainly is descriptive in nature.

SKILL REQUIREMENT FOR WOMEN IN THE INFORMAL SECTOR

As per the skill gap study conducted by the National Skill Development Cooperation during 2010 - 2014, there is an additional net requirement of 109.73 million skilled manpower by 2022 across twenty four key sectors. But in the case of women, they are today facing the economy which is increasingly becoming less-labour intensive but more capital, technology, knowledge and skills driven. Besides that they are overwhelmingly work in the informal economy, with less education and generating lower incomes than men. It is proven that female participation in the workforce increases along with educational levels. Hence to unlock the full economic potential of women's participation, India needs to bring about an employment revolution, along with a skill development or educational revolution. It is also observed, that the concept of training and skill development of women 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 (FICCI, 2014, Nitika Diwakar and Tauffiqu Ahamad, 2015).

India is experiencing a demographic dividend as more than 50 per cent of the population is in the working age group which can make India the skill capital of the world. It is estimated that by 2020, the average Indian will be 29 years of age compared to average age of 37 years in China and US and 45 years in Europe and 48 years in Japan. However, skilling this youth bulge constitutes a challenge particularly when there is preponderance of informal sector (Sunita Sanghi and Kuntal Sensarma 2014). In fact, during the next 20 years the labour force in the industrialized world is expected to decline by 4%, while in India it will increase by 32%. This poses a formidable challenge and a huge opportunity. To reap this demographic dividend which is expected to last for next 25 years, India needs to equip its workforce with employable skills and knowledge so that they can contribute substantively to the economic growth of the country (Nitika Diwakar, Tauffiqu Ahamad, 2015). However, research conducted in the informal sector suggests the need for further research into the prevailing conditions that have led to the failure of the existing training and skill development initiatives of the government. It also demands action in the form of policy change and local level initiatives and building of



institutes that are sensitive to the needs and work conditions experienced by women and men separately.

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. Training and skill development 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 already know. 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. Hence, there is a need to make the skill development process accommodating and flexible to encourage women to enroll (GoI, 2015). 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 has developed many schemes to increase the proportion of formal and informal skilled workers in its total workforce especially women from a mere 2 percent now to 50 percent by 2022, thus creating a 500 million strong resource pool. Therefore it is clear that there is an urgent need for a paradigm shift in the skill development sector, in favor of special training, innovations and high quality training.

CHALLENGES FOR WOMEN IN ATTAINING SKILL

The informal sector includes small entrepreneurs, paid and unpaid establishment workers, independent workers, casual workers etc. The majority of women working in informal sectors learn their skills on the job, something that is common to both the formal and informal sectors. However, many times, apprenticeship might provide basic skills but does not familiarise the workers with new technologies or managerial skills (Singh, 1992). Constraints of both time and money often prevent women workers in the informal sectors from acquiring further training, even when such facilities exist. It is also to be noted that the initiatives required to skill the workforce, cannot be assumed to be the same for both men and women, as women and men face very different social and economic circumstances in India. Gender differences abound right from the access to and the availability of education and training, to the conduct of training programmes.

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. Besides that, low social value is attached to girl's education, and as they are considered secondary income earners, lower importance is given to training of girls for employment. Hence, a sustainable skill development programme would aim to take on board, both women's as well as men's concerns and experiences. These should form an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and the programmes on skill training and development. The key strategy for women's empowerment and gender equality is to combine policy and institutions at the local level (Anju Malhotra *et. al*, 2009).

Apart from this, 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. 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 (Institute of Social Studies Trust, 2012). Hence, it can be said that women face unique problems in attaining skill and there is a need for unique solutions.

MAJOR SUGGESTIONS

Following are some of the suitable policy measures to improve skills of women workers in the informal sector.

Need for Gender Sensitive Training and Policy

First and foremost there is an urgent need to further develop 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 training. Besides that 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 for women.

Streamlining the Skill development programmes

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, i.e. Ministry of Labor and Employment and Ministry of Human Resource Development and several other Ministries. This will lead to better focus and coordination between different initiatives.

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. Hence, there is a dire need to upgrade the craftsmen training centre. Besides, the expansion of ITIs and ITCs, it is equally crucial to build basic infrastructure especially in remote areas, making ITIs more accessible, particularly for women.

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. It is therefore recommended that vocational education should be introduced at the level of secondary education, or from 9th standard onwards, to attract students who may drop out, to skill them and as a result provide them with better livelihood opportunities. The National Vocational Education Qualifications Framework (NVEQF), currently being developed, will encourage integration of vocational and general education.

Making Use of private sector

If India has to benefit from the demographic dividend, the private sector has to take a responsible position in the skill development sector. Two policy level changes that could be undertaken are: (a) As more investments are crucial for skill development sector, one innovation that is suggested for India, is taxing of medium and large industries to contribute to a fund for reinvestments in skill development. Such a provision which is successfully in place in 61 countries, not only substantially supports the skill development efforts of the country, but also helps in meeting the demand for skilled persons from the industry. And (b) Local industry needs to become members of the governing body of ITI, to guide them about the new and emerging needs of the industry.

Changes at attitude level of the society

Along with other measures, identifying and making efforts to change basic and nuanced socio-cultural values with a view to eliminate existing biases that women in the country face when seeking employment is necessary. 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.

Identification and Up Gradation of Skills

One method of encouraging participation in skill development is the identification of skills that are already known and up gradation of the same; 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 women. To make training programmes actually accessible to women, it would be crucial to provide additional basic services and facilities such as, safe and secure transport, toilets, etc.

Need for Accessible and affordable training

With poor infrastructure, accessibility continues to be a major problem for women. Hence, It is crucial to build and fund modern institutes of training, which are made easily accessible for women 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.

Channelizing training through the local institutions

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.

Support services beyond training

Providing employment opportunities to trainees after the completion of training will go a long way in assuring sustainable livelihood options and economic independence, especially in case of women. By ensuring that NSDC (National Skill Development Corporation) funded organizations place at least 70% of its trainees, NSDC has been able to facilitate employment of many workers to a large extent. But the target of productively employing workers is gigantic in India, and these efforts need to continue and achieve goals at a high rate to have any impact.

Apart from this, special mechanisms in the delivery of training such as mobile training units, flexible afternoon batches, training based on the local needs of the area, will be introduced to ensure participation and mobilization of women. Appropriate incentive mechanism will be designed to achieve the same. Training in non-traditional fields for women will be promoted through the establishment of specific training programmes that focus on life skills training modules and literacy training. Along with that, efforts will be made to increase the pool of women trainers and providing them certification by earmarking a

certain percentage of intakes in training of trainers institutes, for women. New institutes exclusively for training of women as trainees and trainers will also be promoted by Government.

CONCLUSIONS

Various governments both central and state have made several efforts to uplift women workers in the informal sector through several innovative programmes. However, it has not succeeded up to a satisfactory level due to many confronting issues and inhibitions. In order to unlock the full potential of women workforce in India, the need of the hour is to bring about an employment revolution along with a skill development revolution. The planners should focus on women specific policies for their effective participation in the employment market. As it would help India to meet its skilling target and reap benefits of having the largest workforce by 2025 and make 'Make in India Concept' a successful one.

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