

Bringing Women to the fold of Skill: An Overview of the Initiatives for Skill Development in India

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ABSTRACT

Skills and knowledge are considered the primary movers of economic growth and social development in any country. The skill development of women has been a tremendous challenge in India. The labour force participation rate of women, who constitute almost half of the country's population, had steadily declined over the years, causing concern in both social and economic contexts. One fundamental way of improving this would be to provide for the skill enhancement of female workers. With the requisite skills and adequate financial support, women can also be encouraged to emerge as entrepreneurs, even at the grassroots level. The article maps the evolution of national policy initiatives for skill development and entrepreneurship and examines them for their inclusive dimension with regard to gender. It is argued that sound policy, sharply enunciated and keenly articulated to the specific socio-cultural requirements and situation of women, is the need of the hour.

Introduction

Skills and knowledge are considered the primary movers of economic growth and social development in any country. Over the years, a need has been perceived for a reorganisation of the ecosystem of skill development and entrepreneurship in the country to suit the needs of industry and to facilitate equitable access to a comfortable standard of living for people. The participation of women as skilled wage workers is an important aspect of this. Women participation in agricultural production activities is reported significant but suffer in farm management decision making activities (Nain and Kumar, 2010). The labour

force participation rate (LFPR) of women is seen to be consistently declining in both urban and rural areas. Women, who constitute almost half of the country's population, are overwhelmingly engaged as labour in the unorganised sector. The demographic imperative, therefore, would be to ensure that women are adequately included in the skilled workforce. Subscribing to economic rationality alone, there would still be a strong case for ensuring this. Furthermore, if women are equipped with the necessary skills to find employment in the organised sector of the economy, they will be able to negotiate life situations from positions of greater strength. This is vital from a societal standpoint for the empowerment of women and inclusive development.

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The demographic dividend

The urgent need for skill enhancement of women emanates from another temporal exigency. It is now well documented that India stands low in the skilled workforce, with only an estimated 5% of the workforce (20–24 years) having formal vocational training as per NSSO data. In contrast, in most developed countries, the percentage of the skilled workforce is anywhere between 60% and 90% of the total workforce. With the population of India, there have been severe concerns on the issues of sustainable development and utilisation of resources. However, particularly in the past decade, the idea of viewing population as a human resource has gained considerable momentum. Over the years, this paradigm shift in the conceptualisation of population has led to much exultation about the 'demographic dividend' that India seemingly possesses. This is the potential advantage that India has over many other countries, including the developed nations. The opportunities exist and how the opportunities can be further strengthened to augment the income of the farming community from the agriculture sector (Kumar and Nain, 2013). India is one of the few nations that are undergoing a demographic transition that will render a majority of their population as belonging in the working age groups. However, the accompanying problem is that when countries in the 'greying' west look outward for trained and skilled personnel, India has to be ready to seize the opportunity and fill the labour gap. According to IMF projections, this demographic dividend could add two percentage points to per capita GDP growth per annum. Hence it is imperative that we rapidly equip our population, women included, with economically viable and globally sought after skills.

According to King (2012) the target of increasing the proportion of formally and informally skilled workers in the total workforce from a mere 2 per cent now to 50 per cent by 2022, thus creating a 500 million strong resource pool is an ambitious and challenging task indeed. In this, there is a hope to profit from the 'demographic dividend', gaining from the fact that the country's labour force is much younger than that in China and other competitors. The aim is to supply the world's future skill needs for some 50 million workers, apart from satisfying its own (King, 2012 a, b). This demographic dividend for India arose due to the country's declining dependency ratio. The dependency ratio (the ratio of dependents to the working age population) of India has declined from 0.8 in 1991 to 0.73 in 2001 and further decline to 0.59 by 2011. India's low dependency ratio gives India a cost advantage and helps in improving the country's competitiveness.

A population dominated by the young, however, brings with it challenges of its own. Jobs will need to be

created for all these people till such time that the demographic transition is in place and the anticipated demographic dividend can be reaped. And most importantly, necessary skills need to be developed in accordance with contemporary job market requirements. This is a complex task that needs to be undertaken without any delay if India wishes to reap the benefits of its demographic dividend. We need to recognise and cultivate the potential of young people and close the gap between the demands placed on young people and the opportunities provided to them. Policy formulations that focus on skill development speak of the 'nurturing of the talent pool', an idea that creates a romanticised conceptualization of a mass of talented individuals simply waiting to be lapped up by the job market. The idea of a 'talent pool' creates an illusion of an amorphous, homogeneous mass of people. Any policy to be effective has to necessarily focus on the diversity among people and address the inherent disadvantages associated with gender and other social categories. Inclusive skill development of the population is the need of the hour.

According to estimates, this demographic dividend is expected to last until around 2035. Hence, India has to act swiftly and set the training and skill development operations in place so that it can benefit from this demographic dividend, to create a global pool of skilled persons. If this is not turned into an opportunity soon, and if India fails to deliver, this demographic dividend, in about a quarter of a century will return to being the handicap of over-population. Once again there will be the likelihood of an encounter with a severe population explosion fettering the country's economy, with millions of poor and marginalised crying for succour rendered then through their poverty into an amorphous mass awaiting redemption. The government is aware that possibly the only way of averting this looming disaster is if the population in the working age group is equipped with job relevant skills and is able to provide to the international labour market. Besides the rapidly ticking 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 need to be given employment in the service sector. The education and skill development sector has to adequately respond to this emerging need, making it vital to provide skill development and training in marketable skills and services. It is therefore without any doubt that there is a pressing need for a gathering of momentum in the skill development sector in the country. A movement has to be generated in favour of innovations, improvements and high quality training. The pedagogic divide between skill based learning and theoretical knowledge has to be bridged and vocational and technical learning has to be elevated in the hierarchy of disciplinary domains.

The demographic divide

The representation of women in the labour force is quite poor. Therefore, at the same time, along with the potential demographic dividend, we also need to be sensitive to the deep demographic gulf in the country. The gender gap is perhaps the most significant demographic gap, given that gender is the most basic category of segregation and of unequal distribution of opportunity and privilege. Women comprise 48.5% of the total population. According to studies, even increasing women's labour force participation by even 10 percentage points could add \$770 billion to India's GDP by 2025 (McKinsey Global Institute, 2018:99). It therefore bears reiterating, even at the cost of sounding repetitive, that even from the purely economic standpoint, disregarding all gender concerns, gender sensitivity in matters of policy on skill and competency enhancement is the need of the hour. According to estimates, 51% of women and 75% of men in the country are literate (World Economic Forum, 2014). Women form a significant proportion of the work force in India. However, the overall labour force participation rate for women has fallen alarmingly from 37% in 2004-05 to 29% in 2009-10 (ILO 2013). Furthermore, data show that the labour force participation rate of women in both rural and urban areas has been steadily declining over the last decade. The Labour Force Participation Rate is the portion of women in the working age group who report either being employed or being available for work. The working age group is considered from the age of 15, which is the point of departure for global comparisons by the International Labour Organization. It has declined alarmingly over the years. In 2011-2012, women comprised 24.8% of all rural workers, down from 31.8% in 1972-73. In 2011-2012, women comprised 14.7% of all urban workers, a small increase from 13.4% in 1972-73 (indiastat.com). This further plummeted to 23.3% in 2017-18 and to about 20.7% in 2019 (NSSO). At the same time, India's economy is growing, with an increasing GDP and a working-age population expected to climb to over 800 million people by 2050. Despite this growth, only 20.3% of women aged 15 and older participated in the labour force as of 2020, as compared to 76.0% of men (Catalyst, 2020). According to World Bank estimates, women account for only 19.9% of the total labour force in India (World Bank, 2020). The labour force participation rate is an important indicator that reflects the economy's active workforce. Table 1 shows the rural and urban LFPR of women over the past two decades for people aged 15 and above.

Table 1. Labour Force Participation Rate of Women

	Rural (%)	Urban (%)
2004-2005	49.4	24.4
2009-2010	37.8	19.4
2011-2012	35.8	20.5
2017-2018	24.6	20.4
2018-2019	26.4	20.4

Source: NSSO data; Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation, Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) – Annual Report [July, 2018 – June, 2019]

Women workers are largely confined to the informal sector, stuck in low-paying jobs characterised by low productivity, poor working conditions, and insufficient social protection. Among them rural women are the worst affected. The gender roles defined for women expect them to primarily devote their time to household chores and child rearing, while time devoted to skill training and economic activities is conditional and limited. In rural areas in particular, it is difficult for women to travel to training centres for upgradation of their skills. Any sustainable skill development programme would need to take into account the societal considerations that come in the way of women's participation in vocational and higher education. These should form an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies and programmes on skill training and development. Policy would have to be combined with implementation, especially within the ambit of the functioning of institutions at the local level.

The imperative, therefore, becomes to increase and sustain the participation of women in the country's labour force or to develop their own entrepreneurship potential, which, in addition to empowering women, is also directly linked to the economic growth of the country. It is important to draw women into the organised sector and the skill-based sectors of the economy. This is not just necessary for women's own empowerment but also for the overall growth of the economy. A nation with a wider and better skill base is most likely to emerge victorious in the comity of nations.

Overview of skill development policy initiatives in india

Recognizing the urgency for building a skilled human resource base, the government of India has instituted a rather comprehensive network of agencies and policies for skill development. Over the past few years, the gov-

ernment, in keeping with global trends, has appreciated that skill development is an area that requires independent attention as a matter of policy. In the past decades, upgradation of skills of target groups used to be one of the tasks of the several ministries and government departments established to ensure inclusive development of the poor and the marginalised. However, over time, it was realised and rightly so, that skills are most essential if the much hyped demographic dividend that India has needs to be encashed. If we take an overview of the various national level skill development initiatives since their inception, we can see that these have been extremely well crafted and cover considerable ground, and yet, when the same are viewed from the lens of gender one recognises certain shortcomings and inadequacies immanent in them.

The national skill development corporation

The very first of these initiatives was the establishment of the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) in 2008, with the objective of increasing the skill training capacity in the country. The NSDC is a unique initiative in public-private partnership in India and now comes under the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship. The NSDC is meant to act as a catalyst in skill development by providing funding to enterprises, companies, and organisations that provide skill training. It intends to develop appropriate models to enhance, support and coordinate private sector initiatives. It has a differentiated focus on diverse sectors under its purview and an understanding of their viability in order to make every sector attractive to private investment. It is also supposed to play the crucial role of a 'market-maker' by bringing financing, particularly into sectors where market mechanisms are ineffective or missing. The NSDC has taken the responsibility of training 150 million people, contributing 40 per cent to the overall target of skilling 400 million people in India by 2022, mainly by fostering private sector initiatives in skill development programmes and providing funding. The core objective of NSDC is to create training capacity in the country, fund scalability and sustainability of private enterprise, create a market ecosystem for skill development and meet the targets set out by the Government (nsdcindia.org). The NSDC has itself acknowledged that there are some major challenges that would need to be addressed to build an environment that encourages the skill development of the female workforce.

As in China, our vocational training programmes should be integrated into the school curriculum (Sharma and Nagendra, 2016). Public-Private Partnership is critical to the development and upgrading of skills.

By forming more and more public-private partnerships, NSDC has made some headway in enhancing the training infrastructure in the private sector. Such collaborations have grown in popularity in recent years. Such collaborations are especially encouraged in rural regions, where there are a large number of candidates. It is critical to build ties with training institutes to guarantee that quality is maintained and the model is also sustainable.

National skill development fund

The National Skill Development Fund (NSDF) was set up in December 2008 as a Trust under the Indian Trust Act, 1992 with an initial corpus of Rs. 995.10 crore received from the Government. Its charter is to raise funds for skill development from both government and non-government sectors in the country. The NSDF is responsible for monitoring, supervising and regulating the NSDC. The Fund meets its objectives through the NSDC which, as aforementioned, is an industry led 'not-for-profit company' set up for building skill development capacity and forging strong linkages with the market (msde.gov.in).

National skill development policy 2009

Giving further credence to the need for skill development for overall social and economic wellbeing, a pan-India policy, the 'National Skill Development Policy' was formulated in 2009, which was meant as a comprehensive national charter for skill development of different sections of society (msde.gov.in).

The national skill development agency

The National Skill Development Agency (NSDA) was notified through a gazette notification dated 6th June, 2013. NSDA is an autonomous body (of the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship), for coordinating and harmonizing the skill development efforts of the Government and the private sector to achieve the skilling targets of the 12th Plan and beyond. Its endeavour is to bridge the social, regional, gender and economic divide by ensuring that the skilling needs of the disadvantaged and marginalized groups like SCs, STs, OBCs, minorities, women and differently-abled persons are taken care of through the various skill development programmes, and by taking affirmative action as part of advocacy by the NSDA. The central ministries and NSDC however, are expected to continue to implement the various schemes within their ambit. The NSDA is to spearhead the National

Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) and facilitate the setting up of professional certifying bodies to endorse diverse skills.

Ministry of skill development and entrepreneurship

Perceiving this need for coordinating the efforts of all concerned stakeholders in the field of skill development and entrepreneurship, and recognizing its urgency the Government of India notified the formation of the Department of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship on 31st July, 2014 which subsequently led to the creation of the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MoSDE) on 10th November 2014. Giving a ministry status to an activity displays without doubt that the governance regards that activity as an important one. This was a good step, albeit late, in the right direction. Having a democratically elected representative at the helm of affairs brings the arena of skill development out of the singular control of the bureaucracy. But on the other hand, a ministry brings with it its own bureaucracy and yet another governmental labyrinth.

To achieve these outcomes, a framework devised on what it calls the 'five central pillars' representing the core requirements for skilling was conceived by the Ministry – 'to create a pipeline of skilled people, correct supply for demand, certify global/common standards, connect supply with demand and catalyse entrepreneurship' (Ibid.). These five pillars are to be supported by 'cross-cutting enabling measures'. The Ministry has developed certain common norms and parameters on inputs, outcome measures and funding for skill development schemes across central ministries/departments. Skill gap studies for all high priority sectors including key manufacturing sectors under 'Make in India' have also been initiated. Support to states has been extended via the State Skill Development Mission through funding and technical support to ramp up capacity and improve standards of skilling at the state level.

A number of other initiatives such as collaborating with other nations to adopt international best practices, revamping the vocational education framework in the country, partnering with corporates, leveraging public infrastructure for skilling, creating a pipeline of quality trainers and leveraging technology for skill training, are being pursued by the Ministry. The Ministry is responsible for co-ordination of all skill development efforts across the country, removal of the disconnect between demand and supply of skilled manpower, building the vocational and technical training framework, skill upgradation, building

of new skills, and innovative thinking not only for existing jobs but also jobs that are to be created.

The Ministry's professed aim is to skill on a large scale with speed and high Standards in order to achieve its vision of a 'skilled India'. It is aided in these initiatives by the aforementioned agencies – the National Skill Development Agency, the National Skill Development Corporation, the National Skill Development Fund and 33 Sector Skill Councils (SSCs) as well as 187 training partners registered with the NSDC. The Ministry also intends to work with the existing network of skill development centres, universities and other alliances in the field. Further, collaborations with relevant central ministries, state governments, international organisations, industry and NGOs have been initiated for multi-level engagement and more impactful implementation of skill development efforts.

Policy framework

The Ministry's strategic framework is based on what it declares as the 'five main pillars', the '5C's' that outline the elements most necessary for a holistic approach to skill development. Analogous to the terminology of the diamond industry that uses 5Cs criteria to assess the quality of gemstones, this framework, according to the policy document, helps 'us ensure the quality of our strategy'. The document further elaborates these 5 C's ; Create (a pipeline of skilled people), is about increasing the number of individuals with long-term training across existing and planned institutions; Correct (supply for demand), is about upskilling those with some existing work experience – primarily within the informal segment, to enable them to access growth opportunities; Certify (certification and assessment), is about aligning existing norms and frameworks across the skills landscape; Connect (supply with demand), involves both developing an understanding of the demand and supply dynamics of skills requirements, as well as practically matching trained individuals to jobs anywhere in the country/world and Catalyse (demand for skilled people), is about entrepreneurship - how we engage, develop and support entrepreneurs to create jobs and economic opportunities.

These five C's are a mnemonic device to bring to focus the processes involved in the mechanism of skill development. Skill development goes hand in hand with the market demand. In order to make its efforts effective, the MoSDE intends to focus on developing an understanding of the demand and supply dynamics of skills requirements as well as practically matching trained individuals to jobs anywhere in the country/world. A policy research institute is envisaged to strengthen the information base on

which the skill development policies for the future will be designed. It also perceives that globalization is changing the dynamics of employment rapidly. Keeping the global changes in mind, MoSDE will forge international partnerships to be prepared to serve the demands of global Indian workforce (msde.gov.in).

As per the charter of the Ministry, two things stand out – one, is that the focus is on readying the youth in terms of acquisition of in-demand skills and the other, is on the skills themselves. It however, is taken for granted, that the young include both men and women and that by making skill training accessible to the young it shall ipso facto be made equally accessible young women as well. This premise rests on an optimistic naiveté that unfortunately illustrates yet again that policy makers need to develop a more nuanced understanding of the sociocultural factors that surround women and that when it comes to the question of women, broad based economic, technological and financial interventions are not sufficient.

National Skill Development Mission

To rapidly scale up skill development efforts in India, by creating an end-to-end, outcome-focused implementation framework, which aligns demands of the employers for a well-trained skilled workforce with aspirations of Indian citizens for sustainable livelihoods is the mission statement. (<http://www.skilldevelopment.gov.in/nationalskill-mission.html>). The National Skill Development Mission was approved by the Union Cabinet on July 1, 2015, and officially launched by the Prime Minister on July 15, 2015 on the occasion of World Youth Skills Day. The Mission has been developed to create convergence across sectors and States in terms of skill training activities. Further, to achieve the vision of ‘Skilled India’, the National Skill Development Mission would not only consolidate and coordinate skilling efforts, but also expedite decision making across sectors to achieve skilling at scale with speed and standards. It is to be implemented through a streamlined institutional mechanism driven by Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE). Key institutional mechanisms for achieving the objectives of the Mission have been divided into three tiers, which will consist of a Governing Council for policy guidance at apex level, a Steering Committee and a Mission Directorate (along with an Executive Committee) as the executive arm of the Mission. The Mission Directorate will be supported by three other institutions: National Skill Development Agency (NSDA), National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), and Directorate General of Training (DGT) – all of which will have horizontal linkages with Mission Directorate to

facilitate smooth functioning of the national institutional mechanism. Seven sub-missions have been proposed initially to act as building blocks for achieving overall objectives of the Mission. These are: (i) Institutional Training, (ii) Infrastructure, (iii) Convergence, (iv) Trainers, (v) Overseas Employment, (vi) Sustainable Livelihoods, (vii) Leveraging Public Infrastructure. (<http://www.skilldevelopment.gov.in/nationalskillmission.html>)

National policy for skill development and entrepreneurship 2015

Five years into its inception and keeping in mind the trends globally, the country’s skill development policy was released in its version 2.0; the earlier policy being reviewed and reworked as the ‘National Skill Development Policy 2015’. This new policy has taken into account the various paradigm shifts in the skilling and entrepreneurship scenario in the country, the experience gained through implementation of various skill development programmes, and the need to align with the emerging trends in the national and international climate. One key rationale for having a national policy response to guide the skill development strategies and coordinated action by all stake holders is underpinned by the need to have a holistic view of the development process instead of the programme specific piecemeal approach. The national policy helps to articulate skill development with the arenas of employment generation, economic and social development (<http://msde.gov.in>). Apart from the macro policy frameworks outlined above, there have been in existence specific programmes for skill development of rural youth. Training of Rural Youth for Self-Employment (TRYSEM) has been a programme of the Government of India wherein efforts were made to provide skill training to rural youth in various trades so that they could earn their livelihood. However, concurrent evaluation initiated by the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India (2000) found out that the training programmes had not been demand-driven, and the trained persons did not take up occupations as they had been doubtful whether such training would substantially increase their income (Sarangi and Lahiri, 2007). The guidelines for formulation of special projects for skill development of rural youth under SGSY provided by the Inter-Ministerial Group (1999) had recommended that potential trade needs to be identified to give the programme a focused market orientation. Another recommendation was that area based skill surveys and labour market scan should be undertaken for proper assessment of demand for various skills. The report had also indicated that in comparison to earlier attempts,

selection of trade for training should be demand-driven instead of supply-driven. The beneficiaries who seriously wish to acquire skill in the identified trades and would seek employment in that trade should be considered for selection. In an evaluation of development of women and children in rural areas (DWCRA) (2000) initiated prior to start of SGSY, it had been found that nearly half of those received training expressed dissatisfaction with the trainers. The programme's implementation had come in for sharp criticism in the report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG), Government of India (Ibid.). Further, Misra et al. (2001) observed that inadequate credit and marketing facilities, lack of entrepreneurship development and inadequate training are other major problems (Misra et al., 2001).

Evaluation

As can be gathered from the preceding, in the history of skill development in India, there has been a consortium of skill development initiatives rather than one spearheading institution with a clearly enunciated goals. New departments have been added as ideas kept evolving, leading to a complex governmental labyrinth. Generally speaking, perhaps this could be held true for the entire process of development. However, in most cases, there is a clear blueprint and a foundation upon which additional structures get added along the way. In the case of skill development initiatives, it generates a feeling that there has not been a clear cut policy foundation and conceptual understanding and the maxim of skill development seems to have dawned only in the past few years, leading to a host of 'on-the-job' sort of structures. According to government data, there are over 20 ministries/departments that run more than 70 schemes for skill development. In spite of this, or perhaps because there is such an unwieldy plethora of schemes, there remain, even by the government's own admission, gaps in the capacity and quality of training infrastructure as well as outputs. There has been lack of focus on workforce aspirations, lack of certification and common standards and insufficient attention on the unorganised sector (msde.gov.in). Another vital lacuna in the skill development policy is the lack of focus on the specific needs of women. Women have been subsumed under the wider categories of 'youth' and 'unskilled'. Given the grim reality of the skill scenario for women, it is necessary that any policy document should have a specific separate section devoted to elaborating the vision and the mechanisms for the skill upgradation of women populations.

In recent years however, the leadership at the helm has a revealed clear vision regarding skill development.

The phrases 'Kaushal' and 'Kushal Bharat' evoke fervour and a deep sense of pride in every citizen. Undoubtedly the state is vitally alive to the need for skill development. In the past also, government departments have commissioned studies to improve women's participation in the skilled sector (EY, 2006). Elevating skill development to a national mission displays the high level of dedication and commitment of the government towards this cause. What is now required for filling the gaps, is a distinct clearly enunciated policy statement attuned to the specific needs and situations of women, with the long term vision for skill development of women, addressing their specific impediments and requirements. Through NGOs specific training courses are being implemented for women empowerment (Slathia et al, 2014). Convergence of institutional synergistic strengths for entrepreneurship development in women is being taken up (Singh et al, 2014). Through specific projects women are being empowered in tourism activities (Slatyha et al, 2015).

Training women in economically useful skills is a process that functions within the overall social milieu. Training centres cannot exist in vacuum as enclaves of faith, equity and participation, in a hostile social sphere. The overall social consciousness needs to be reworked if any training activity can be conceptualised and executed at the scale and with the zeal with which policy agencies have been created and policy prescriptions formulated. There is a clear skill gap when it comes to the women – currently only 2% of the female workforce is formally trained. This means that a large number of women would need to be imparted employable skills and training. This further implies that the existing inadequacies in the quality and relevance of technical and vocational employment training in India would need to be rectified. Adequate training tools suited to women would need to be created. Women's access to skill training is being held back due to insufficient and inadequate training infrastructure, an acute shortage of women trainers and the poor quality of training. Mechanisms to judge and certify the quality and relevance of the training need to be put in place. Then, there are the concerns of equity in access to technical and vocational education and training (TVET) for women. Since for most women from the marginal groups, the basic starting point at which they enter training is at a low level of education, this limits the training of women in the formal sector and restricts their presence as potential trainees. There is also the problem of credibility – the usefulness and the worth of the training to be imparted has to be perceived by potential trainees at the same level, else the costs incurred to provide the training will not be met by the gains that accrue through the training, either to the women themselves and their families or to the state. These challenges are mul-

tiple and complex. They represent the complexity of the issues involved. After analysing the implementation data and evaluative studies of the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY), Gaiha et al. (1998), for instance, identified incorrect targeting and a lack of people's efforts as important factors for the persistence of poverty even after the scheme's implementation.

Some suggestions for the skill development of women

Skill development of work force is necessary to prepare them for jobs, but also to improve their performance by optimizing work quality and output and ultimately leading to enhanced productivity. In the case of women all these present manifold challenges. The aim of skill development of women in addition to the aforesaid utilitarian objectives is also the empowerment of women. In fact the social goal of skill development for women is inextricably linked with its economic goal. When it comes to the question of women, the idea of education with skills and competencies has also to be accompanied by generating basic literacy and numeracy. In addition, there has to be the generation of social and political awareness, especially about rights guaranteed by the state, the awareness of the gender question and an overall enhancing of life skills. Interventions of this nature will improve the self-esteem of women and lead to their overall personality development, including the ability to stand against oppression and to speak for themselves. It is also important to erase gender-work stereotypes and mainstream women's economic roles by skilling women in occupations that have traditionally been the bastion of men. Effort has to be made to bridge the occupational divide into what constitutes 'men's' and 'women's' work. Women are severely under-represented in many occupations, thus, policies are needed to fight exclusion in the labour market by reducing the incidence of discriminatory practices. This however is easier said than done. A more realistic approach perhaps would be of inducting women into skills that have traditionally been associated with women such as those related to cooking, nursing, or tailoring, for instance. In this way, first time entrants into the skill arena are less likely to be overwhelmed by the process. Women are more likely to feel comfortable training for tasks that are previously lodged in their realm of perception. Aspirations too are bound up with socialisation and the schema perpetuated through the habitus, and usually individuals tend not to aspire for that which is realistically speaking unattainable. Thus, skilling of women cannot take a jump start into the fantasy land of equality - it has to create a number of short interim steps where

women cautiously tread before they, in their lifetimes, or in the lifetimes of generations posterior to them, can experience the joy of aspirational skills.

Women are surrounded by multiple intersections of disadvantage and each of these is like a wall that has to be scaled before the woman reaches anywhere near her aspirations. For instance, a Dalit woman would have at least two identifiable social zones of disadvantage - that of being a woman and that of being a Dalit. In addition if she is widowed, or if not married, an orphan, lives in a backward region, is poor, is illiterate, etc. she is at the centre of so many disadvantages intersecting with one another. For such a woman to even aspire for a better life would require tremendous courage on her part, and to assume that grassroots skilling interventions would reach her with ease would perhaps be a naive assumption. There are undoubtedly a number of women specific schemes at both state and central level but when an umbrella organisation such as a ministry is conceived of for the purpose of addressing a certain concern by giving it complete and undivided attention, then women as a population need to be specifically mentioned in its mandate. According to Somayaji (2020) self-help groups (SHG) are instrumental in the self-reliance and empowerment of women. SHG mobilisation in Goa is gaining momentum due to the initiatives of civil society institutions. Networking among people's initiatives, local self-governments and NGOs are prime factors in the formation of SHGs (Somayaji, 2020). These SHGs should be tapped to aid the implementation of governmental programmes.

There is a need to further develop human resources training in both policy and praxis from a gender sensitive perspective, desisting from the temptation of treating women as a blanket category, and with an awareness and understanding of local customs and traditions in which women and their agency are deeply embedded. There needs to be emphasis 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 enrol for education and training. Apart from general societal impediments, some of the challenges that are most pronounced in the case of women workforce can be identified as emanating from the workspace as well as the home space. Misra et al. (2001) concluded that among other problems such as, credit and marketing facilities, and lack of entrepreneurship, inadequate training has been a major problem to the Swarojgaries.

Since the dropout rate from schools is high usually after the 8th standard, it would be useful to provide vocational training in schools, when girls drop out from

schools at this stage with little technical skills, and have no option but to join the informal sector. Therefore vocational education should be introduced early in the educational process so that even students who cannot continue schooling are equipped with better livelihood opportunities. Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) are also extremely important in the larger context of education for all (Hughes, 2005) and have indeed found a place in India's skill development programme (King, 2012). However, these vocational training frameworks need to focus on the specific suitability for women. There also needs to be accessible and affordable training mechanisms; especially in rural areas, accessibility is a major concern and especially so for women. Among the different aspects of training programme 'coverage' is more effective, but least effective in 'need assessment' of trainees. (Arunkumar et al, 2021). It is important to create ancillary infrastructure such as safe roadways, toilets, day-care facilities for children, etc. To bring training closer to the user, vocational training programmes could be channelled through local governments. In Gram Panchayats, for instance, women have a representation of 33 per cent seats. These women representatives may be utilised to identify the requirements of women in the village. The training processes designed for women should take into cognisance their unique ground realities - low levels of literacy, discriminatory social practices, period available for training and work during the day and lack of familiarity with new technology. Promoting excellence in Skill Education in close association with industry, and boost economic status of youth by enhancing employability or establish as an entrepreneur (Parveen, 2021). Divyaranjani and Rajasekar (2017), illustrated the effectiveness of training in overall development of workforce and to identify the results of training programme. Trainings contribute to overall sustainable livelihood (Bhukal et al, 2021). The psychological traits including need for achievement, aspirations and risk taking willingness of the potential entrepreneurs must be taken care while planning capacity development activities (Nain et al, 2015). Furthermore, some women may require training in basic skills such as arithmetic and language even before they are ready to receive specific types of training. If systematic training is provided in areas that women are already familiar with, the acceptability, rate of participation and success rate of training are likely to increase manifold. The number of ITIs or other vocational training institutes exclusively for women needs to be augmented and on site employment opportunities should be provided post training in order to assure sustainable livelihoods. It is seen that NSDC funded organizations have been successful in facilitating employment of many workers to a large extent but these are not focused on women alone. There is also need

for disseminating information about the various schemes for women preferably in the local language through Gram Panchayats, SHGs, NGOs and other local organizations to enable women for entrepreneurship or employment.

Conclusion

It can be seen that there have indeed been a number of large scale policy initiatives in the country. Skill development has been elevated to a national mission and that itself speaks volumes on the priorities of the government. Broadly speaking, the new policy initiatives are a significant improvement over the previous ones. But the question still remains if these are enough; and further if these are enough in themselves. There is need to reassess the situation at both levels. It bears reiterating that perhaps there is need for a separate policy framework for women's skill development. While appreciating the primary merits of the various initiatives, it is found that the guiding logic of the entire discourse is one of governmentality – that is, target driven interventions to ameliorate the condition of a 'population' – and therefore perceive of women as a demographic and one among many. If women have to receive the benefits of policy, the approach has to go beyond a principle of governmentality towards a need centred approach. It is important and extremely urgent to have a governing agency and a policy exclusively devoted to the skilling of women, keeping in mind the unique requirements of women and the societal impediments to their economic resurgence. Among the women also exist the intersections of caste, religion, region and social class, and any policy that is formulated must be such that even the most marginalised are adequately enabled. This is the way not only to reach the cherished goal of true economic emancipation for the woman, but also to ensure that when the greening of India is at its peak our preparedness is more so, and most inclusive at that. In the ultimate analysis, economic considerations aside, as Amartya Sen has maintained, freedom has to be seen as a principal end of development. True economic empowerment for the woman can come about only if she is free to access the skills of *her* choice and pursue the occupation of *her* choice in a gender sensitive work space. In the ultimate analysis human agency, which is the capacity of the individual to undo different 'un-freedoms' to determine individual choice is the core of the development process (Sen 1999). Irrespective of where an individual is stationed in life every individual needs and deserves to have the freedom of choice if the skill development process is to be balanced, positive and fruitful. If we look at the entire range of policies and programme strategies around which these are built, we can see that there is an inequity-

ocal need to devise a gender inclusive and gender sensitive policy in favour of women. The visionary leadership needs the support of a solid policy foundation.

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