

AN EXPLORATORY REVIEW OF SKILLS-BUILDING INITIATIVES IN INDIA AND THEIR RELATION TO WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' EMPOWERMENT

Sujata Gothoskar

CONTENTS

03	Executive summary
06	1. Introduction
08	2. Methodology
10	3. Framing the empowerment issue
12	4. Global trends in employment, training and education
14	5. Skills building in India: Government policy and practice
18	6. Skills training for girls: Non-traditional and traditional trades
26	7. Impact of skills training: Observations and conclusions
36	8. Recommendations
38	Acknowledgments
39	Appendix I: Organizations covered by the review
40	Appendix II: Interview and group discussion guides
41	Abbreviations and glossary

This review was commissioned by the American Jewish World Service as part of its Early and Child Marriage initiative in India. For more information, see: <https://ajws.org/our-impact/research-early-child-marriage/>. The author, Sujata Gothoskar, is a Mumbai-based researcher and activist in the labor movement and the Indian women's movement.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is a brief review of the skills development situation in India for girls and women living in communities that are disadvantaged due to social, economic and/or geographical factors. It also includes an attempt to gauge the impact of skills training and the ensuing employment on the lives, choices and empowerment possibilities of the girls and women who participated in the programs and schemes.

METHODOLOGY

The review began with a survey of the literature on employment, education and skills training and their impact on women's employment or livelihoods, choices in life and empowerment in India. I then visited skills-training initiatives, including government schemes, to talk with organizers, trainers and trainees. With the trainees, I asked about the impact of the training on their means of livelihood and general life choices. I met with staff from eight organizations and institutions in five states (three in the North, one in central India and two in the West). Overall, I interviewed 41 women and organized 10 group discussions that involved a total of 63 women. The field work was conducted over a seven-week period. Considering the short time period, any conclusions are thus tentative and indicate the need for more in-depth research.

FRAMING THE EMPOWERMENT ISSUE

It increasingly has been accepted, including at policy levels globally, that the availability of and access to opportunities for both education and skills building enable economic independence for girls and women, which increases their ability to negotiate their choices in life. Empowerment is a somewhat fluid and multidimensional concept that encompasses social, political, economic and cultural changes. It is also culturally and contextually determined. An important element for empowerment is increased autonomy for girls and women. I set out to assess changes in the thinking and lives of girls and women due to skills training they had participated in and the relationship of this change, however small, with the process of empowerment.

GLOBAL EMPLOYMENT, TRAINING AND EDUCATION

Recent global trends as well as in the Indian context illustrate that economic growth has not generated sufficient employment growth and diversification, especially for women. Even more than men, and substantially so, women workers remain stuck in low-value-added but arduous work, including in agriculture. This is in part because they lack access to certain types of training and work opportunities and in part because they are identified with work that is backbreaking, like

An Exploratory Review of Skills-Building Initiatives in India and Their Relation to Women's and Girls' Empowerment

transplanting rice or removing weeds from rice beds. Even with education and skills training, women encounter more barriers than men, especially in rural, informal and traditional economies. These barriers range from an inability to access education opportunities due to distance (not being allowed to travel these distances on their own due to concerns of their family and community about their safety) to being allowed to access skills training only in certain trades and occupations deemed by the family and community as acceptable for them.

GOVERNMENT SCHEMES AND INSTITUTIONS

There are several critical points being raised by practitioners and institutions involved in skills training regarding related government policy and underlying assumptions. One of those assumptions is that of the demographic dividend – with more young people of working age (and likely to be the case in the coming decades), India will have a global advantage with its labor force. But as several scholars have pointed out, this outcome is not automatic; it depends on the implementation of effective policies. Thus, as Lee and Mason contended in a 2006 report in *Finance and Development*, “The dividend period is a window of opportunity rather than a guarantee of improved standard of living.” Another question is whether skill development can be viewed in isolation. For example, there is an argument that the poor employability of India's workforce is related to the deficits in education attainment and health status due to the poor quality of education that young people receive (for those who attend school) and the lack of proper nutrition and health care.

Apart from these issues that affect girls and boys both, there are structures that affect girls and women differently and more severely. With limited resources, male bias in society means that household decisions as well as social opinion typically favor boys and tend to deny girls and women good-quality education and deprive them of training in skills that can lead to better remuneration in the labor market. Employers also tend to prefer hiring men over women due to persistent gender biases.

The government has set up a large number of skills-training institutions across the country. Among the government schemes and institutions intended to benefit girls and women, several are run by contracted NGOs or private entities, which face several challenges in their operational aspects.

While the women's Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs), which provide training in technical fields are a good idea and young women seem to flourish in the atmosphere of training together, the number of trades that are accessible to them falls far short of what is accessible to young men – 21 trades in the women's institutes and 153 trades in the general ITIs. Although the general

ITIs are also open to all young women, they are off-limits to many of them because their conservative families do not want them in mixed-sex classes (in which young women and men receive training together without being segregated).

What is evident from this review is that girls and women are motivated to want more opportunity for themselves and in non-traditional directions. The girls and women who were interested in non-traditional opportunities, like electrician skills, seemed to be questioning the frameworks that govern and, in some cases, control their lives. They were clear that their capacities, including technical aptitude, were no less than their male colleagues or their male partners.

While in numbers, there are currently more private ITIs than government ITIs, the government has huge resources and can change India's skills situation with its policies – provided there is political will, adequate knowledge, willingness to engage with participants and their needs and a vision of wanting to make a difference. In terms of employment or placement possibilities, the reach of the government is large and can create much greater possibilities than what NGOs and private facilities can ever do.

SKILLS TRAINING IN THE NON-GOVERNMENT SECTOR

Several institutions and organizations have emerged in the past couple of decades to respond to the need for a skilled and employable workforce. This includes initiatives that have as their starting point a more comprehensive approach to either empowerment of women in general (especially when the focus is on non-traditional skills) or empowerment of specific groups, such as Dalits or underprivileged youth.

Masonry is one of the trades in which NGOs (rather than government schemes or private facilities) have started working with women. While women in the construction industry have always engaged in hard work tasks, they have been considered as unskilled and paid extremely low wages. Training women to be taxi and chauffeur drivers is another trade gaining popularity.

All organization officers interviewed during the research agreed that what may be termed as “hard skills” training is crucial for the self-confidence of female trainees as well as for their success in the labor market and that these hard skills are an important base for the earning capacity of women. Training in life skills and social issues, “soft skills”, however, is valued differently by different organizations. Although women's organizations, especially those with a feminist (Azad Foundation) or political perspective (Dalit Shakti Kendra), see life skills training as invaluable and critical to the overall empowerment of girls and women enrolled in skills-training programs, others, such as

An Exploratory Review of Skills-Building Initiatives in India and Their Relation to Women's and Girls' Empowerment

Enabling and Training Adolescents for a Successful and Healthy Adulthood (ETASHA) and the government institutions, do not consider it important.

In some cases, the life skills training includes a critique of structures like patriarchy, as well as caste, class and inequality in society. It also includes, in a few approaches, communication and self-defense skills.

Almost all the training institutes and NGOs in this review are conscious, though to different extent, of the gender-based binaries in the available training opportunities. But the social, political and economic forces seem too powerful and all-pervading for them to deal with those binaries on their own without wider support. Most of the institutions and NGOs reviewed, however, have tried to break down some stereotypes and gender divisions in skills acquisition and training.

The young women trainees in non-traditional trades and skills seemed to have gained a great deal of self-confidence from engaging in the training process: from negotiating with their family to enroll in a program to postponing marriage and to actually participating in a course. Even the questioning of gender-based binaries in the skills-training opportunities (by participating in non-traditional trade courses) has made it easier for them to question other stratifications and exclusions.

The training initiatives available in India seem to represent a random and ad hoc selection of skills, even though an extremely large number of young women and men enter the labor market every year. Many of them end up unemployed, underemployed or even unemployable. This is more likely to occur with girls and women than boys and men, given the social, political and economic structures. Girls and women, however, seem geared up to venture out into the world, as the research interviews with young trainees in Aajeevika Bureau, Azad Foundation, Dalit Shakti Kendra, ETASHA and the other organizations indicate. The level of confidence, curiosity, energy and enthusiasm to do something different from what their mothers have done is there and increasing. This was evident in most of the situations I encountered – I saw it clearly in the confidence of the rural young women who used to work as unskilled construction workers and were learning masonry skills. They were determined to earn 400 rupees as recognized masons instead of the 250 rupees they earned while in the learning program or the 150 rupees they used to make previously hauling material to masons. This is but a brief glimpse of how skills training affects self-perception and determination of girls and women wanting to pursue their dreams.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The insights that the review achieved in a short time led to many new questions that call for more in-depth research. It is necessary, for instance, to look at urban and rural training facilities differently in terms of what types of skills training are available or useful. More research is needed to look at what the training has meant for girls and women in terms of their abilities and the possibility of making decisions about their life, their role and status in their family, how they see their future and whether the situation is different for boys and men and, if so, why. An important related theme for research would be the changing dreams and aspirations of young women entering the labor market. A critical concern for women's organizations and NGOs is the role that life skills training has in the process of empowerment. A longer-term study that looks at the connections between life skills training, technical training and changes in attitudes and perspectives of women would be useful for enabling organizations and institutions to better design or tailor their life skills training as well as their training content with a more outcome-oriented approach.

ACTION POINTS

It is necessary to invest in institutions and organizations that are keen to innovate and explore new avenues in the labor market. This could include investing in building up the capacities of NGOs and skills-training institutions to conduct market needs assessments of different skills and services. It would be interesting and useful to look at a few sectors in greater depth to see what are the new or non-traditional skills within the “sunrise” industries and which ones would empower girls and women. Industries or trades that traditionally have excluded women should be targeted, such as the automobile or other engineering trades, and training opportunities should build up a related skill set, followed by work or employment opportunities. Organizations or institutions that provide skills training should then look at pilot projects to learn from them and strategize for their inclusion in the trades they cover.

The reach of the government is vast and should be further explored to see how government institutions and policies can be leveraged to have maximum impact on the empowerment of girls and women through the provision of skills-training opportunities it makes possible for them. Hence, it is expedient to engage with the official training system more strategically, possibly in cooperation with other like-minded agencies.

SECTION
01

INTRODUCTION

*I have begun to believe in myself
I can see beyond the horizon
I open the door to fresh new worlds
I open my eyes, open my soul
I am my own companion
I can swing up to the clouds...*

So go the words of a music video in which a woman driver sings of her empowerment as she maneuvers her truck down a long stretch of highway, with her young daughter riding along. The video, “Mann ke Manjeere”, features the strong voice of popular Indian singer Shubha Mudgal and tells the story of a young mother going places. She grew up in a middle-class family and is married. But her dreams of what married life would be like are shattered when her husband is violent toward her, even in front of their daughter. The mother learns to drive and becomes a truck driver after walking out of her abusive marriage.

I showed this video to women in two locations during the field work for this review. One venue was a semi-rural

setting with the Jaatav (Dalit) community just outside Bhopal in Madhya Pradesh State. The audience was mainly high school- or college-aged girls and some women. The other venue was in rural Udaipur District in Rajasthan State, where there were girls and women who had participated in some of the skills-training programs of Aajeevika Bureau. These programs relate to kitchen gardening, sewing and tailoring, beautician training and jewelry making.

Discussions both preceded and followed the video and revolved around what skills training they or their daughters (in the case of older women) would like to have. In the discussion before the video, the audience cited basically four skills – nursing, teaching, sewing-tailoring and *aanganwadi* (child care) training. After the video, they talked about wanting skills related to driving, electrical work, computers, photography, videography, plumbing and masonry. In the meetings, girls and women said they would like to do things that were different. When asked about the market for such skills,

An Exploratory Review of Skills-Building Initiatives in India and Their Relation to Women's and Girls' Empowerment

the girls seemed confident that they could use the skills if they could learn them. That confidence was reflected in other situations I observed in which young women were experimenting with new ideas and carrying them out through their own businesses or livelihood ventures.

These discussions were in the context of this review of the skills development situation in India for girls and women from communities that are disadvantaged due to social, economic and/or geographical factors. The review was also an attempt to gauge the impact of skills training and the ensuing employment or livelihoods on the lives, choices and empowerment of girls and young women.

The next section of this report explains the methodology used for the review. Section 3 looks briefly at the concept of empowerment and its relevance in the context of skills training. Section 4 looks at emerging issues in the context of employment, training and education trends globally and in India. Section 5 briefly looks at the challenges in government skills-building schemes and institutions, while Section 6 introduces the government and non-government schemes (both those that were shuttered long ago and those ongoing) included in this review. Section 7 presents an analysis of the impact of the trainings and highlights issues arising out of them in relation to girls' and women's empowerment. The final section discusses areas for further research and other recommended actions.



In Mumbra, India, girls prepare for a rally to raise awareness about women's rights and bring an end to child marriage in their community. Photo by Jonathan Torgovnik for American Jewish World Service

SECTION
02

METHODOLOGY

This review was commissioned by the American Jewish World Service as part of its work on addressing early and child marriage through girls' empowerment and was guided by the following questions:

- What is the global discourse on skills building, income generation and employability of girls and young women?
- What types of skills programs exist in India for young people, including for girls and young women, especially from marginalized communities?
- What, if any, is the social change underpinning the vision of these programs? Are they geared toward empowerment overtly or covertly? Do they challenge the social, gender and sexual norms?
- What are the intended and unintended benefits of these initiatives?
- What is the impact of participating in a program for girls? Have these programs increased girls' agency and access to public life or influenced their aspirations?

- What are the gaps in research and questions that need to be explored in future research?

The review began with an assessment of the literature on the global context of employment, education, skills training and their impact on women's employment or livelihood, choices in life and empowerment. I also looked at similar literature and websites in the Indian context. I then looked at a few skills-training initiatives by visiting the institutions or organizations that conduct them and interviewed trainees or graduates who were already working or looking for work.

The organizations and programs I looked at were chosen along the following axes:

1. Composition of trainees – male or female only and mixed (male and female trainees in classes together).
2. Socio-economic background of trainees, with special emphasis on Dalits and women.

An Exploratory Review of Skills-Building Initiatives in India and Their Relation to Women's and Girls' Empowerment

3. Nature of the organization – government, private, non-government organizations (NGOs) and collaborations between them.
4. Nature of the skills imparted – traditional and non-traditional.
5. Nature of the economy where the skills may be imparted or used – rural and urban areas.
6. Geographical location – North, South, East, West and central.

The initial aim was to include visits to organizations in the four main geographical areas of India. Due to lack of time, I could not travel to the South of India. However, I found some initiatives in the South on the internet and met with staff officers of organizations operating there at a meeting on non-traditional livelihoods.

Over a seven-week period I visited eight organizations and institutions in five states (three in the North, one in central India and two in the West). I interviewed 41 women and had 10 group discussions involving 63 women in total. I met with staff of the Azad Foundation and the Enabling and Training Adolescents for a Successful and Healthy Adulthood (ETASHA) in Delhi, though they have a much larger presence in other cities and states. I also visited and met the management as well as trainees from the women's Industrial Training Institute in Delhi and Aajeevika Bureau in Udaipur District in Rajasthan State (all in the North). I visited the Dalit Shakti Kendra in Gujarat State and met women electricians in Nashik city, Maharashtra State (both in the West of India) (see Appendix I for details of the women who were interviewed or participated in the group discussions).

The organizations I visited together covered the following skills training: sewing-tailoring, embroidery, photography and videography, kitchen gardening, masonry, jewelry making, beautician, electrical work, computers, spoken English, animal

husbandry, security guard, repairing of domestic appliances, electronics (including medical electronics), stenography, desktop publishing, food processing, architectural assistants, interior decoration and design and textile design (see Appendix I for the names of the organizations visited and their characteristics).

The interviews and discussions were based on broad sets of questions for female and male trainees and staff (see Appendix II for each set of questions). I also spoke with 19 experts – people with extensive experience in and knowledge of the skills-training, education and employment situations in India and globally.

In addition to looking at previous as well as current initiatives of NGOs and women's organizations, I included older experiments with non-traditional livelihood skills training, such as the training of women to be autorickshaw (three-wheeler) mechanics and a short-lived attempt to start a women's garage service. I also looked at some livelihood initiatives that trained youth had undertaken – cab services, tailoring shops and a home-based training facility – and spoke to young entrepreneurs.

Last, I attended a three-day workshop organized by the Azad Foundation on non-traditional livelihoods in April 2016. This provided an opportunity to learn about many more projects and meet additional organizations and empowered women who have helped girls and women take control of their lives through the acquisition of new skills and the pursuit of new livelihoods.



FRAMING THE EMPOWERMENT ISSUE

“Emancipation” was the commonly cited goal in the early history of the women’s movement. It meant freedom from restraint, control and power of another. After the 1960s, emancipation was used less and increasingly replaced with “empowerment” of women. Academics and aid workers first used empowerment as a goal in relation to social services, social psychology, public health, adult literacy and community development.¹ More recently, it has entered the worlds of politics and business.

In the 1990s, the concept of empowerment gained footing in the international gender and development agenda. By mid-decade, the term found favor with United Nations agencies. For instance, according to documents of the fourth United Nations Conference on Women in Beijing, the platform for action adopted constituted “an agenda for the

empowerment of women.”² By that point, the co-opting of the term by activists and organizations was in full swing.

An interesting and useful aspect of the empowerment term is the re-focusing of power and power relations and the process whereby power and control over one’s choices, opportunities and possibilities are reasserted either by other individuals or by communities. In practice, empowerment is often reduced to its economic dimension, while the psychological and social dimensions of power are ignored. One result has been the mushrooming of microcredit initiatives and self-help groups over the past two decades, which international development organizations have presented as the empowerment tool par excellence for women and the poor.³

¹ A. Emmanuele-Calves: *Empowerment: The history of a key concept in contemporary development discourse* (Paris, Armand Colin, 2009), p. 11. Available at: http://www.cairn-int.info/article-E_RTM_200_0735--empowerment-the-history-of-a-key-concept.htm#anchor_citation.

² United Nations: *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* (New York, 1995), p. 2. Available at: [www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA percent20E.pdf](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20E.pdf).

³ Emmanuele-Calves, op. cit., p. 11.

An Exploratory Review of Skills-Building Initiatives in India and Their Relation to Women's and Girls' Empowerment

Promoting economic independence of women dates back to the early days of the women's movement, when it was conceived as a necessary condition for the emancipation of women. This was followed by the realization that economic independence is not a sufficient condition for either emancipation or empowerment. Social, political and cultural independence are equally necessary.

It is increasingly accepted in various forums, including at the policy level globally, that the availability of and access to opportunities for both education and skills enable economic independence for girls and women, which increases their ability to negotiate their choices in life. There have been several variations of this theme over the years, with different streams of progressive thought each placing slightly different emphasis and focus on this relationship.

Maharashtra State Electricity Transmission Company Ltd empowers women as electricity technicians in Nashik city



SECTION
04

GLOBAL TRENDS IN EMPLOYMENT, TRAINING AND EDUCATION

The capacity of the world economy to create jobs has been steadily declining since the early 1990s.⁴ Global unemployment increased by 5 million people in 2013, to nearly 202 million people. Global employment was expected to increase by 3 million in 2015 and by 8 million in another three to four years.⁵ According to estimates by the International Monetary Fund, in 35 of 102 countries, the rate of unemployment in 2012 was more than 9 percent. And in these years, the youth unemployment rate has increased phenomenally.⁶

Long-term and continuous unemployment also creates what is called

the “discouraged worker” phenomenon, which creates social, political and economic issues. Unemployment estimates understate the severity of the world’s employment crisis.⁷ This is especially true of developing countries, where the phenomenon of “the working poor” is a major issue because most people who are poor cannot afford to be unemployed – they must work to survive. But the only statistics that capture the working poor refer to the “underemployed”.

Issues relating to women’s work are qualitatively different from those of male workers. Women have a higher

4 International Labor Organization: “Globalisation failing to create new, quality jobs or reduce poverty: ILO report sees wide gaps in wages, productivity gains” (Geneva, 2005). Available at: www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_075685/lang-en/index.htm,

5 ILO: *Global employment trends, 2014* (Geneva, 2014), p. 11.

6 *ibid.*, p. 21.

7 I. Ortiz and M. Cummins: *When the global crisis and youth bulge collide – Double the jobs trouble for youth*, Social and Economic Policy Working Paper (New York, UNICEF, 2012), p. 2.

An Exploratory Review of Skills-Building Initiatives in India and Their Relation to Women's and Girls' Empowerment

unemployment rate than men, and the gap has widened since 2009.⁸ Across countries in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region, for instance, women have low labor force participation rates.

The labor market has also pronounced gender-based disparities. These disparities need to be looked at carefully in the context of women's work, which is mostly unpaid and unrecognized but hugely important for individuals, for households, for society and for an economy.

Globally, women are regarded as a flexible source of labor. Hence, a large proportion of informal sector workers are women. There are more women in vulnerable employment, especially as contributing unpaid family workers (they work as part of a family unit, but the payment or profit accrued goes to the head of the household and not to them). The number of vulnerable workers increased by nearly 150 million between 2000 and 2011, and a large proportion of them were women.⁹

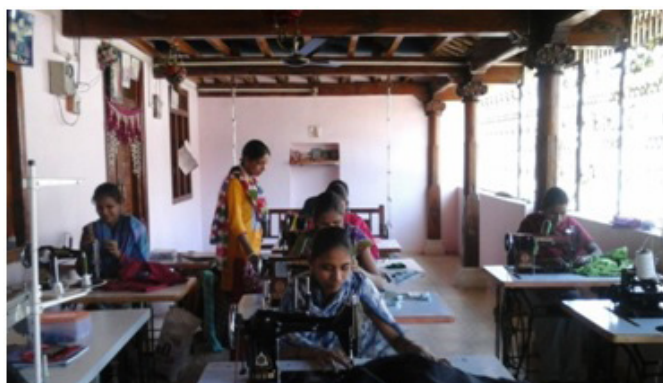
Even in the arena of education and skills training, women face more barriers, especially in rural, informal and traditional economies. For instance, families are less willing to invest in girls' education. This has given rise to what is called the "accumulation of educational disadvantage". There is the additional reluctance of families and society to give girls and women formal skills training. This lack of investment in educating and training girls adds to the disadvantage that women of all ages encounter in the labor market.

In skills training, gender stereotypes circumscribe the opportunities girls and women have in the labor market. Skills acquired by women through hard labor and decades of practice within the home are undervalued. Cultural values that subordinate women are deeply embedded in the social structures that regulate social interaction in everyday life and in the economy.

This is the backdrop against which I looked at skills development and women's employment in the Indian context.



Another tailoring shop in Panchmahal District in rural Gujarat State



Savitri guiding students in a tailoring class she set up in her home



A roadside blouse-tailoring shop in rural Panchmahal District run by young sisters who had trained at DSK

8 ILO: *Skills for employment – Policy brief: Gender gaps in employment and education* (Geneva, 2014).

9 Ortiz and Cummins, op. cit., p. 10.

SECTION
05

SKILLS BUILDING IN INDIA: GOVERNMENT POLICY AND PRACTICE

Several economists and policymakers have made the point that “India is on the cusp of a demographic opportunity”.¹⁰ India today has one of the youngest populations in the world, with more than 62 percent of its people of working age (15–59 years), and more than 54 percent of the total population younger than 25 years. The average age of India’s population by 2020 is projected to be 29 years, while it will be 40 years in the United States, 46 years in Europe and 47 years in Japan. In the next 20 years, the labor force in the industrialized world will decline by 4 percent, while in India it will increase by 32 percent.

These factors present both challenges and opportunities. As Kumar and Subramanian argued, “Demography

alone cannot be counted on for future economic growth.”¹¹ And according to Bloom and Canning, “Both empirically and theoretically, there is nothing automatic about the link from demographic change to economic growth. Age distribution changes merely create the potential for economic growth. Whether or not this potential is captured depends on the policy environment.”¹²

To reap the “demographic dividend”, which is expected to last for the next 25 years, India needs to equip its workforce with employable skills and knowledge so that youth can participate productively.¹³ “These outcomes are not automatic but depend on the implementation of effective policies. Thus, the dividend period is a window of

¹⁰ Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship: *Draft National Policy for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship* (New Delhi, Government of India, 2015).

¹¹ U. Kumar and A. Subramanian: “Growth in India’s states in the first decade of the 21st century: Four facts”, in *Economic and Political Weekly*, 21 Jan., 2012, Vol. XLVII, No. 3.

¹² D. Bloom and D. Canning: Global demographic change: *Dimensions and economic significance*, National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper, No. 10817, Sep. 2004. Available at <http://papers.nber.org/papers/w10817.pdf>.

¹³ *ibid.*

An Exploratory Review of Skills-Building Initiatives in India and Their Relation to Women's and Girls' Empowerment

opportunity rather than a guarantee of improved standards of living," wrote Lee and Mason.¹⁴

However, according to the 2015 draft national policy of the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, the country has a paucity of highly trained laborers, with large sections of the educated workforce considered non-employable because they possess little or no job skills.

Another issue is whether skill development can be viewed in isolation of the wider context. Skills are important for the confidence of youth as well as for their doing well in the labor market. But skill acquisition is not a sufficient condition for better jobs or employment opportunities. There is an entire range of social, political and economic structures that influence, if not determine, the future of youth, their work possibilities and livelihood options. These are structures like class, caste, gender, sexuality, sexual identity and the rural-urban divide that relate to the lived realities of people. For example, the poor employability of the workforce in India is related to the deficits in educational attainment and health status (due to lack of access to good-quality education and proper nutrition and health care).¹⁵

Lack of educational advancement is an important factor. Although the latest report¹⁶ from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) hailed India's effort in primary school enrolment, the figures dim at the secondary, higher secondary and higher education levels, which is when many students drop out. The poor quality of the skills imparted and the lack of links between institutions involved in skills training and what the labor market needs have been important roadblocks.

Apart from these issues, which affect girls and boys both, there are structures that affect girls and women differently and more severely than they affect boys and men. These include the preference that households as well as employers give to boys and men as opposed to girls and women in training and employment. In the context of limited resources, household decisions and social opinions lean toward directing resources for boys and men and denying girls and women opportunities. Denying good-quality education to a large number of girls and women

and depriving them of training in skills that can lead to better remuneration in the labor market has long-term repercussions.

Another important limiting factor is the slowdown in job creation due to the capital-intensive nature of the economy that absorbs less labor. Automation is taking place at more advanced levels. On the other hand, with automation in all areas of the economy, there is greater need for technical and technological skills, whether in mathematics, statistics, computer science and related skills. Yet, India is not rising to this need.

In practice, all of this creates a situation in which many more people are prepared to work for low wages, and it creates a situation in which basic conditions, such as the guarantee of minimum wages to trained workers, are not met. For example, trainees in a Delhi-based institution that offers a course in patient care expect to begin earning 6,000 rupees per month, which is the minimum wage. But most small hospitals and clinics do not pay 6,000 rupees per month. Reportedly, patient care assistants are willing to work for as little as 4,000 rupees per month.¹⁷ "How does one ensure that the trainees who have been trained will actually get the 6,000 rupees [they are] entitled to? Employers are reluctant to pay the levels laid down by the government," explained an officer with one of the large training institutes that works with the government under the Deen Dayal Upadhyaya-Grameen Kaushal Yojana (DDU-GKY) flagship youth program.¹⁸

Another issue is ensuring that training does not reinforce the problem of skills mismatching. Seeking to impart skill development to youth on a large scale without the desired learning outcomes or the jobs that are willing to recognize those skills runs the risk of adding "skilled and unemployed" to the pool of distressed youth. According to feminist economist Jayati Ghosh, the skills mismatch in India "is a result of three interlinked factors: not enough skilled jobs; perverse market signals and incentives causing people to shift to jobs that do not require the skills they were trained in; and poor-quality higher education generating poor employability. These are not problems that can be solved with more training, especially if the training actually replicates these inadvertently. Rather, the challenge of good-quality employment generation requires a completely

14 R. Lee and A. Mason: "What is the demographic dividend?", in *Finance and Development*, Sep. 2006, Vol. 43, No. 3.

15 P. Svedberg: "Why malnutrition in shining India persists", Paper presented at a conference at ISI, 2008. Available at: http://www.isid.ac.in/~pu/conference/dec_o8_conf/Papers/PeterSvedberg.pdf.

16 See Livemint, quoted in *All study no skills – Skilling in schools* (New Delhi, KPMG and PHD Chamber of Commerce, 2013).

17 Interview with Madhavan of Skills Academy, 24 Jan. 2016.

18 Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana is the skilling and placement initiative of the Ministry of Rural Development. It derives from the Aajeevika Skills program and the Special Projects occupational aspirations component of the Swarn-jayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana. The scheme focuses on catering to rural youth and enhancing their skills for wage employment.

different approach, which sees skill development as part of a broader macroeconomic and development strategy that is systematically worked out.”¹⁹

Rajesh Walawalkar, a consultant on human resource management, remarked that skills-training programs are not based on any needs assessments (what they are based on is not clear). Without such assessments, asked Walawalkar, “How does one determine what the needs for particular skills in particular geographical areas or sectors are? How do we know whether we need more fitters or plumbers? How do we know that while there is a need for such and such skill now, that in two years or five years what the need is going to be?”

IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

According to the 2013–2014 annual report of the Directorate General of Employment and Training, by 2014 there were 2,275 government-run ITIs that could accommodate 490,802 students and 8,475 private ITIs with a capacity to train 1,032,894 students.²⁰ However, there were regional variations. For example, in the eastern region there were only 207 government ITIs (as compared with more than 800 in the western and northern regions and more than 400 in the southern region). Private ITIs were also heavily concentrated in some regions more than others, such as in the southern region.²¹

Government skills-training schemes and institution are often run by NGOs, with funding or premises provided by the government. In some cases, they are run by government staff. More recently, there have been public-private partnerships in which the government along with private entities or corporations fund and run the institutions.

Based on the review discussions with institution staff who manage the government skill-development initiatives, there are several challenges to fully implement the schemes:

1. Most skill-development schemes mandate a job placement of between 50 and 75 percent of the trainees. DDU-GKY, for instance, mandates that 75 percent of the trainees be placed and that proof be provided of their continuous employment for a minimum of three months, at 6,000 rupees per month or

the minimum wage, whichever is higher. Proof of employment required is primarily bank account receipts.

“This is a very important challenge, as India has a huge cash economy. It is very difficult to ensure that minimum wages are actually paid to workers. There are many more [people] standing in a queue and ready to work for much less. Employers are reluctant to pay the levels laid down by the government,” explained an officer of the STEP Academy, one of the large training institutes that work with the government under the DDU-GKY program.²²

2. There are minimum attendance requirements, which are inflexible and impractical. For example, if trainees come a little late or if they forget to clock in or put in their identification mark as proof of attendance (in the morning or in the evening when leaving), the government does not pay the stipend for those trainees that day. Trainees who come from different cultural traditions and social and economic conditions are not typically accustomed to this sort of discipline. This translates to a loss of revenue for the NGO that is carrying out the training as a government partner.

3. Another serious issue is assessment. The National Council on Vocational Training and the relevant skill sector council need a third-party independent assessor. But it is common practice for assessors to ask for money to pass candidates. And the pass percentages are an important basis for a training institution to receive government compensation.

4. Almost every institution I spoke with had cash flow concerns due to consistent delays in the release (from state administration departments) and receipt of payment (by the institution) because of bureaucratic functioning. Rent seeking²³ is common. Honest service providers find it difficult to sustain these strains and are either unwilling to work with the government or, if willing, are becoming selective about which schemes and which states they work in. This, in effect, leaves the skills training field to unsavory characters who invest less than is required and deliver shoddy training. One NGO officer, who has worked with government skills-training schemes for almost a year and is currently with the Regular Skill Training Program (RSTP), said it is difficult to recover full compensation for expenses from the

19 J. Ghosh: “Skills mismatch and all that”, in *Frontline*, 3 Jan. 2015.

20 Ministry of Labour and Employment: *Annual report 2013–2014* (New Delhi, Government of India, 2014), p. 249. Available on the Directorate General of Employment and Training website: <http://www.dget.nic.in/content/innerpage/annual-report.php>.

21 *ibid*.

22 Interview conducted at the STEP Academy, Udaipur, 14 Mar. 2016.

23 Examples of rent-seeking behavior includes the ways in which individuals or groups lobby government for taxes, subsidies or regulatory policies that confer financial benefit or special advantages on them at the expense of the taxpayers or consumers or other groups or individuals with which the beneficiaries may be in economic competition.

An Exploratory Review of Skills-Building Initiatives in India and Their Relation to Women's and Girls' Empowerment

government. For its skills academy, the organization spent 1.4 million rupees for the most recent session but was reimbursed only 0.9 million rupees by the government.

5. The documentation required by the government is difficult and a challenge. For example, the organization implementing the RSTP shared that they must show proof of age for all trainees, most of who come from rural areas; many of them do not have the relevant document. Or there are discrepancies in the recorded age in the identity (Aadhar) card and in the school-leaving certificate or the voter card. (There was an instance when a 14-year-old boy's document said he was 17, which is the minimum age requirement to enroll in the training course.) These sorts of discrepancies are common, but when they come to light, the government declines to reimburse the organization for training provided to underage persons. To cover those expenses, the organization uses donor funds.

6. Several officers noted that there is an inflation of the number of persons who have undergone skills training. This makes a mockery of skills-training efforts and of policies that depend upon such data.

7. There is little or no flexibility in what trades are covered in government schemes. The RSTP, for example, has fixed trades, and it is not possible to improvise as per the needs of the trainees.

Although public-private partnerships have become relatively common in India, many of the private partners find the relationship limited due to little willingness by government entities to change and develop skills and training methods that are in tune with the changing world. One officer with a private organization explained that she encountered considerable resistance when she tried to change the ethos of the partnering ITI, such as changing the unsafe and unsuitable uniforms for girls, making the canteen and the surrounding environment more pleasant and adding new courses to the curriculum. When she did succeed, the change would eventually revert back if she did not heavily monitor the situation.

"There is a great resistance to change, as there are several direct and indirect interests that have been created over the years. These may range from giving orders to particular contractors to reluctance to change the courses and curriculum to suit the latest markets. Changing anything in the institution involves changing oneself as well, like having to learn new things. It can be very daunting," explained one informant who asked not to be named. Few changes have

been attempted, and some of them have been laughable, added the informant. For example, the ITI authorities changed the name of the embroidery course from "embroidery" to "surface ornamentation", and "beautician course" was switched to "basic cosmetology". But it was difficult for students to understand the terminology, and the rationale behind the changes was unclear. The confusion prevents some students from enrolling in a certain course, or it leads to drop-outs when trainees, who thought the name meant one thing, discovered something different once the course started.

Discussions with several practitioners reiterated how, over the years, skills training began to take an important position in the development policies of the government and, with the talk of public-private partnerships and government partnership with NGOs, scores of skill-development institutions sprang up across the country. But the mushrooming of organizations did not create corresponding skills-training facilities. And there has been a number of dummy organizations – several of them reportedly made a great deal of money. A feeble attempt at accountability has instead created "red-tapism", which threatens the health and stability of the several genuine skills-development organizations, institutions and initiatives.²⁴

The government has huge resources and can change the skills situation with its policies, provided there is political will, the knowledge of the field, willingness to engage with participants and a vision to actually make a difference. Even though in number there are more private ITIs than government ITIs currently, the wide-reaching government machinery has the potential absorb more of the young people trained in their facilities.

The work of the NGOs reviewed in this study is more sporadic and depends on their ability to raise resources. Some NGOs follow the training content of the government ITIs, which is generally just skill-centric and does not deal with related social issues. Some NGOs have a balanced content that includes a larger perspective, including life skills. Looking at the training modules and perspectives of different organizations and institutions, some NGO training schemes seem more in-depth, extensive and wide-ranging in terms of the issues they deal with. This is especially true of organizations that began with a political perspective or a perspective that recognizes structural disadvantages faced by women from certain socio-economic backgrounds and tries to address these more holistically. These are also much more resource-intensive. Their reach, compared with the resources needed, is also fairly limited.

24 Part of the conclusion of a group discussion with several experts in skills training, 13–16 Mar. 2016.



SKILLS TRAINING FOR GIRLS: NON-TRADITIONAL AND TRADITIONAL TRADES

Skills training has, in general, been a concern since national Independence because industrialization was regarded as an important plank for India's development. The ITIs that were set up in the early days of Independence had this as their objective. Although equal opportunity and non-discrimination have been the professed basis of most legislation, especially the Constitution of India, most of the ITIs practiced segregation in the actual skills-training courses in terms of access to the courses and the active discouragement to girls and women in most of the industry-related skills.

Much later, it was women's organizations and NGOs that attempted to raise issues of equal opportunities and discrimination in access to certain types of skills training for women and girls.

Over the past decade, however, state governments have tried to address some of these issues, as the following schemes and institutions that contribute to the

skills development for girls and women, highlights.

STATE-RUN INSTITUTIONS AND SCHEMES

Jijabai Women's Industrial Technical Institute offers building trades in Delhi

The Jijabai Women's Industrial Technical Institute near Siri Fort in Delhi is a state-run facility with a compact and interesting campus. It has capacity to train 700 women every year in 21 trades that broadly can be bunched into hospitality, the building sector, electronics, apparel and office management. The building sector includes two-year courses for architectural assistant as well as draughtsman. These courses are free, beyond an examination fee of 500 rupees, which is returned if the young female trainee passes the examination. A tour of the campus and training sessions indicates a healthy mix of theoretical and practical sessions. The discussions with the young women trainees who were mainly in their early twenties (there is no age limit for ITI admission) revealed

An Exploratory Review of Skills-Building Initiatives in India and Their Relation to Women's and Girls' Empowerment

a high level of motivation. Almost all the young women I spoke with were at college-level (graduate or post-graduate) or wanted some additional advanced courses. They wanted to work and improve their standard of living. They knew of other young women who had graduated from an ITI and achieved success; one example cited was a woman who ran a *tiffin* (food) service and had bought a large apartment with her earnings.

I was not able to visit the general ITIs (which have male and female students) but was informed they offer training for 153 trades. The enrolment of female trainees in the general facilities is small, however, when compared with the women-only ITIs. The electrician, plumber, machine maintenance and auto repair courses are open to females, although young women are heavily discouraged from enrolling in them. Employers and consumers reportedly prefer men in these trades, which only encourages young women to avoid them, even though they are often more remunerative and afford greater autonomy than many female-identified courses. This is an area worth more attention because the reach of ITIs is large, and helping young women access different types of skills would open up vistas that could change the overall employment and livelihood scenario for the better.

MAHARASHTRA STATE ELECTRICITY TRANSMISSION COMPANY LTD EMPOWERS WOMEN AS ELECTRICITY TECHNICIANS IN NASHIK CITY

The first batch of 45 female junior technicians, known as Mahila Vidyut Sahayaks,²⁵ was inducted by Maharashtra State Electricity Transmission Company Ltd (Mahatransco) in Nashik city, Maharashtra State in mid-2010 to work on the maintenance of substations and 1,500 km of transmission lines. This was a part of the Maharashtra government's commitment to empower women by setting a minimum of 30 percent of government jobs to be filled by women. According to the Mahatransco public relations officer, "Women were coming to the electrician courses in many of the ITIs. A large part of electricity generation and distribution is in the public sector. When there were talks about women's reservations [quotas], the idea of women technicians being a part of Mahatransco was mooted."²⁶

The young women first receive training in the electrical trade

at their local ITI. According to Suresh Borse, an executive engineer with the power utility, "This is a job that requires knowledge, skill and strength. Initially, it was assumed that women might not be able to carry out such tasks of strength and risk. This batch of women has proved us wrong. They are capable of carrying out arduous tasks." Although women have been inducted as engineers in the upper cadres of the company for years, this is the first time that they have been recruited as junior technicians.²⁷

The young women come from disadvantaged backgrounds, many from rural areas and distant villages.

The job includes climbing up towers and transformers to clean gadgets, hang cables and repair circuit breakers. The women are also trained in proper safety measures. According to one of the junior engineers, the job is considered high risk due to working in areas of high voltage. The women work alongside men on almost all tasks.²⁸

The electricity technicians earn 6,000 rupees per month from the state government in their first year of apprenticeship training, 7,500 rupees a month in their second year and 8,500 rupees a month in their third year. After the third year, the women are hired by Mahatransco on a permanent basis and receive about 25,000 rupees per month.

In each of the first three years of the apprenticeship training, the women are entitled to one week of leave time. After completion of the third year and hired by Mahatransco, they are entitled to holidays and leave, including maternity leave.

NON-GOVERNMENT FACILITIES AND SCHEMES, PAST AND PRESENT Forum Against Oppression of Women initiates a short-lived electrician course for women in Bombay

In the 1980s, the Forum Against Oppression of Women (of which I was then and remain a member), a feminist group formed in 1980 after the Mathura judgment,²⁹ started offering courses on non-traditional skills for girls and women. The Forum had a friendly relationship with the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), which provided shelter for women affected by domestic violence. Following many

25 Sahayak in Marathi means "helper", but here it means "junior" electricity technician.

26 V. Balajiwal: "Women storm yet another male bastion in Nashik", in *Daily News & Analysis*, 21 Nov. 2010. Available at: www.dnaindia.com/mumbai/report-women-storm-yet-another-male-bastion-in-nashik-1469802.

27 *ibid*.

28 *ibid*.

29 A 16-year-old adivasi girl had been raped by two policemen in a police station. The Supreme Court passed comments on the "character" of the girl and acquitted the policemen. Four lawyers wrote an open letter critiquing the judgment, which resonated with several hundreds of women in India, and women came together to form women's organizations in 1980. "Adivasi" is an umbrella term for ethnic and tribal groups considered the aboriginal population of South Asia, also known as Scheduled Tribes.

An Exploratory Review of Skills-Building Initiatives in India and Their Relation to Women's and Girls' Empowerment

discussions regarding women's work being confined to low-paying and non-technical areas of the economy, the Forum then initiated dialogues with the YWCA, which also offered young women from underprivileged backgrounds courses on tailoring, food processing and nurses' aide and was open to trying new areas of training.

The YWCA agreed to start an electrician course for women. The Forum contributed sessions on gender and other social issues. Several young and enthusiastic women eagerly joined the course. There was a great deal of optimism and hope for what could be done with this skill.

But after a couple batches of training, the young women said they were not finding work. They were not being hired to full-time positions, nor did customers seek them out as self-employed workers. Some felt insecure to make home visits that were far away or at late hours. The Forum members talked to housing colony authorities geographically closer to the YWCA premises about employing the trained women, but there was too much reluctance. Gradually, other courses like baking, tailoring and nursing flourished, and the electrician course was stopped.

VIMOCHANA'S ALL-WOMEN'S GARAGE SERVICE IN BANGALORE BREAKS GROUND BEFORE SHUTTING DOWN

Another feminist group, Vimochana, came together in Bangalore in the early 1980s, also offering skills courses for women. The organization set up Sakhi Motors in 2003 as a way of promoting women's rights. Sakhi Motors was run by four women mechanics and offered repair service for motorcycles with a horsepower lower than 100 cc.

According to *India Today*,³⁰ "The garage has spelt confidence for the four women working there. For S. Sampige, 23, a mechanic at Sakhi Motors, it is an opportunity for a rewarding career. Sampige, who comes from a poor family, took to this track after she approached Vimochana, through whose initiatives she received six-month training in repairing two-wheelers."

The Sakhi project began with a training program for eight women in two-wheeler (scooters and motorcycles) maintenance and repair. The group, which completed a six-month certificate course at Loyola Industrial Training Institute run by the Jesuits (which previously had worked only with

men), was given hands-on training at various service centers. Vimochana supplemented the Loyola technical training with classes on gender issues. Two batches of women were trained.

Initially, the women found it difficult to wear the blue coveralls of mechanics. They were also not used to working with grease but gradually became familiar with the work tools and accepting of the work conditions. Through the garage service, according to Donna Fernandes, Vimochana was "aiming at removing barriers that prevent women from working in sectors that remained a male bastion".³¹

Vimochana obtained a premise to set up the garage service, and with some financial assistance, acquired basic tools and announced the opening of Sakhi Motors. Six of the 20 women trained wanted to work in the garage. Although the garage was situated in a fairly working class area that was dense with two-wheelers, few people sought it out for mechanical services. Recalled Fernandes, "This was largely because the [women], except for one or two, did not repose confidence that they could deliver. Hardly one or two clients reported for the day. Gradually, it began to be a burden, and the business was going in a loss."³²

At the same time, young women in the area, particularly housewives, approached Vimochana with a request for training in driving two-wheelers. This, too, was tried but did not last for long. Vimochana shut the garage a year after it opened.

A few months later, one of the women mechanics was hired by a network in Chennai to run a training course in two-wheeler mechanics. Based out of Chennai for about two years, she trained several batches of women who managed to work as mechanics in servicing two-wheelers.

Both organizations launched these initiatives because non-traditional skills training had been systematically denied to girls and women. Making such opportunities accessible was an important feminist ambition then, as it is now. What may have been ignored was that considerable groundwork was needed for society and employers to accept women in all work areas. Vimochana also may have underestimated the resistance to women in the service and labor markets that they typically had been excluded from.

30 S. David: "All-woman garage in Bangalore revs up confidence, breaks stereotypes", in *India Today*, 21 Apr. 2003. Available at: <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/all-woman-garage-in-bangalore-revs-up-confidence-breaks-stereotypes/1/206455.html>.

31 Email interview with Donna Fernandes, founding member of Vimochana Bangalore, 19 Jan. 2016.

32 *ibid*.

ARCHANA WOMEN'S CENTRE CEMENTS A PLACE FOR FEMALE MASONS IN KERALA

An NGO operating in Kerala, the Archana Women's Centre (AWC) was set up in 1989 as a response to the gender discrimination that its founder, Thresiamma Mathew, had observed in the construction industry.³³ Although women were doing the same work as men, they were receiving much lower wages. For instance, male masons earned 80 rupees a day and male "helpers" earned 45 rupees a day. But female helpers were paid only 25 rupees,³⁴ even though they were mixing concrete, breaking granite and taking the mixed material to the masons. There was no scope for women in that occupation to upgrade their skills.

At that time, Mathew was associated with a Dutch-Danish-supported Water Supply and Sanitation program undertaken by the Socio Economic Units Kerala.³⁵ The state program involved construction of latrines in large numbers in rural areas. Mathew saw a link and set up a training program for women in masonry.

The training component flourished, at least compared with the resistance the newly trained women masons faced from prospective employers. Mathew thus found a way to hire them and use their skills in various rural development and sanitation programs. In 2006, the AWC office moved to a new location that was constructed by an all-women team.

More than 2,000 women have been trained by the AWC to date.³⁶ AWC provides proficiency for women in all areas of construction, carpentry, concrete block making, ferro cement technology, bamboo technology and even in modular kitchen designing. The Archana Institute of Technology, an AWC facility, is now collaborating with a HUDCO-Kudumbasree-sponsored project for establishing an all-women construction company.

Not only was AWC able to help women break into a male-dominated industry, they were also able to ensure equal remuneration. The AWC now has four production units of bricks and tiles that are in great demand. The women masons' success has encouraged them in other new directions as well, explained Shaiby Kuruvilla, an AWC staff member. One of the women masons, for instance, is now the vice-president of her *panchayat*, or local village council.

Not all the women who trained as masons succeeded in finding masonry work, however, due to a saturated labor market and reduced labor demand.

But AWC's pioneering work has paid off. Said Mathew, "These women used to be very poor. They were either widows or their husbands were not working. So they were single earners in their families. Now they have very good houses, they have deposits in banks, their children are into higher education and so on. Even the earlier stigma women in construction had is no longer there. They live a life of dignity."

The experiences of AWC suggest a more amenable environment in a smaller economy and labor market, at least compared with the experiences of the organizations operating in Bombay and Bangalore in the early 1980s. This seems contrary to the popular perception of the urban economy offering more opportunities. A consistent and substantial financial backing may be another important factor.

AZAD FOUNDATION MAKES INROADS FOR WOMEN CAB DRIVERS IN JAIPUR, INDORE AND KOLKATA

Azad Foundation is an NGO based in New Delhi but operates training centers in Jaipur, Indore and Kolkata cities. It was founded in 2008 with the aim of working towards "a world in which all women, in particular women from resource-poor backgrounds, enjoy full citizenship, earn a livelihood with dignity and generate wealth and value for all".³⁷

Through its Women on Wheels program, Azad helps women enter the male-dominated transport sector as taxi cab and chauffeur drivers. Its extensive training program comprises various modules on driving along with gender issues, communication skills, self-defense, first-aid, English language, legal rights and sexual and reproductive health issues. The program is designed for six to eight months but can be extended, depending on the learning speed of a trainee.

In addition to creating opportunities for remunerative and sustainable livelihoods for women in which they have the chance to make a career, Azad's training process helps women become catalysts for change, not just in their lives but also for women around them.

³³ See www.archanawomencentre.com/.

³⁴ Presentation by Thresiamma Mathew at a working group meeting organized by Azad Foundation, 6–8 Apr. 2016.

³⁵ See www.archanawomencentre.com/page_content.php?pgm_id=MTE=&page=mainmenu#cntnts.

³⁶ See www.archanawomencentre.com/.

³⁷ See <http://azadfoundation.com/>.

An Exploratory Review of Skills-Building Initiatives in India and Their Relation to Women's and Girls' Empowerment

Azad Foundation partners with the Sakha Consulting Wings Pvt. Ltd, which provides employment placement and professional development services. Sakha is a social enterprise geared towards safe transport solutions for women by women in urban India. Together, Azad Foundation and Sakha have developed a fleet of about 75 women drivers and advocate for more women in the public transport system.

According to founding member Meenu Vadera, Azad Foundation has trained about 750 women drivers since November 2010.³⁸ “Eighty percent of the women drivers in Delhi, Indore, Jaipur and Kolkata [have been] trained by Azad,” she estimated. Women they have trained are now driving for private services, such as Meru and Uber. Their drivers are earning between 8,000 and 25,000 rupees. One former trainee recently bought two cars and hired an Azad graduate to drive the other one.

The training is resource intensive: Azad spends around 30,000 rupees per person for an eight-month training course. The women trainees deposit 2,000 rupees before the training into a Commitment Fund. The Azad Foundation spends a great deal of resources on the training and would like a commitment from the women that they will complete the training. The women may pay the entire amount of 2,000 rupees or pay an installment each month or, in special cases when women cannot afford to give any money at all, they are given an interest-free loan from the Azad Foundation's Social Security Fund. When the women begin to earn from their driving, they then can pay back the loan.

No stipend is given. The Social Security Fund makes loans available for women who need assistance. (The loan also must be repaid once the receiver begins earning an income.) In addition to its cab service, Sakha places women drivers as private chauffeurs.

The National Safai Karmachari Finance Development Corporation recently asked Azad to train 50 women *safai karmacharis* (sweepers or cleaners in the public sector). Of them, 15 Dalit women enrolled in the driver's training.

ENABLING AND TRAINING ADOLESCENTS FOR A SUCCESSFUL AND HEALTHY ADULTHOOD PACKAGES EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS TRAINING FOR OLDER TEENAGERS IN SEVERAL INDIAN STATES

Enabling and Training Adolescents for a Successful and Healthy Adulthood (ETASHA) is an NGO operating since

2006 in many regions of India. It provides market-oriented vocational skills and assists with the placement of older adolescent girls and boys in formal sector employment in Delhi and Jaipur and the states of Uttar Pradesh, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Haryana.³⁹

ETASHA offers skills courses on retail, hospitality, accounting, data entry in financial services, business process outsourcing work, human resources, medical electronics, travel and tourism, computers and the internet, among other interests. In 2012, the placement rate for students was 71 percent, which has improved since then, according to the ETASHA president.

Students' fees cover about 10–15 percent of the training costs; the rest is covered by corporate donors. Donations come year on year, and thus there is an element of uncertainty in the organization's ability to underwrite its training program. The funding partners, however, have a history of remaining supportive. The global consulting firm Accenture, for instance, donated funding for 40 students five years ago and then increased it to cover 324 students in 2015.⁴⁰

The courses contain what Meenakshi Nayar, ETASHA president, called the “core employability skills”, which include communication skills, spoken English, social confidence and interpersonal skills (including anger management).

“Until recently, we assumed that the dream job for girls and women was related to teaching. So we looked at computer teacher training as a course that fit the bill. But halfway through the course, all but one girl wanted to discontinue the computer teacher training. They all wanted to do the office program. This is because while the fees were less and the duration of the course was less, the possibility of office work giving more wages was higher. Most of the girls continue to do their [graduate courses] independently. We realized that dream jobs for the girls were also undergoing a change,” said Nayar.

SELF-EMPLOYED WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION PROMOTES SELF-RELIANCE THROUGH INFORMAL WORK IN DELHI

As the website of the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) explains, the Delhi-based trade union offers “integrated development programs that support women towards self-reliance and full employment. The aim is to ensure that these programs cater to the diverse life-cycle needs of women workers and provide workers with a network of

38 Interview with Meenu Vadera, Azad Foundation, New Delhi, 25 Jan. 2016.

39 See <http://etashasociety.org/>.

40 Interview with Meenakshi Nayar, ETASHA, New Delhi, 23 Jan. 2016.

An Exploratory Review of Skills-Building Initiatives in India and Their Relation to Women's and Girls' Empowerment

support.”⁴¹ The integrated approach of skills development and education taps into the skill interests and talents of children, adolescent girls and women members and includes organizing, advocacy, livelihoods, social security, health services and microfinance. The program addresses women informal workers' needs throughout their lives in terms of employment, income, nutritious food, health care, housing, assets, organizing into groups, leadership, self-reliance, education and child care.

“Women and girls are trapped in a cycle of poverty by a lack of diverse and market-responsive education and skill-building opportunities,” says the SEWA website. “More often than boys, girls are pulled out of school to take over household responsibilities. Many never have the chance to go back. SEWA Bharat [the parent organization] facilitates skill-building, vocational training and education programs across India and supports its members with starting and operating learning centers.”⁴²

Recognizing that girls born into households engaged in the informal economy lack access to good-quality training institutes, and as a result, remain outside the mainstream market of employment, SEWA Bharat provides women-organized skill-building workshops, training courses and events that develop both traditional practices and modern skills.⁴³ The available opportunities include SEWA Polytechnics, SEWA Youth Resource Centers, Youth Connect, SEWA Youth Clubs, SEWA Youth Explore and other diverse youth events.⁴⁴

The SEWA youth skill-development courses are available for adolescent girls within the polytechnic academics or via SEWA Shakti Kendras.⁴⁵ Most classes are six months in duration, and charge a nominal fee that is affordable to poor girls' families but can be waived if a girl demonstrates the passion but does not have access to funding.

All the courses offered through SEWA Delhi polytechnic academies and vocational training centers are balanced with

training that helps girls develop “soft skills” in terms of self-confidence, leadership and teamwork experience. The courses also strengthen girls' spoken English to make them more competitive in the labor market.

SEWA has partnered with the National Institute of Open Schooling to help prepare girls for their class 10 and class 12 exams and coaches them to reduce the likelihood of their dropping out of school. Through the partnership, girls have developed skills in English, science, math, home science and painting.

In 2014, SEWA launched a course in customer relations and sales. Its vocational training centers provide girls with opportunities to develop “hard skills” in embroidery, cutting and tailoring, stitching and computer literacy. There are also advanced training courses in textile design, graphic design, fashion design, spoken English and clerical and financial literacy. Non-formal education classes are available for children, adolescents and young adults as a bridge to formal educational training. In the first three years, 5,000 girls and women were trained in basic functional literacy. Vocational support, refresher courses and testing and certification are also offered at the school.

Most of what SEWA offers responds to the expressed needs of its members or reflects the organization's analysis of changes taking place in society, the economy and the labor market. For instance, to address issues faced by women construction workers, SEWA set up the Karmika School for Construction Workers in Ahmedabad, Gujarat State in 2003 to provide training in new technology to increase their productive efficiency and, consequently, their bargaining power.⁴⁶ As of 2012, about 8,000 women had been trained. They include electricians, 10 percent of whom have become contractors.⁴⁷ In keeping with its holistic approach, SEWA also works to help women in the construction industry obtain an identification card and any benefits they are entitled to

41 See <http://sewadelhi.org/programs/integrated-approach/>.

42 *ibid.*

43 *ibid.*

44 *ibid.*

45 The Delhi government initiated a Gender Resource Center in a resettlement colony to bring social, economic and legal empowerment to women, particularly those belonging to the underprivileged sections of society. Adapting the Gender Resource Center model, SEWA now runs its own empowerment centers, called SEWA Shakti Kendra (Empowerment Centers) across seven areas of Delhi and across all SEWA Bharat-supported districts to empower communities by strengthening members' capacities to access entitlements – through assembly, building awareness, initial support and nurturing grassroots leadership. Community members can find information on SEWA initiatives, government departments and schemes and application support (see <http://sewabharat.org/program-themes/health-social-security/>).

46 See <http://wiego.org/resources/karmika-school-construction-workers>.

47 TNN: “Women electricians to light up footpath shala”; 5 Apr. 2012.

An Exploratory Review of Skills-Building Initiatives in India and Their Relation to Women's and Girls' Empowerment

under the Construction Workers' Protection and Welfare Act, including an accident insurance scheme, child care crèches at construction sites, additional skills training and job placement.

Through its experiences, SEWA sees that women are more prepared to venture into newer skills and, to some extent, defy traditions, including those imposed by their family, if they see a value in it. Its work, however small in scale, is regarded as important to other girls and women who are looking for role models.

SEWA recently signed a memorandum of understanding with the National Skill Development Corporation to train 137,000 women workers. It will provide training to women in eight priority sectors in the coming decade and provide access to finance for more than 96,000 women in Gujarat State to procure skills and invest in livelihood ventures. The National Skill Development Corporation agreed to provide a loan of 318,000 rupees and a grant of 796,000 rupees for the project. The sectors in which skill development is supposed to take place are building and construction, handlooms and handicrafts, food processing, agriculture and related trades, salt making, financial management, business counseling, housekeeping and paper products manufacturing.

Although a SEWA officer told the *Economic Times* that skills training for self-employment will contribute towards higher incomes for individuals and increased entrepreneurial opportunities,⁴⁸ its courses reach but a miniscule segment of society. And even though a great deal is made of entrepreneurship and start-up businesses, self-employment for the poor usually means self-exploitation and a precarious existence. Yet, self-employment is the only type of livelihood that seems accessible to large sections of people, especially in the rural areas.

DALIT SHAKTI KENDRA USES SKILLS TRAINING TO BOOST SELF-CONFIDENCE IN DALIT COMMUNITY

The Dalit Shakti Kendra (DSK), or Dalit Empowerment Centre, is a unique experiment that started in the late 1990s to reach underprivileged youth, boys and girls with skills training in Gujarat State. It was part of a wider movement to challenge caste oppression and exclusion of the Dalit community,

especially the youth. It was set up in collaboration with another like-minded organization, Janvikas. They offer "short-term vocational training courses that combine with personality development and creation of social consciousness to enhance self-confidence and self-respect" to Dalit youth.⁴⁹ According to Martin Macwan, the organization's founder, DSK sees itself as part of a much larger movement for social change.⁵⁰

Until recently, DSK catered mainly to rural youth in Gujarat State, but there are now many students from other states enrolled in its courses. The batch of boys at the time of the review had students from nine states, for instance. Most of them were from rural areas, most likely looking at self-employment for survival in an otherwise grim employment landscape.

The DSK training includes discussions on current and social issues and the way in which one needs to look at social issues. A critique of discrimination – class, caste, gender, among others – is an important theme.

In the early years, more boys than girls came for courses. And until 2006, boys and girls participated in courses together. But parents did not feel comfortable with their daughters in such an environment. After 2007, when girls' courses were separated from boys' courses, more girls began enrolling, to the extent that there have been a total of eight girls' batches and only two boys' batches since (for a total of 4,094 girls and 3,265 boys). The girls' batches have been consistently full, while that has not been the case with the boys. Induben, who has worked in DSK for 13 years, remarked on this apparent favoring of girls: "The boys often tease us, saying we are discriminating against them. Then we explain that boys have much more opportunities than girls."⁵¹ Each batch is designed to accommodate 100 students who stay at the center for two months of intensive courses.

The DSK skills training comprises intensive sessions that last the entire day for two months without a break.⁵² The DSK daily routine for its residential training courses includes sports, exercises, elocution and diary writing competitions that emphasize new ideas and innovations (through the Best Diary

48 PTI: "National Skill Development Corporation signs MOU with SEWA to train 1.37 lakh women workers", in *Economic Times*, 16 Jan. 2015.

49 Personality development refers to the building up of self-confidence and a young woman's ability to raise questions about issues she is facing. See <http://navsarjan.org/dalitshaktikendra>.

50 Discussion with Martin Macwan, 23 Feb. 2016.

51 Discussion with Induben, DSK, in Ahmedabad, 23 Feb. 2016.

52 Interview with Induben, DSK, 23 Feb. 2016.

An Exploratory Review of Skills-Building Initiatives in India and Their Relation to Women's and Girls' Empowerment

and the Best Idea awards). The diary writing opens up a great deal of discussion and helps students begin to deal with traumas they may have experienced (including sexual assault in childhood), feelings of depression and suicidal thoughts. Some girls have asked DSK to intervene when there have been instances of domestic violence in their household (disclosed in their diary writing).

The students are involved in all the day-to-day functions of DSK – cleaning, sweeping, making rotis and chopping of vegetables. Often there is some resistance from the boys because they have never touched a broom or cleaned a toilet, for example. It is typically a longer process to communicate these ideas and concerns with boys and sometimes girls who have come from very different backgrounds and their gender, caste, religious, etc. biases are strong and likely have not been challenged. Gradually, they come to realize the relevance of such work. There is also some initial resentment regarding the strict rules, such as not being allowed to use a mobile phone. This could be a reason for a drop-out rate of about 10 percent (10.1 percent for boys and 9.5 percent for girls).

When asked why such rules are necessary in an institution like DSK, Induben cited several reasons. For one, when the boys and girls come to DSK, they are of a “delicate” age. “There is a great deal of resistance from parents to send the girls for residential courses,” she explained. “Second, when the girls and boys are here, they are our responsibility. We cannot take risks. Also, there is far greater concentration on the work and the schedule of the training, like sports, and the discussions we have every evening and so on.”

Although students pay 4,500 rupees for the two months of intensive training, the actual cost per student comes to about 12,000 rupees. DSK initially used donor funding to cover the deficit (the largest part of the initial infrastructure and training equipment was financed by the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation, which also helped cover operating costs for the first three years). In keeping with the philosophy of self-sustainability, DSK now covers the deficit from its own savings. It does not take funding or any support from the government because it would mean some loss of autonomy in decision-making.

In the early days, DSK offered 30 types of courses. Over the years, they have been restructured to 15 courses. They include a beautician course, computer basics, computer tally, an

TABLE 1

NUMBER OF WOMEN TRAINEES IN THE STEP

TRAINING PROGRAM	NUMBER OF WOMEN TRAINEES
Beautician	88
Computer Plus	41
Kitchen Gardening	354
Animal Husbandry	69
Goat Rearing	183
Jewelry Making	40
Masonry	41
Electronic Data Processing	28
Commercial Stitching	81
Security Guard	14
Mobile Phone Repairing	3
Kashidakari (embroidery)	6
Advanced Tailoring	78
Basic Tailoring	139
Total	1,165

electrician course, furniture making, mobile phone repairing, photography and videography, police and security and different types of sewing and tailoring courses.

AJEEVIKA BUREAU OFFERS RURAL YOUTH IN RAJASTHAN SKILLS-TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Ajeevika Bureau in Udaipur District, Rajasthan State is another organization that aims at skilling young girls and boys from rural areas. They work largely with households of migrant workers, who form a large proportion of households in Udaipur.

The Skill Training, Employability and Placement (STEP) Academy of Ajeevika Bureau trains young women and men in 14 trades (table 1) through rigorous residential training courses that last four to six weeks. Most of the trainees are from rural Udaipur and face a great deal of challenges (outlined further on).

SECTION
07

IMPACT OF SKILLS TRAINING: OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

What comes through from this review is that women are experiencing empowerment in varying levels due to some type of skills-training opportunity. At one level is the empowerment they experience from acquiring a skill and earning relatively good money. At another level is their ability and confidence to insist on participation in decision-making regarding their life choices. At a third level is girls' and women's ability to see their lives in the context of social structures and have the capacity to make small or big changes. Some young women have achieved a level of personal empowerment and are able to negotiate further access to skills development, their mobility and even resist pressure to marry (or insist that they themselves decide whether to marry and to whom). At a fourth and wider level is the ability to connect these changes with other structures and with other people. This section highlights several themes that emerged through the review.

HEIGHTENED LEVELS OF AMBITION AND CONFIDENCE

One of the most important issues on which there is agreement among experts in the field of skills training is that self-confidence is a crucial element for young women's employability. What was evident through the review is that girls and women of different ages are gaining self-confidence, and are motivated to achieve more out of life and in non-traditional directions because of the skills training.

The women who were studying tailoring or textile designing in the women's ITI at Siri Fort in Delhi had not been part of any gender training or training on social issues. Yet, almost all of the more than 40 young women I talked with there said they were studying further and doing graduate or post-graduate courses and they wanted to "become something" in their lives. The ITI courses ran from 8.30 a.m. to 5 p.m. from Monday to Friday. But most of the young women were

An Exploratory Review of Skills-Building Initiatives in India and Their Relation to Women's and Girls' Empowerment

taking additional classes or correspondence courses or some other learning-related engagement during their weekends. That a world of skills had been offered to them and that they were with other young women learning a trade had opened reservoirs of ambition and inspiration within them.

For example, all the women I met in their three-year apprenticeship training at Mahatransco in Nashik city were in their second year of the program. Most of the women I talked with were in their early 20s and single. Only one was married. The oldest, Shraddha,⁵³ is a widow and mother of two children, who enrolled in the Mahatransco program after the death of her husband. She previously had engaged in domestic work.

"We are proud that we are among the first to be inducted into this job. It is a good feeling to know that we can do what some thought women would not be able to," said 23-year-old Anjali.⁵⁴ Pointing to the senior engineer, she said she wanted to take his place one day. Anjali belongs to the Other Backward Class caste and recently married. Hers was an arranged marriage. When the marriage was being discussed, she insisted that she wanted to meet her to-be husband and talk to him before the agreement was finalized. There was a great deal of reluctance, but ultimately she had her way. "I told my husband: 'See, I have to wear a uniform for work. That uniform is just like yours, khaki shirt and pants. And I will not leave my job no matter what,'" Anjali recalled. She lives in Mahatransco-provided housing on her own because her husband's job is in another town. "Everyone is fine with that. I will try and get a transfer. But when that happens it happens," she added, matter-of-factly. In her ITI batch, she was the only girl in the eight courses, which comprised 160 trainees.

The first challenge for the young women at Mahatransco was wearing trousers. "We used to wear *saris* or *salwar kameez* and were not comfortable with any other dress. Also, those of us who are married had a tough time convincing our in-laws. But now that we have accepted this job, its requirements have to be met, and hence we are wearing jeans and T-shirts. We have realized that it is convenient to work this way. We are also very proud of our uniform. My friends have told me that their families and relatives are also proud of the uniform," said Yamuna, 24,⁵⁵ who is part of the first batch of technicians. She is also pursuing a Master of Arts degree and will take the Maharashtra Public Service Commission exam required for

state government positions. She has a great deal of ambition and wants ultimately to become a police officer. Yamuna said there is no pressure for her to marry.

The second challenge cited by the young women I met at Mahatransco was adjusting to the conditions, such as carrying heavy equipment, the loud noise, sparks and working high up. It took them a while to get accustomed to this work. The young women seemed happy that usually (though not always) their seniors accompany them and that helped them overcome their initial fears. They seemed confident and proud of the work they were doing. What was most difficult for some of the women was confronting users over fees. One young woman said she felt a little intimidated by this aspect of the job. The women said there had been instances of unpleasantness and a few open threats to their well-being.

The women electricians in the Mahatransco training had gained a great deal of self-confidence in the process of negotiating with their families, insisting on postponing their marriage and attending the training courses. Some of the women trainees in other organizations expressed similar sentiments, such as Lata⁵⁶ in Azad Foundation, who had convinced her family to even cancel her engagement.

In the Azad Foundation's experience, driving has proven to be a vehicle for genuine change for resource-poor women, providing them remunerative income and also mobility, agency and a position of power in the family and community. Discussions with several women drivers echoed this perspective. Lata, who now drives a cab in New Delhi, reported, "It is almost four years that I am driving a cab. I was just 18 when I began (I was ready to learn earlier ... but had to wait because 18 is the rule). I come from a very poor and conservative family in rural Bihar. My mother is very supportive, but she could not do anything when my father forced my sister to get married when she was only 13. She was not allowed to even complete her education. I too was forcibly engaged. But I resisted, and my mother supported me. My father was initially very upset and angry that I broke my engagement, but ultimately he relented. Now that I earn so much, he does not say anything. I am not sure whether I want to get married or not. But I am sure I want to make something of my life. My elder sister was good in her studies. She is very talented. Another friend of mine, her in-laws had promised

⁵³ Not her real name.

⁵⁴ Interview at the Nashik Mahatransco facility, 18 Mar. 2016. Her name has been changed.

⁵⁵ Interview at the Nashik Mahatransco facility, 17 Mar. 2016. Her name has been changed.

⁵⁶ Not her real name.

An Exploratory Review of Skills-Building Initiatives in India and Their Relation to Women's and Girls' Empowerment

that they would allow her to study after marriage. But then they did not. What could be done?"⁵⁷

I met girls in their mid and late teens in rural Udaipur District who had previously worked on construction sites but were now training for masonry jobs through the Aajeevika Bureau. Although they were wearing *ghaghra*s (long flowing skirts) when interviewed at their work site, they said if given pants, they would wear them. "We used to get 150 rupees per day as unskilled workers. Now we get 250 rupees. The skilled men get 400 rupees. We will also get 400 rupees [one day]," Pavatri, one of the girls, said confidently.⁵⁸

Reshma⁵⁹ from Delhi is training with ETASHA for employment in the hospitality and retail sector. Though excited about the skills she was learning, she was not sure how much she would earn eventually and how far the training would take her. But she could not afford anything more than what she was doing at the time I met her. She said she would earn what she could for a while and then see what more she could do. She said her mother is proud of her and has stopped her brothers from pestering her and her sister to marry. Reshma and her sister recently were hired for part-time jobs by McDonalds in Delhi. Said their mother, "Even if they get married, they will have a job to fall back on."

That "even if" is what makes a great deal of difference in the lives of many girls. The girls and boys who come to the skills-training courses are from extremely disadvantaged backgrounds; their fathers tend to work as auto drivers, laborers or vegetable vendors and their mothers mostly work as domestic workers. After completing the courses, the students earn between 7,500 and 14,000 rupees per month.

"At the age of barely 20 and with the level of skills they have, the wages are not [too low]. And they increase over the years. It is an improvement over the wages the rest of the family earns," said Nayar, ETASHA president.

WANTING A LIFE DIFFERENT FROM THEIR MOTHERS

There seems to be a large number of girls and women who are determined to be educated, skilled and to reach a way of life that their mothers could not have imagined. According to Neha, a young activist in ETASHA, "In the initial period, there

were fewer girls than boys in many of the courses. Girls used to feel intimidated. Over time, this has changed. In one of the computer courses (CODE) in Mori Gate, a Muslim-dominated area in Delhi, there were 19 girls and 1 boy [recently enrolled]. In the Kucha Mohtar Khan area, which is Balmiki [the sweeper community] dominated, there were 18 girls and 2 boys [enrolled]."⁶⁰

This is a major trend in many situations. Girls seem eager to get out of their current predicament in which society and family structures constrain them. They want to make a life for themselves and thus avoid a situation similar to what their mother or elder sister has experienced. The boys, on the other hand, seem caught in the same situation, unable to get out of a rut their backgrounds have created for them. This, of course, is a preliminary observation and needs more research before any definitive conclusion can be made.

Several contradictions emerged through my interviews with trainees and former trainees. For instance, the feisty cab driver of Sakha Cabs, was insistent that she would not hear of anyone stopping her daughter's education to marry her, yet she continues to cover her head when elderly in-laws are around. She feels she understands gender oppression and tries to work on issues that are close to her heart. Suvarna,⁶¹ a cab driver with Veera Cabs, had been part of several training programs. She is clear about the gender-based division of labor, how it is women who pay the price for it and how women should not be submissive. Still, she feels that leaving her alcoholic unemployed husband would be her defeat. She has come a long way in terms of her own professional empowerment and now has her own taxi and owns her house.

Nonetheless, the level of confidence, curiosity, energy and enthusiasm to do something different from what their mothers have done is there and increasing. "My father was opposed to my leaving home and coming for training in DSK. He thought it was very far from home. I told him, 'Give me 100,000 rupees and then stop me.' He let me go," said Pooja.⁶² This was her way of telling her father that if there was no way of giving her the money she was asking for, maybe he had no right to stop her from gaining a skill and earning that amount on her own. Although only 15, Pooja is an expert on stitching

57 Interview with Lata, New Delhi, 29 Jan. 2016.

58 Interview with three young women training for masonry in rural Udaipur District, Rajasthan State, 15 Mar. 2016. Their names have been changed.

59 Not her real name.

60 Discussion with Neha in ETASHA office, 23 Jan. 2016.

61 Not her real name.

62 Discussion with Pooja (not her real name), DSK trainer, 24 Feb. 2016.

An Exploratory Review of Skills-Building Initiatives in India and Their Relation to Women's and Girls' Empowerment

shirts and trousers and has become a master trainer in DSK, working with mostly older boys and girls.

I heard several stories like Pooja's in the course of my research.

HARD SKILLS AND LIFE SKILLS ARE BOTH IMPORTANT

Another important insight from the review was the life skills that NGOs attach to the skills-training programs, which were described as crucial inputs in the training of girls and women. Most of the NGO-run skills-training programs that I looked at had a strong component of practical skills. These included spoken English, training in conversation and communications, self-defense and discussions on social structures and social issues. Although the NGO staff regarded these elements of skills training as critically important, the girls and women seemed to be of mixed opinions. Some girls and women (and also some of the boys) thought the life skills exposure changed the way they looked at life, including demands for dowry and the caste system. Others thought they had not benefited from such interventions and inputs, which had only increased the duration of the regular skills training.

The "hard skills" were what the girls and women seemed to appreciate the most. Almost everyone I met attributed the employment, the money, the independence and autonomy they had gained or were anticipating they would gain to the technical skills they had learned. This may be because they had witnessed women – their mothers and other women relatives and their women friends and neighbors – who had not had the opportunity, the luck or even the grit and determination to pursue a career choice.

Together with the hard skills, what most NGOs emphasize is the building of progressive values. Staff with the STEP Academy of Aajeevika Bureau thought that sound technical training, together with building positive values and nurturing leadership and aspirations among youth, is important for them to succeed as workers, as entrepreneurs and as citizens. Martin Macwan of the NGOs Navsarjan and DSK in Ahmedabad, went further in saying that theoretical and practical training in particular skills are both important; but building an attitude towards society and social issues is as important.⁶³

Dolon Ganguly,⁶⁴ an expert in the area of skills training, agreed that for training to be meaningful, sessions on allied social issues

should regularly accompany the hard-skills courses. "Social issues are important but should not be dealt with in isolation," she argued. "For example, if we talk with training participants about early marriage, we need to link this with skill building, access to livelihoods, control over money and earnings, dignity, freedom, etc. It is easier to make linkages and [show] that early marriage cannot ensure this life with dignity, choice and freedom and women's skill to earn money." She also thinks that training courses should increase the analytical skills of participants to assess for themselves the situation and position of women in Indian society, communities and families and challenge discrimination and the control others have over their hard-earned skills and money. Learning how to handle sexual harassment in the workplace and how not to be patronized as a woman worker are also important elements of skills training, she added.

The DSK component of training on social issues comprises one hour of a discussion, which they call "prayers", each evening. They talk about, for example, caste discrimination and its impact on people and on the social structure or they analyze some incident that has taken place recently, historically or in mythology.⁶⁵

Induben, from DSK, told a story of three sisters who live near a village in Ahmedabad who now own a shop together (and still tend their cattle) after training at DSK. They have all married according to their own choice, out of their caste and have been accepted by their family and by society. She thought their ability to pursue their own life choices grew out of the training they experienced with DSK. The atmosphere of DSK as well as being with girls from different backgrounds, along with the evening prayer discussions, Induben said help girls to assert themselves in ways that are less confrontational and more persuasive. Nonetheless, she added, "It helps that society generally is changing in the same direction."

The social component of the training of women in Azad Foundation is quite comprehensive over the program's duration of six to eight months. It consists of self-defense, sexual harassment training, communication, legal rights awareness as well as sessions on gender issues, sexual and reproductive health and the English language.

Lata, Seema and Ganga,⁶⁶ the three women drivers I spoke with at Sakha Cabs who had been part of the Azad Foundation training, were clear about the importance of hard skills and

63 Navsarjan works in several hundred villages of Gujarat State on social issues, especially those related to caste, and helped set up DSK. Interview with Martin Macwan, DSK, 23 Feb. 2016.

64 Email exchange with Dolon Ganguly, 6 Mar. 2016.

65 DSK calls it "prayers" because this is an acceptable mode of meeting for most families; also, it is easier to skip a meeting but not so a prayer.

66 Not their real names.

An Exploratory Review of Skills-Building Initiatives in India and Their Relation to Women's and Girls' Empowerment

the confidence that they create in women, in their own abilities in general and in their specific trade in particular. They were also insistent that women's access to other perspectives and knowledge gives them the ability to take their lives into their own hands.

As Ganga explained, "I come from a very conservative family. I have to cover my head in front of my in-laws even now. I wear my uniform – shirt and pants – and then take a scarf to cover my head. My parents also gave dowry when I got married. But now I think differently. I have told my family, 'Never talk about me leaving my job. You will regret it.' I have also encouraged my daughter to study as much as she wants and will resist it if my in-laws or husband insist on her marriage."

There are many similar stories. I met a girl who was to be married to a boy whose sister was to be married to the girl's brother in a tribal custom called "exchange marriage". After going home from a DSK course, the girl insisted that she would not marry the boy. She argued with her parents. "You say I am like a part of your heart. How will you feel if this part of your heart is unhappy in her life?" she told them. Ultimately, the parents agreed to call off the marriage. I asked her how this had happened. She said, "I did not want to get married. But it was difficult for me to understand why I thought like that and what I would do. Also how I would convince my parents. Once I was at DSK, I realized that there is more to life than marriage and all that. Once I was convinced and I had a path that I knew I could follow, it was not difficult to communicate. There are many others who are thinking differently and wanting to complete their education."

The young female electrical technicians at Mahatransco had previously completed a two-year course on electrical training at the ITI in Nashik city. At Mahatransco, as noted earlier, their apprenticeship training began with a week-long session on applying the ITI training to the substation sites and transmission lines. Neither the ITI nor Mahatransco provides any life skills or similar type of training that some of the NGOs provide. According to the women I met, there was a public relations officer earlier who was a support to them, but that person had left a year ago and had not been replaced. Even sexual harassment training has been minimal; essentially, they were advised to leave a situation if any untoward incident takes place. (Although there is a sexual harassment committee and the women are made aware of sexual harassment and what needs to be done, some of the electricians told me that they were not aware of any such committee. "We were told that if there is that sort of

unpleasant incident, we should just quickly leave the place and then report the matter to our seniors.") The women I spoke with were critical of the dowry practice, caste hierarchies and discrimination. That they had to wear a uniform as an electrician, which consisted of khaki shirt and pants, when no woman from their extended family had ever done that, was an important thing for them.

EXPOSURE TO NEW IDEAS, SOCIAL RELATIONS AND WORK ETHICS

The women who were into relatively non-traditional skills, like electrical skills in the case of Mahatransco, and who had been exposed to any training that included discussions on social issues, seemed to be questioning some of the frameworks that governed their lives. The women electricians I interviewed were mainly from rural or semi-rural backgrounds and had never heard of caste discrimination being challenged. Yet, they seemed to be starting to do so themselves. For example, in my conversation with Anjali, who was from Nashik city in Maharashtra State, she mentioned, "When you are in an environment of training or work, how do you go and inquire about someone's caste. And even if you come to know of someone's caste, if that person is your co-worker, what can you do? You just forget about caste."

As Sanjay Chittora, the program manager of STEP Academy (Aajeevika Bureau) in Udaipur District related, "It is difficult to imagine the levels at which one has to struggle. It is not just skills and the technical part of it, which is challenging in itself. But most of the girls and boys who come from villages to do the residential training for three months have never really interacted with anyone but people from their own community. Tribal and Brahmin girls sitting and eating together is not heard of. That is where one starts. This is also mixed with fear of the city and fear of the 'stranger-man' [*gair mard*]. There are so many layers. It is not simply skills training. It is an introduction and exposure to an entirely new and different world and worldview that one is talking about."

This can also create confusion and contradictions in the minds of the young people who may be exposed to certain issues for the first time in their life. This is where the DSK method of asking trainees to keep a diary is useful; the senior-most people in DSK have access to the diaries and can gauge how well each trainee is managing all the change. Similarly, professional behavior, being meticulous in work and punctuality are not qualities that are often rated highly in many informal work arrangements. But it is important for employability. Induben and Macwan of DSK talked about the discipline that is part of the training. "Just getting up at 5 a.m.

and being part of a pre-decided routine that everybody has to follow is itself part of education and training. Often, the boys resist household chores that are part of the routine. The girls at first resist participating in sports, which is also part of the daily schedule," said Macwan.

GENDER-BASED DIVISIONS IN SKILLS ACQUISITION IS A CHALLENGE

The institutions, NGOs and other training facilities that have co-educational batches (unsegregated by sex) of trainees seem less able to break gender stereotypes in their courses. This has been true for Skills in Progress, which made huge inroads in the area of skills and works in nearly every state of the country. The courses for girls include basic computer training, tailoring, knitting, fashion designing, electronic tailoring, industrial sewing, embroidery, bedside nursing assistant and health assistant. The courses in which there are some boys but more girls relate to the hospitality industry. Courses in which there are only boys are welding, plumbing and basic electrical. Courses in which there are more boys but also some girls are driving and industrial security guards.

Most of the courses available in the general training institutions are not available in women's ITIs. As noted previously, while the women's ITIs have 21 courses, the general ITIs in Delhi have 153 courses. But it is not simply a matter of whether co-educational batches work better or segregated (only girls or only boys) batches work better. The issue is deeper, and it relates to a gendered political and institutional mindset that looks at skills in a completely binary fashion.

The gender-based binary in skills training is an issue that needs to be better challenged. Almost all the government training institutes as well as the NGOs that I reviewed seem to be conscious of this reality, but the social, political and economic forces seem too powerful and all-pervading for them to deal with on their own without wider support. Most NGOs and institutions have tried to break at least some of the stereotypes as well as the gender divisions in skills acquisition and training, with mixed success. Although the earlier attempts encountered difficult moments and several had to be given up, the more recent initiatives have had more positive experiences. These could mean that society is more ready for such experiments and changes and may herald a greater acceptance of women breaking glass walls and ceilings.

According to Fr. Joseph Stanley of Skills in Progress, a large association of about 200 skills-training institutes that offer government-recognized two-year intensive courses, "Girls

are more into short-term non-technical courses, like fashion designing or beautician courses, because being able to give the two-year commitment at that age is difficult for them. But things are changing. There is a definite shift in the mindsets. Some girls do come for automobile or fitter courses, too."⁶⁷

Although more girls have been trained than boys at the DSK residential center in Ahmedabad, the rate of completion for each course is almost the same (as many girls as boys completed the course in the same time). There is a gendered segregation in the courses that girls and boys opt for: No girls have ever enrolled in auto mechanic, construction, fabrication or machinist courses, for example, while more than 250 boys have enrolled in the auto mechanic course. Fewer than 10 girls have enrolled in the electrician, furniture making, motor rewinding and men's tailoring courses. The same is true for boys in the bakery, cooking, beautician, embroidery and ladies' tailoring courses. In the driving course, 411 boys have enrolled (with 378 of them completing it), while only 17 girls have enrolled (only 15 have completed it). For mobile phone repair, 241 boys have enrolled (with 186 completing it), but only 15 girls have enrolled (and 11 have completed it). For the photography and videography course, 232 boys have enrolled (and 198 have completed it), while 42 girls have enrolled (and 37 have completed it).

Courses that attract large numbers of girls and boys are computer basics, computer tally, secretarial and tailoring. Surprisingly, for spoken English, fewer boys (28) than girls (67) have enrolled, though there seems to be a larger number of drop-outs among girls – one boy did not attend the course after enrolling, while 23 girls did not attend or dropped out.

As expected, many girls have enrolled in the blouse-tailoring course – at 2,119 girls, which is the largest number of girls in any course and accounts for almost half of the total girls' enrollment. Even within tailoring, nine girls have enrolled for industrial tailoring, which is supposed to be heavier work, and only six girls have completed the course, while 116 boys have enrolled and 105 boys have completed it. A possible reason for the gender-segregated choices of girls could be that most of them come from rural Gujarat, where the options for non-traditional livelihoods are limited.

Another likely factor for girls not enrolling in large numbers in courses like driving, photography, videography and machinist could be the more intensive use of technology and/or the need for more expensive equipment. These skills may be perceived to be more related to self-employment rather

⁶⁷ Telephone conversation with Fr. Joseph Stanley, 16 Apr. 2016.

An Exploratory Review of Skills-Building Initiatives in India and Their Relation to Women's and Girls' Empowerment

than employment. This would mean the need for personal investment, which parents may be less able or willing to undertake, especially for daughters rather than sons. While tailoring may seem more manageable in terms of less investment and less risks because women are traditionally associated with tailoring, there seems to be no risks in terms of social acceptability as well.

DOMESTIC RESPONSIBILITIES AFFECT TRAINING CHOICES

Despite the growth in confidence, women's skills building and the process of empowerment as a whole are seriously hampered by the household chores that young women must continue managing, according to Ganguly, the skills-training expert. Training, she said, consumes a great deal of women's time, energy and mental space. She often suggests to women

TABLE 2

NUMBER OF BOYS AND GIRLS IN DSK COURSES, 2000–2015

NO.	COURSE	MALE ENROLLED	MALE COMPLETED	FEMALE ENROLLED	FEMALE COMPLETED
1	Auto Mechanic	270	254	0	0
2	Bakery and Cooking	0	0	5	5
3	Bandhkam (construction)	13	13	0	0
4	Beautician	4	2	308	249
5	Computer Basic	328	290	375	310
6	Computer Tally	54	50	51	42
7	Driving	411	378	17	15
8	Electrician	210	174	1	1
9	Embroidery	1	1	26	23
10	Fabrication	60	54	0	0
11	Furniture	236	197	4	4
12	Micro Concrete Roofing	26	25	0	0
13	Machinist	114	105	0	0
14	Mobile Phone Repair	241	186	15	11
15	Motor Rewinding	199	182	2	1
16	Photography and Videography	232	198	42	37
17	Police and Security	239	184	50	43
18	Screen Printing	1	1	1	1
19	Secretarial	28	27	32	30
20	Spoken English	28	28	67	44
21	Teacher Training and Leadership	51	50	28	26
22	Tailoring Blouse and Advance	65	59	2,119	1,881
23	Tailoring Dress and Advance and Top	57	57	862	770
24	Tailoring Gents	171	162	1	1
25	Tailoring Ladies	3	3	351	345
26	Tailoring Ladies and Gents	167	165	175	175
27	Tailoring Industrial	116	105	9	6
28	Tailoring Pant and Advance	216	184	9	6
29	Tailoring Shirt and Advance	103	91	10	5
30	Textile Designing	55	41	74	63
Total		3,699	3,265	4,634	4,094
Percentage			90.54		89.96

An Exploratory Review of Skills-Building Initiatives in India and Their Relation to Women's and Girls' Empowerment

that they buy a pressure cooker with their first earnings and convince younger men, like a brother, son or brother-in-law, to share the household work. Unless the women are able to negotiate some of these issues with their family, they have no choice but to “prefer” work, occupations and skills that allow them to be around home, where they can switch flexibly between household work and paid work.

Some women can negotiate the resources needed to reduce some of their burdens. “I used to spend a lot of time when I went back home washing everybody’s clothes. My family could not think of [buying] a washing machine. We come from a very poor economic background. Then I talked with my husband and younger brother-in-law. They began to help in washing clothes. Now, there is talk about buying a washing machine,” said Suvarna,⁶⁸ a driver with Veera Cabs in Mumbai.

DIFFICULTIES FINDING EMPLOYMENT AND ENTREPRENEURIAL EXPERIENCES

Training is a relatively easy task. Getting employers or contractors to give work to trained women is much more difficult. The women who trained as electricians in the YWCA courses in the 1980s and as auto mechanics in the Vimochana trainings in the early 2000s initially experienced this. The difficulties may be slightly less now, but they continue. When Archana Women’s Centre trained women masons, they also had their own construction projects. The women thus were put to work promptly after training, which built up their confidence as well as their image as good masons in the labor market. That is not a situation that is easy to come by, however.

In rural areas, especially agriculture-dominated areas, there seems to be even fewer opportunities for women to train in newer skill domains. For example, the Rural Agency for Social and Technological Advancement NGO in hilly Wayanad District in Kerala State arranged for one Dalit young woman and one adivasi young woman to be trained as solar panel engineers. The two young women were sent to the Barefoot College in Rajasthan State, about 2,400 km from their home for six months. They had never spoken Hindi, had lived in a cold climate and eaten totally different kinds of food. They took up the challenge, and when they returned they brought light to their villages. But they remain the only two young women able to train in this capacity. The terrain of the area is so difficult that even after working hard and walking and climbing large tracts, they are barely able to make 250 rupees a

day. Resources for such ventures continue to be a major issue. Young girls as well women are prepared to face the challenges if support exists in terms of different types of resources, including some level of exposure to the possibilities of training in a range of skills.

Because of the large number of youth that DSK trains, I travelled to rural Panchmahal District (where a large adivasi population lives) in Gujarat State to learn more about the impact of skills training in terms of livelihoods as well as empowerment. Most of the youth from this area who had trained with DSK came from households that owned small plots of land, which allowed them to grow corn and wheat. This year, however, had been one of the worst in terms of rain, and there was much less water for irrigation in the adivasi areas than in previous years. Yet, there seemed to be fairly decent quantities of grain in each house I visited. Several households also had cows, buffalo, goats and poultry.

All the former DSK students from this area had taken different types of tailoring courses for women and men. In Panchmahal, which has one of the largest contingents of DSK students, there are around 1,000 tailoring shops run by former DSK students.⁶⁹ I visited several shops located on the main road. They were brimming with women’s stitched clothes, mainly blouses. The women I met with said they made between 5,000 rupees and 10,000 rupees per month, an amount that increased drastically during festivals and marriage ceremonies. Because everyone I met had a fair amount of land that gave them their basic food, they thought their earnings from their shop were good.

One of the more enterprising women, Savitri,⁷⁰ had even started a tailoring training center in her house with 10 sewing machines. “The DSK experience was very good. It helped me a great deal,” Savitri praised. “But DSK is very far, and most girls who would like to be trained cannot go there. Many parents will not send them. So I thought, why not start a training center that can cater to the girls nearby. Some of the girls do ‘up-down’ – they go home every day and come in the morning. But four of my students [are from far away] so I asked them to stay here. They help in the housework. They are my responsibility. So they have to follow all the rules. The rules are like in DSK: No bad habits, no mobile phone use, no going out. Right now I am not able to make much money. I charge them 5,000 rupees for a two and a half months of

68 Not her real name.

69 Discussions with Martin Macwan, 23 Feb. 2016 and 6 Apr. 2016.

70 Not her real name.

An Exploratory Review of Skills-Building Initiatives in India and Their Relation to Women's and Girls' Empowerment

training. But once more students enroll, I will make some good money.”⁷¹

According to Induben, the DSK staffer, “Those around Ahmedabad [city] have started photography and videography shops and are making good money. Some have pooled their resources and bought equipment worth over [100,000 rupees] and are doing wedding videos as well as editing of [photo] shoots. There are also beauty parlors that young women have opened. Young women have also bought land. Many of the students from DSK have begun working in the formal sector, in garment factories in Ahmedabad. Arvind Mills, for example, pays about 10,000 rupees for beginners, plus [the provident fund] and gratuity [retirement payment].”⁷²

In an Aajeevika Bureau leaflet of success stories, 18-year-old Asha Salvi describes what she has achieved because of her beautician course (in 2012). Asha used to help her mother with the housework; the only income-earning member in her family was her father, who had to migrate to Gujarat State for work. After the course, Asha opened a beauty parlor in her village. Within a year, she had clients from surrounding villages. Now she earns 3,000 rupees a month. Her father is proud of her and says, “The sort of support my daughter has given the family, she is no less than a son.”

Saraswati, also 18 years old, also started a beauty parlor in her house after completing the STEP course in 2012. She earns 4,000 rupees per month. The family is now relatively better off and her father, who migrates to other states for work, feels less financial pressure.

EMPLOYERS AND TRAINING INSTITUTIONS REINFORCE BIASES IN SKILLS TRAINING

As Ganguly, the skills training expert noted, “Most schemes are not based on real needs, capacities and situations of women. Also, the approach is very top-down. Often the training design as well as the philosophy behind the design is very hierarchical and allows little space for equality or shared learning. In the field of non-traditional livelihoods or training in non-traditional skills, the patriarchal binary of ‘men’s work’ and ‘women’s work’ is a major tool for training institutes (and thus society) to control women and make them feel less confident.”

Whether in co-educational skills-training institutions or in segregated ones, a recurring theme in the research for this review was the practice of denying women skills that seem

remote from those perceived to be required (to do domestic tasks, for example), those that are of high value in the labor market and those that pay well. It may be a vicious circle as well, with employers reinforcing this binary and the skills-training institutions reproducing it.

The lack of response from employers in terms of hiring women and the inability of institutions to lobby for women to be trained and employed in areas of work hitherto closed to them remain major challenges to the whole point of expanding the skills of girls and women. The reality of fewer jobs being created in the economy and of livelihoods that are threatened or disappearing, especially in the rural economy, exacerbates the situation.

The government and some NGOs do not address overall empowerment issues in their training content. Other NGOs, however, engage with certain issues critically and address the challenge of empowering girls and women in a much more nuanced and holistic manner.

The lack of research into the various needs for trained workers at different levels of the labor force compounds the challenges. At an intuitive level, people involved in training and livelihood issues sense the needs but do not have the data to substantiate it. For example, Vanita Vishwanath, a founding member of Udyogini⁷³ pointed out “nursing and elderly care may be the next important skill needed in society as well as in the market”, although she had no data to back up her assumption.

What is scary is that while skills training seems to be done in a rather random and ad hoc manner, the number of young women and men entering the labor market each year is extremely large. Unless more work is done to better match skills with available opportunities and to create jobs, they will end up filling the unemployed, underemployed or unemployable categories. But it will more likely affect girls and women more than boys and men, given the social, political and economic structures.

SAATH Charitable Trust from Ahmedabad city in Gujarat State, which works with employment and livelihood issues of young people and offers training in plumbing and electrical skills, had conducted a demand-supply survey and analysis of different skills and occupations within a 5 km radius of their work area. But generally speaking, needs assessments and

71 Discussion with Savitri at her home training center, Panchmahal District in Gujarat, 24 Feb. 2016.

72 Discussion with Induben in the DSK office, 23 Feb. 2016.

73 Discussion with Vanita Vishwanath, 15 Mar. 2016.

An Exploratory Review of Skills-Building Initiatives in India and Their Relation to Women's and Girls' Empowerment

market matching at different levels – national, state, local – are not systematically conducted. This could be managed by the government with the help of training institutions and other organizations working on skills-training. NGOs like SAATH have done it, but only as a pilot project to assess the local labor market and to explain to youth wanting employment at wage levels why certain options were far from the reality of their skills and qualifications. The young women in rural Udaipur District who had done a beautician course through Aajeevika Bureau were confident that a local needs assessment is not difficult if done systematically and designed well. There is need for an institution to keep tabs on and update different types of labor markets. And it might be worthwhile to invest in building up the capacities of NGOs and skills-training institutions in market needs assessment of different skills and services.

It is interesting to see that many more NGOs and women have taken inspiration from initiatives like Azad Foundation and have begun to venture into the transport sector, a hitherto male bastion. Samaan, an organization in Indore, Madhya Pradesh State, recently began training women cab drivers, and Humsafar in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh State, began training women with e-rickshaws that run on electricity. Radhika, a Gond adivasi girl from Bhopal State, decided to brave opposition from her family and go to far-away Jaipur in Rajasthan State to train as a cab driver.

It has not been an easy path for any of these organizations or for the women who have engaged with them. Women have been denied permission to enroll in training. Some have been stopped midway in their training; some have been forced to quit after having begun to work as a cab driver. One of the factors why women and the NGOs continue with the skills training is their only choice is between continuing with the new training and the new work with relatively better earnings or making do with very little with their previous skills.

The determination of the teenage girl masons in rural Udaipur District to excel with the new skill they were learning was a definite indicator of their self-confidence and trust in their own dreams. “We will be masons. We will work as masons; we are prepared to wear pants, jeans, shirts. We will not stop till we get as much as the male masons,” one young woman told me defiantly. The women who had trained in other trades were also confident. “We are prepared to try out new things, new skills and new avenues of employment and self-employment,” another one of them declared.

And as Suvarna from Veera Cabs in Mumbai added, “I always wanted to learn driving. I would even dream of what uniform I would wear. Coming from a very poor, almost destitute



Three young women training to be masons in rural Udaipur District, Rajasthan State

family, I thought my dream would remain only a dream. I know so many women who will give up anything to be able to do their dream job.”

We all know that empowerment is a complicated process and has many zigzag pathways. Yet, skills acquisition and training that captures the imagination of girls and that shows them some way toward greater autonomy does seem to make girls and women want to try newer arenas of self-realization and self-development. The socio-political and economic situations globally and in India have dampened these aspirations. The scene is one in which a few girls and women fight their way through the dark fog that threatens their dreams and aspirations. But a rather large proportion of young girls and women, especially from underprivileged backgrounds, are left by the wayside, looking at the bullet train of progress and development that rushes off at great speed without so much as a backward glance at who is not on it.

The challenge is to comprehend the complicated and ever-unfolding global scenario in terms of skills and employment while pushing for greater opportunities for young women entering the workforce. Equal content across ITI facilities is only one small part of it. There is great need to make new skills training, employment and livelihood opportunities accessible to girls and women.

These stories of training or trained girls and women are inspiring, reflecting how, in spite of all odds against them, they have begged, cajoled, convinced, blackmailed, negotiated, bargained, rebelled and defied their parents, their families, their community and society at large to grab a piece of the world hitherto denied to them. It is a piece they are determined to hold onto.



RECOMMENDATIONS

FURTHER RESEARCH

The insights that the review achieved in a short time delivered led to many new questions that call for more in-depth research. It is necessary, for instance, to look at urban and rural training facilities differently in terms of what skills should be included in training programs. In urban areas, there are more avenues for employment and work and hence for skills training and acquisition, like security guards, salespersons in malls or as care-giving assistants. In rural areas, most avenues are restricted to daily consumption and natural resources, like agriculture, livestock or tailoring.

The informants, other experts and observers interviewed for the review commented on the difference between girls and boys after they get their first job after the skills training. While girls prioritize sending money home, boys first look at their own needs and sometimes also luxuries before sending money to their family. What are the reasons for this? What are the other differences between the girls and boys and the

factors for those difference? How do women and girls look at empowerment in this context? These would be useful questions to pursue in future research.

It is also necessary to explore what is happening to young boys and their seeming lack of interest and initiative in building up their skills, at least when compared with young girls. Is there a difference in the confidence and bargaining power of girls and women who have pursued non-traditional skills and livelihood options? Often, non-traditional skills make it possible to obtain better wages or remuneration. That itself may give girls and women a greater say in the family and in terms of the choices they make in their own lives.

An important related theme for research would be the changing dreams and aspirations of young women entering the labor market.

What about girls and women who have no option but to enter traditional avenues of skills and employment but

An Exploratory Review of Skills-Building Initiatives in India and Their Relation to Women's and Girls' Empowerment

who are able to earn money and have a say in decision-making in the family? Some of them look at these jobs and the wages they earn as a way of buying their much-sought-for freedom, especially women in small towns.

More research is needed to look at what exactly training has meant for girls and women in terms of their abilities and the possibility of making decisions about their life, their role and status in the family, how they see their future and so on.

What role does life-skills training have in this process of empowerment? Women's organizations and NGOs invest a great deal of time, effort and resources on training that equip girls and women with critical thinking, self-defense and communication skills. How this impacts on women's empowerment is something that would be interesting to assess and might help indicate the emphasis that organizations and institutions can put on this aspect of training.

Another related recommendation would be a longer-term study that looks at the connections between life skills training, technical training and changes in attitudes and perspectives of women. This would enable organizations and institutions to better design their life skills training as well as their training content.

ACTION POINTS

It is necessary to invest in institutions and organizations that are keen to innovate and explore new avenues in the labor market.

It would also be worthwhile to invest in building up the capacities of NGOs and skills-training institutions to conduct market-needs assessments for different skills and services.

It would be interesting and useful to look at a few sectors in greater depth to see what are the new or non-traditional skills within the "sunrise" industries and which ones would empower girls and women.

Following the agriculture sector, the construction sector employs the next-largest number of women workers in India. By and large, women are unskilled workers and remain unskilled till the end of their work life. Yet, men can train periodically and systematically upgrade their construction skills to graduate as masons, supervisors and contractors. Building trades, including masonry, are important skills that women's organizations and NGOs consider as empowering for women. More opportunities should be made available to women in the construction sector. This would involve

skills training in all the building trades, including masonry, plumbing, carpentry, brick making, electricity-related trades and metal-related trades.

Another industry with great potential for women is transportation. Making more opportunities available for women would involve offering training in the mechanic-related trades, motor and automobile-related trades as well as driving skills.

Another sunrise occupation is that of care-giving assistance. While this is much less non-traditional than the building and transportation industries, the need for this work and the related skills are likely to increase in the coming years. This could span from the care and teaching of special-needs children to elderly care, nursing, physical therapy and companionship.

Industries or trades that traditionally have excluded girls and women should be targeted, such as the automobile sector or other engineering industries that are better paying, and training opportunities should build up a related skill set, followed by work or employment opportunities. Organizations or institutions that provide skills training should then look at any pilot projects to learn from them and strategize for their inclusion in the trades they cover.

The reach of the government is vast and should be further explored to see how government institutions and policies can be leveraged to have maximum impact on the empowerment of girls and women through the provision of skills-training opportunities it makes possible for them. Hence, it is expedient to engage with the official training system more strategically, possibly in cooperation with other like-minded agencies.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The entire period of research, especially the seven weeks of field work, was an intense experience in which I met several hundred people who are passionate about new directions and new horizons in women's lives through education, skills and livelihoods.

I would like to thank the women trainees of the different organizations I visited – Aajeevika Bureau, Azad Foundation, Dalit Shakti Kendra, ETASHA, Jijabai Women's ITI, Siri Fort, ITC of Sharadashram Vidya Mandir and Vidyut Sahayaks of Mahatransco. I also am thankful to the activists, friends and personnel working in these organizations for facilitating the visits and the conversations with the trainees and women graduates.

Thanks also to experts in the fields of skills training, education, employment and livelihoods. Some of these experts include Aaloka Kanhere, Anita Borkar, Dolon Ganguly, Donna Fernandes, Fr. Joseph Stanley, Kamal Bhasin, Madhavan, Martin Macwan, Meenakshi Nayar, Meenu Vadera, Namita Gautam, Nilanjana Sengupta, Mr Patil, Rajesh Walawalkar, Rajiv Khandelwal, Sanjeev Chittora, Siddharth Chaturvedi, Sumedha Sharma and Vijay Kumar.

The workshop organized by Azad Foundation on non-traditional livelihoods gave me opportunity to meet many more projects, organizations and individuals involved in training for livelihoods, specifically non-traditional livelihoods. I met organizations like RASTA from Kerala, Archana Women's Centre from Kerala, SAATH Charitable Trust from Gujarat, Humsafar from Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh State, Samaan from Indore, Madhya Pradesh State, Jabala from West Bengal State, Gender Park from Kerala State and Self-Reliant Initiatives through Joint Action, which works in rural areas in 15 districts of five states. I learned a great deal from the three days with them all.

I would last like to thank the American Jewish World Service for commissioning this short review and especially Manjima, who discussed ideas and prodded me along in my meanderings through this research.

Sujata Gothoskar
2016

APPENDIX I: ORGANIZATIONS COVERED BY THE REVIEW

ORGANIZATION	MAIN FEATURES
Azad Foundation	Women, poor, NGO, non-traditional, urban, North (also East)
ETASHA	Mixed, poor, NGO, mixed, urban, North (also East and South)
Navsarjan and Dalit Shakti Kendra	Mixed, poor, Dalits, NGO, rural, West
Vidyut Sahayaks	Women, poor, government, semi-rural, West
Sharadashram ITC	Private, poor and lower middle class, mixed
Aajeevika Bureau	Mixed, poor, NGO, also works with government schemes, North
Jijabai Women's ITI, Siri Fort	Women, poor and lower middle class, government, North

Interviews and group discussion break down with each organization

STATE, CITY AND VILLAGE	ORGANIZATION, TYPE AND LOCATION	INTERVIEWS	GROUP DISCUSSIONS	NO. OF WOMEN IN THE GROUP DISCUSSION
Delhi	Azad Foundation; NGO; urban	7	None	None
Delhi	ETASHA; NGO; urban	2	1	7
Delhi	Women's ITI; Government ITI; urban	6	2	6 each
Gujarat, Ahmedabad	Dalit Shakti Kendra, NGO, urban	3	None	None
Gujarat, Panchmahals	Dalit Shakti Kendra, NGO; rural	9	3	4 each
Rajasthan, Udaipur	Aajeevika Bureau, NGO; urban	3	None	None
Rajasthan,	Ajeevika Bureau, NGO; rural		2	11 and 4
Rajasthan	Ajeevika Bureau, NGO; rural	3	None	None
Maharashtra, Nashik	Mahatransco, Government; Department; urban	3	None	None
Maharashtra, Mumbai	Sharadashram Technical School, Private ITC; urban	5	1	3
Madhya Pradesh, Bhilkheda	Muskaan, NGO; semi-rural		1	14

APPENDIX II: INTERVIEW AND GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDES

Question guide for young people who are in or have completed a training program

- What is your education level?
- What education did you pursue after training – correspondence, etc.?
- How many family or household members do you live with?
- How did you know about this training?
- How long have you been doing this work?
- How did you feel what did you experience when you first began the training and the work?
- Any unique experiences you will always remember? – police, accidents, clients, any other?
- Any recent experiences?
- What challenges have you faced?
- How do you or did you deal with these issues or challenges?
- How did you feel initially?
- How do you feel now?
- Pressure to marry?
- How do you deal with it?
- If not married, is it by choice?
- Why?
- When you started training, were you married?
- How did you come to the decision to do this training?
- Whose decision was it?
- What were the discussions in the house about this training?
- What did your family members feel initially?
- What do they feel now?
- What say did you have in decision-making before?
- What say do you have now? On financial issues for example? On other domestic issues? Children's and/or siblings' education? Marriage of siblings?
- Savings?
- Are there any plans for savings? Like buying a house? Further education?
- Discussions around:
 - dowry
 - men-women wage and other differences
 - caste
 - general situation.

Additional question guide for interviewer

- What do your parents do (what is the socio-economic class of a girl or woman)?
- What were your aspirations and dreams in terms of your future when you were growing up?
- What were the challenges you faced?
- How did you face those challenges?
- What were the tools you used?
- What were the skills you learned in the process?
- How do you evaluate your achievements, compared with your dreams or aspirations?
- What do you attribute that to?
- What role did the particular skills training have in your life?
- What does that particular skill imply in society today, especially for women?
- What would you do differently if given a chance?
- Do you know of other women who have acquired new skills and gone ahead in life? Can you give me some details about them?

Question guide for interviews with people running an institution or training program

- Why did you think of these particular skillsets?
- How do you choose or screen trainees?
- What were the challenges you and your organization have to face to get people to accept your ideas?
- At the organizational level, what did you have to do?
- Details of the contents of the training
- Success stories
- Failure stories
- If there is sudden opposition from the family members of the trainees, how do you deal with that?
- Regular counseling?
- Any grievance mechanisms?
- Financial viability?
- What is the business model, if any?
- If the project self-sufficient? Replicability?
- Fee structure? Donations?
- Turnover of trainees?
- Regular skill update?
- Sort of support in terms of other decisions in the lives of the women?

ABBREVIATIONS AND GLOSSARY

Aadhar card – This is a card issued by the Unique Identification Authority of India. Each card has a number and enables a person to access government schemes.

aadivasis – indigenous people

aanganwadi – A space run by the government for children of poor and marginalized families who are younger than 6 years. This is part of a government of India scheme called Integrated Child Development Scheme. Two local women are employed in each of the *aanganwadi*.

AWC – Archana Women's Centre, a NGO based in Kerala

Balmiki – a caste among the Scheduled Castes who have been sweepers.

Barefoot College – The Social Work and Research Centre, widely known as the Barefoot College, is a voluntary organization working in the fields of education, skill development, health, drinking water, women empowerment and electrification through solar power for the uplifting of rural people and founded in 1972.

Dalit – a term chosen by a population among the organized Scheduled Castes facing caste-based discrimination in society

Dalit Shakti Kendra – Dalit Empowerment Centre

DDU-GKY – Deen Dayal Upadhyaya – Grameen Kaushalya Yojana – a government scheme for skills training of rural youth

ETASHA – Enabling and Training Adolescents for a Successful and Healthy Adulthood, an NGO involved in skills training

HUDCO-Kudumbasree – A joint venture of Housing and Urban Development Corporation and a state-level nodal agency for addressing urban poverty

Humsafar – a NGO from Lucknow that provides rickshaws that run on electricity

ITI – Industrial Training Institute

Jaatav – a caste among the organized Scheduled Castes

Janvikas – Development of People, an NGO

Mahila Vidyut Sahayak – Electricity women technicians for maintenance of transmission lines.

NGO – non-government organization

RASTA – Rural Agency for Social and Technological Advancement, an NGO in hilly Wayanad District, Kerala State

SAATH Charitable Trust – an NGO from Ahmedabad

Safai karmacharis – Workers whose work is to sweep and clean

sakhi – female friend

An Exploratory Review of Skills-Building Initiatives in India and Their Relation to Women's and Girls' Empowerment

salwar kameez – attire commonly worn by women and girls in many parts of India comprising tunic and loose trousers

SAMAAN – a NGO based in central India

saris – an Indian garment worn by women that is draped around the body

SEWA – Self-Employed Women's Association

SEWA Shakti Kendras – SEWA Empowerment Centers

STEM – Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

STEP – Skill Training, Employability and Placement Academy of the Aajeevika Bureau in Udaipur, Rajasthan

tiffin service – service providing snacks and lunch, often home-cooked

Udyogini – a venture that works with poor marginalized women

YWCA – Young Women's Christian Association
