

# Gender and Economic Policy Discussion Forum

## Empowering Women through Skill Development - Challenges and Opportunities<sup>1</sup>

FORUM II | 24 APRIL 2012

BRIEFING NOTE 2

### HIGHLIGHTS/ KEY POINTS

There is a need to

- Further develop HRD and training policy from a gender perspective, with an understanding of local customs and traditions.
- Make one ministry responsible for the entire national skill development system.
- Revisit the Apprenticeship Act of 1961, to update it according to the changed market scenario.
- Upgrade the craftsmen training scheme to offer training in trades relevant for the modern day employment requirements.
- Further expand training institutes mainly in the remote regions of the country and to build basic gender specific infrastructure, making ITIs more accessible, particularly for women.
- Make the private sector also responsible for skill development in the country. By encouraging their contribution in curriculum development, provision of training and internships, and in assessment and the certification of training programmes.
- Provide employment opportunities to trainees after the completion of training to assure sustainable livelihood options.

### Skill Development and Women Workers in India: a brief overview

The 11th five year plan (2007-12) has recognized India's massive need to skill millions of formal and informal workers in the next ten years. In response, the government developed an ambitious scheme "of increasing the proportion of formal and informal skilled workers in its total workforce from a mere 2% now to 50% by 2022, thus creating a 500 million strong resource pool."<sup>2</sup> Women form a significant proportion of this work force in India, however, they are largely concentrated in the informal sector, engaged in vocations characterized by low earning, low productivity, poor working conditions and lack of social protection.<sup>3</sup> The following table presents the current scenario of women workforce in India, one can clearly observe the huge concentration of female workforce in favor of the informal sector. Furthermore, Table 2 presents the percentage of skilled women and men in rural and urban areas in terms of marketable skills. Both, women and men, whether urban or rural, are majorly unskilled compared to having some skills. There are higher number of unskilled workers in rural than in urban areas, and more number of women do not have any skills, compared to men with no skills. The table reflects the urgent need that prompted the government to take serious note of this dire situation in training and skill education.

**Table 1: Female Workforce in India (Nos. in Million)**

Female Workforce in India	148
Female Workforce in Informal Sector	135
Female Workforce in Formal Sector	13
Fresh Women Workforce added to Labour	
Market every year in informal Sector	3.5
Fresh Women Workforce added to Labour	
market in formal sector	0.2

Source: Dilip Chenoy, op.cit<sup>4</sup>

right from the access to and the availability of education and training, to the conduct of training programmes. Low social value is attached to girl's education, and as they are considered secondary income earners, lower importance is given to training of girls for employment. The gender roles defined for women, expect them to primarily devote their time to household chores and child rearing, while time devoted to skill training and economic activities is conditional and limited.<sup>7</sup> Hence, a sustainable skill development programme would aim to take on board, both women's as well as men's concerns and experiences. These should form an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and the programmes on

**Table 2: Distribution of Persons with Marketable Skills (figures in percentage)**

Skill Status	Rural		Urban	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
No Skill	89.9	93.7	80.4	88.8
Some Skill	10.1	6.3	19.6	11.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Sample Size	183464	172835	109067	99283

Source: Amit Mitra, op.cit<sup>6</sup>

It is to be noted that, "the wages of workers with qualifications beyond primary school have grown far more rapidly than those of workers with primary school or less; the greatest increases being for workers with tertiary qualifications. This movement in wages shows that education and skill acquisition are important determinants of job prospects."<sup>5</sup> Close to 90 percent workers in India engage in informal work associated with low productivity. Provision of modern skill training programmes may substantially help in increasing the productivity of this workforce. Moreover, the figures in the table suggest the need for research into the prevailing conditions that have led to the failure of the existing training and skill development initiatives of the government. It demands action in the form of policy change, and local level initiatives and building of institutes that are sensitive to the needs and work conditions experienced by women and men separately.

However, it is to be noted that the initiatives required to skill the workforce, cannot be assumed to be the same for both men and women, as women and men face very different social and economic circumstances in India. Gender differences abound

skill training and development. The key strategy for women's empowerment and gender equality is to combine policy and institutions at the local level.<sup>8</sup>

The National Skill Development Mission, headed by the Prime Minister, was launched in 2008, and a Co-ordinated Action Plan for Skill Development was formulated with a three tier structure that includes, (a) the Prime Minister's National Council on Skill Development, as the apex body for advice on policy and interventions, (b) the Skill Development Co-ordination Board to device detailed strategies, guidelines and instructions based on the advice of the council, and (c) the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), a non-profit company registered under the Companies Act of 1956. The role of the corporation is to identify the full range of skill development needs, develop processes with special emphasis on excellent standards and certifications, training of trainers, and proper delivery of training. Historically, vocational training has been primarily coordinated by Directorate General of Employment and Training (DGET) under Ministry of Labour and Employment (MOLE), Government of India;<sup>9</sup> while technical training falls under the

Ministry of Human Resource Development. "The main objective of vocational education and training (VET) is to furnish the technical and management skills and help develop appropriate attitudes for specific occupations and jobs."<sup>10</sup> However, this traditional objective is being widened now to include

approaches and interventions that promote capacity building and empowerment, and not just training per se. The present focus is to develop and achieve sustainable improvements in the livelihoods of the poor.<sup>11</sup>

## Key Issues and Challenges in Brief

As noted earlier, the aim of skill development, particularly in case of women, is not merely to prepare them for jobs, but also to improve the performance of women workers by enhancing the quality of work in which they are engaged. The NSDC has identified a few of the major challenges, which need to be addressed for building a conducive ecosystem, of skill development for the women workforce. These are as follows, "(i) the large number of women who need to be trained since currently only 2% of the female workforce is formally trained, (ii) inadequacies in the quality and relevance of TVET (technical and vocational employment training in India), (iii) inadequate Infrastructure, acute shortage of trained women workers, poor quality of training, (iv) lack of mechanisms to judge and certify quality, (v) inequity in access to TVET for women (vi) low level of education of potential women trainees that limits training of women in the formal sector, (vii) lack of recognition of prior learning of potential women trainees (viii) relatively high opportunity cost of learning involved for training women."<sup>12</sup> The major challenges noted here are few in number but represent a complexity of issues involved

Additionally, it is argued that the empowerment practice has to go beyond its focus on women to gender. A focus on gender would imply an emphasis on strategic needs such as leadership and advocacy, rather than a simple focus on basic needs. The concept of gender will also, encourage an understanding and an analysis of power relations, and enforces the idea of developing capabilities rather than simply skills.<sup>13</sup>

Another important point that cannot be left out is the potential advantage of "demographic dividend" that India has over many other countries.<sup>14</sup> "The demographic dividend arises as an asset for India due to expected decline in dependency ratio in the country. The dependency ratio (ratio of

dependent to working age population) of India has declined from 0.8 in 1991 to 0.73 in 2001, and is expected to further decline to 0.59 by 2011. Low dependency ratio gives India a cost advantage and helps in improving India's competitiveness."<sup>15</sup> This demographic dividend is expected to last until around 2035.<sup>16</sup> Hence, India has to act now and get the training and skill development right to benefit from this demographic dividend, to create a global pool of skilled persons. However, if the demographic dividend is not turned into an opportunity now, and if India fails to deliver, this demographic dividend in about 25 years may actually become a handicap.

Besides the demographic dividend, another factor that adds to the urgency for improved skill development is the increasing number of newly educated youth, especially women, who would like to seek employment in the service sector. The education and skill development sector has not adequately responded to this emerging need, making it imperative to provide skill development and training in marketable skills and services.

It is therefore clear, that there is a dire and urgent need for a paradigm shift in the skill development sector, in favor of innovations, improvements and high quality training. It is also observed, that the concept of training and skill development needs to move beyond the conventional goal of imparting technical and managerial competencies, to playing a broader role of even including basic literacy, numeracy, critical social and political awareness, awareness about gender, and enhancing life skills. Such interventions by their nature will encourage higher self esteem among women and overall personality development. It is also urged that for skill development to be more effective, training needs to bend towards developing the kind of skills women and men already know.<sup>17</sup> Or, in other words, the need is to enhance or adapt traditional skills to

aspirational skills.<sup>18</sup> However, focus on upgradation need not be at the cost of developing new skills,

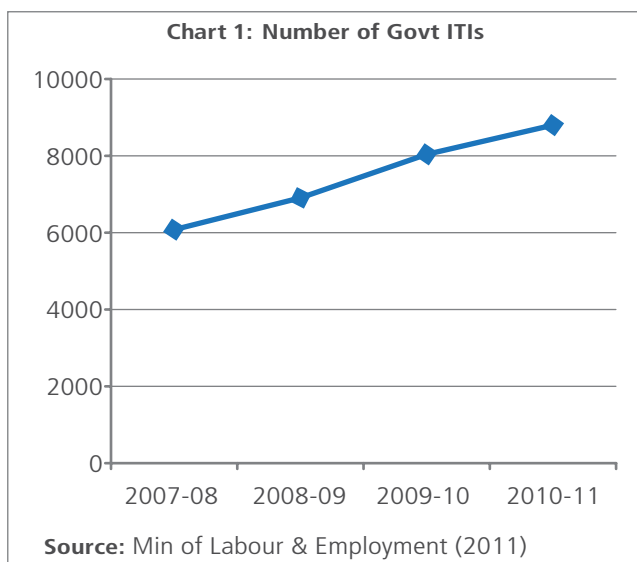
especially in the case of women who otherwise may get further entrenched in traditional skills and roles.

## Suggestions for Improvement and Implications for Change

There are several suggestions and implications for the overall improvement of the TVET and skill development programme in India, with particular focus on concerns related to women's skill development, that were highlighted at the GEPD Forum II.<sup>19</sup> Below are some of the main suggestions, clubbed under the following heads: (A) policy level changes, (B) societal changes (C) local level changes, including changes required in the training institutions (D) M&E.

### A. Policy level changes

- Gender sensitive policy:* There is a need to further develop HRD and training policy from a gender perspective, with an understanding of local customs and traditions. It also implies focus on improvements in access to education and training for girls, including the provision of services, such as transport, hostels, scholarships, and other incentives to encourage women to enroll for education and training.<sup>20</sup> Women are seriously under-represented in many occupations, thus, policies are needed to fight exclusions in the labour market by reducing the incidence of discriminatory practices.
- Skill development programmes to be run by one ministry:* The entire national skill development system should be put under the umbrella of one ministry, rather than running them under the leadership of two key Ministries (MOLE and MHRD) and several other Ministries. This will lead to better focus and coordination between different initiatives.
- Revisiting the Apprenticeship Act:* the government enacted the Apprenticeship Act in 1961 to connect job seekers and industrial units. It made obligatory for employers in specified industries to provide both basic skills and job training according to a certain set of prescribed standards. There is a pressing need for radical improvements in the 1961 Act according to the changed times. The circumstances and challenges faced by youth, particularly women, are very different from what existed in India at the time of formulation of the act. There have been dramatic changes in the employment scenario and the skills required to meet the industrial demand for skilled labour.<sup>21</sup>
- Up gradation of the craftsmen training scheme:* The main institutions under the craftsmen training scheme in India are public Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and private Industrial Training Centers (ITCs). The aim of the ITIs and the ITCs is to provide skilled workers to the informal sector, however, evidence shows that both the institutes have performed poorly on their mandate. ITIs have been criticized for offering training in trades that are out dated and not relevant for the modern day employment requirements. Furthermore, "the share of ITI graduates who entered self employment or became employers was not much greater than 10 per cent while only around 5 per cent of ITC graduates joined the unorganized economy. The main reason is that running a small business requires much more than simply possessing a particular occupational skill. It requires the ability to run a small business, which requires a person to be multi-skilled. This sort of training is not imparted in the ITIs and ITCs."<sup>22</sup>
- Expansion of training institutes and provision of basic infrastructure:* There has been a steady expansion of ITIs in the country as reflected in figure 1, however further expansion is needed mainly in the 'backward' regions of the country. Besides the expansion, it is equally crucial to build basic infrastructure especially in remote areas, making ITIs more accessible, particularly for women.
- Provision of vocational training in schools:*<sup>23</sup> The dropout rate from schools is high usually after the 8th standard. Most often, the drop outs from schools at this stage have very little technical skills, and have no option but to join the informal sector. It is therefore recommended that vocational education be introduced at



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

- Making the private sector responsible for skill development in the country:* Germany has one of the most mature TVET systems in the world, one of the reasons contributing to the country's manufacturing edge over other countries. The key to success of the TVET system in Germany is that it is led by the private sector. Of the total financing for training and skill development in Germany, only 16 percent is borne by the government, while rest of the 84 percent is contributed by the private sector.<sup>24</sup> While in India the ratio of government- private sector contribution in the skill development sector is about the reverse. If India has to benefit from the demographic dividend, the private sector has to take a responsible position in the skill development sector. Two policy level changes that could be undertaken are: (a) As more investments are crucial for skill development sector, one innovation that is suggested for India, is taxing of medium and large industries to contribute to a fund for reinvestments in skill development. Such a provision which is successfully in place in 61 countries, not only substantially supports the skill development efforts of the country, but also helps in meeting the demand for skilled persons from the industry. And (b) Local industry needs to become

members of the governing body of ITI, to guide them about the new and emerging needs of the industry.

## B. Changes at the level of society

- Identifying and making efforts to change basic and nuanced socio-cultural values* with a view to eliminate existing biases that women in the country face when seeking employment. Greater efforts are needed in the form of awareness programmes, counseling of families to assuage their fears with regards to training of women, and investment in personality development of women to be able to analyze and challenge discriminatory practices. It is equally important to recognize the structural changes in the Indian economy and changing gender norms of our society indicating slowly but steadily changing life-style aspirations of youth, both men and women.

## C. Changes at the level of provision of training and skill development

- Gender sensitive training:* women face complex ground realities, including low levels of literacy, discriminatory social customs and traditions, limited hours available for training and work, and limited exposure and unfamiliarity with new technology. Hence, the need to make the skill development process accommodating and flexible to encourage women to enroll.<sup>25</sup> "The training may have to incorporate teaching of basic skills such as numeracy, problem solving, communication, learning to learn, and team work and, other deeply impacting skill such as behavioral skills, including building self-esteem, self-organizational and negotiating capacity for employment purpose. Issues of identity, autonomy, leadership, rights and responsibilities, entrepreneurial and business management skills, increasing awareness on gender are to be relevant issues not only for women but also for men."<sup>26</sup> One method of encouraging participation in skill development is the identification of skills that are already known and up gradation of the same.<sup>27</sup> In case of women, such an approach would increase the acceptability of the training being offered. It is

also equally important to provide training after identification of changing norms and aspirations of women.<sup>28</sup> As noted earlier, to make training programmes actually accessible to women, it would be crucial to provide additional basic services and facilities such as, safe and secure transport, toilets, etc.

- *Accessible and affordable training:* with poor infrastructure, accessibility continues to be a major problem for men and more so for women. It is crucial to build and fund modern institutes of training, which are made easily accessible for women and men by building additional infrastructure for instance in terms of safe and secure roads. To enable and encourage individuals belonging to low income groups to join vocational training programmes, it is important to provide quality training at an affordable cost with the option of availing loans and scholarships.

Additionally, channeling training through the existing local institutions of governance can prove to be very fruitful. Local institutions include the gram panchayats, where women have a stipulated representation of 33 percent seats. Women from the gram panchayat may be assigned the role of identifying the most desired needs of the women in the village.<sup>29</sup>

- *High quality training that matches the changing needs of the market:* one of the main criticism of skill development and training programmes is their inability to match up to the acceptable market standards in terms of the quality and type of skills required. "The relative supply of workers with technical/vocational skills has declined throughout this period while their relative wages have also come down since the early 1990s. This may be due more to the fact that workers with technical/vocational qualifications do not have skills that meet the labour market (often because of the poor quality of training provided) than that there is little demand for skilled workers."<sup>30</sup> It is proposed, that the government ITIs need to be upgraded as Centers of Excellence on an urgent basis.

A decentralization of decision making in the ITI system and, as noted earlier, participation of employers in decision making processes, may help in the absorption of trainees and make the training more responsive to the

needs of local industry. The industries may fill the gap of qualified trainers at the training institutes by providing latter with qualified trainers, instructors and teachers. It further implies that the Industry needs to participate in designing of the curriculum for training in different institutes.<sup>31</sup> However, NSDC has been trying to collaborate with major corporates such as, Bharti, NIIT and even NGOs such as Pratham, to provide training and contribute in developing skill of thousands of individuals.

Besides the already existing apprenticeship system, provision of internship in different industrial sectors is equally important. Furthermore, it is imperative to develop a standard certification system by recognizing and including quality skills acquired through any informal system of learning.<sup>32</sup> Industries could undertake the assessment and the certification of training programmes, which will facilitate placements after the completion of the training course.<sup>33</sup>

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

## D. Monitoring and Evaluation

Enrolment in training and providing employment opportunities alone would not be sufficient. It is crucial to evaluate the progress and the quality of training provided in order to check discrepancies, whether it is between the needs of the trainees and the nature of training provided, or between the kind of skill being imparted and the demand from the local industry. A proper monitoring and evaluation system consistent with gender equality perspective would help in informing corrections needed in time and assure quality of training for sustainable skill development.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>This was the topic of discussion during the second Gender and Economic Policy Discussion (GEPD) Forum, co-organized by Heinrich Boll Stiftung, New Delhi and Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST), New Delhi. Representatives from the skill development sector and the government participated, to analyze the challenges facing skill development programmes in India, and to highlight the specific needs for improvement in favor of the large number of informal workers, especially women. This paper presents the ideas and discussions that took place during the forum, and substantiates these ideas with some relevant data and research available. This paper is not meant to be a comprehensive and exhaustive presentation of the topic. It seeks to contribute to the body of research on the subject by presenting a mix of, academic, private and government experiences. This brief paper is mainly aimed to encourage further dialogue on the subject with a gender sensitive perspective.

<sup>2</sup>King(2012), p 665

<sup>3</sup>As noted by Mr. Dilip Chenoy at the GEPD forum II, April 2012

<sup>4</sup>Cited by Mr Dilip Chenoy, Power point presentation, slide no 5, at GEPD forum II, 2012

<sup>5</sup>Abrahart, A et al. (2008-09), p 107

<sup>6</sup>As cited by, Mr. Chenoy from NSDC, at GEPD forum II, India Habitat Centre, April 2012

<sup>7</sup>As pointed by, Dr. Comyn from ILO, at GEPD forum II, India Habitat Centre, April 2012

<sup>8</sup>Ibid

<sup>9</sup>The most prevalent skill development scheme of DGET is the craftsmen-training scheme under which training is imparted through 1913 Government Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and 3,552 private Industrial Training Centres (ITCs). The total training capacity through ITI/ITCs is nearly 0.75 million (Batra, 2009). The apprenticeship-training scheme for trade apprentices is the other important scheme. According to the DGET (2007), out of the total number of 0.25 million seats for apprenticeship, 0.17 were actually utilized (Ibid). Apart from MOLE, the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), also provides for vocational training to students through secondary schools. Besides the MOLE and the MHRD, the government undertakes a number of other initiatives for skill development, under several other ministries. For a list of skill development and training programmes under different ministries, refer to Mukerji, S & Tripathi, P. available at [http://wikieducator.org/images/f/f1/Siran\\_Mukerji.pdf](http://wikieducator.org/images/f/f1/Siran_Mukerji.pdf)

<sup>10</sup>Bennell (1999), p 10

<sup>11</sup>Bennell (1999)

<sup>12</sup>Chenoy, D. (2012) Power point presentation at the GEPD forum II, slide no 7

<sup>13</sup>Viswanatha, V. (2012) Power point presentation at the GEPD forum II, slide no 2

<sup>14</sup>Santosh Mehrotra at the GEPD forum II

<sup>15</sup>Batra (2009), p 351

<sup>16</sup>Santosh Mehrotra at the GEPD forum II

<sup>17</sup>According to Mr. Mani Shankar Aiyar, at the GEPD forum II, April 2012.

<sup>18</sup>Vishwanath, V.(2012) Power point presentation at the GEPD forum II, slide no 4

<sup>19</sup>Suggestions presented here, mainly represent the ideas of the speakers at the GEPD forum II. The speakers were a mix of academicians and field practitioners.

<sup>20</sup>Comyn, P. (2012) Power point presentation at the GEPD forum II, slide no 9

<sup>21</sup>As opined by Dr Santosh Mehrotra, Institute of Applied Manpower Research, at GEPD forum II

<sup>22</sup>Abrahart (2009)

<sup>23</sup>Suggested by Santosh Mehrotra, at the GEPD forum II

<sup>24</sup>Ibid

<sup>25</sup>Dilip Chenoy, at GEPD forum II, April 2012

<sup>26</sup>Paul Comyn, at GEPD forum II, April 2012

<sup>27</sup>Mani Shankar Iyer, at GEPD forum II, April 2012

<sup>28</sup>Dr. Vanita Vishwanath, at GEPD forum II, April 2012

<sup>29</sup>Point emphasized by Mani Shankar Aiyar, at the GEPD forum II

<sup>30</sup>Abrahart, A et al. (2008-09), p 107

<sup>31</sup>Point made by Santosh Mehrotra, at the GEPD forum II

<sup>32</sup>MOLE (2011)

<sup>33</sup>Point made by Santosh Mehrotra, at the GEPD forum II

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## Speakers at the Forum

### Keynote speaker

**Mr. Mani Shankar Aiyar**,  
Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha

### Panel

**Mr. Dilip Chenoy**, CEO and MD, National Skill Development Corporation, New Delhi

**Dr. Paul Comyn**, Senior Vocational Training & Skills Development Specialist, Decent Work Team for South Asia, ILO

**Dr. Santosh Mehrotra**, Director-General, Institute of Applied Manpower Research, New Delhi

**Dr. Vanita Viswanath**, CEO, Udyogini, New Delhi

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