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WOMEN'S VIEWS ON TRAINING AND STRATEGIES FOR EMPLOYMENT IN NON-TRADITIONAL TRADES

Introduction

To promote the employment of women and girls, the Employment Fund (EF) in Nepal aims to include women and girls as 50% of its overall clientele each year. With the social perception of women's roles in the family and the community, a large percentage of female participants take training in traditional trades where more than 50% of those working in the trade are women. However, EF encourages women to participate in non-traditional trades where fewer than 50% of the workers are women, in order for women to have an opportunity to earn the higher levels of income and to demonstrate the capabilities of women in society. A study on women in non-traditional trades in 2014 examined the perceptions of women on these trades and the factors that enabled them to continue working (or not) in a trade usually done by men.

Women's views on gender in the training environment

When asked about their impressions of the training, almost 100% of the women respondents said that they were satisfied with the training and that it was a very good experience in their lives, even if they had attended only due to peer pressure. Only three women responded that it had not been a positive experience. Similarly, women said that the biggest benefit from the training was gaining knowledge, perhaps because many of these women had never been to school. It was clear in the discussions that their main motivation for the training was gaining knowledge and the intellectual stimulation rather than the ensuing opportunity for employment.

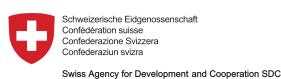
The gender mix in the training and working environment

When asked about the gender mix in classes, every respondent said that she preferred to have other women in the classes. The majority of respondents said that relations with male classmates were usually

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Sharmila Rana took training in mobile phone repair: “My class had a male teacher with 15 women and 5 men in the class. Since there were fewer boys in the class, they did not tease, but I would prefer just women in the class because it is easier to talk about personal issues. I still feel uncomfortable working as a girl alone in the shop when boys come in.”

Kalpana Gurung took training in a traditional trade as a tailor: “I needed a trade that was flexible so that I could take care of my two kids. We had 22 women in the class and both trainers were women. Since the class was all women, we could talk openly about our problems, what was good or bad. I have been interested in this trade for a long time and really wanted to do this work. I can work according to my own needs and wants, on my own time. Everyone is happy.”



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friendly like brothers and sisters. Only two women mentioned problems, which the trainers resolved.

Over 80% of women would have preferred all women classes. Others said that they did like to have some men in class because they would have some skills in the non-traditional trades, like being able to use a screwdriver. The women said that there was a lot of learning that happened among the classmates, which speeded up the learning in the class. Over 80% of women mentioned that they would have liked to have one of the trainers be a woman both to be able to share their personal experiences and as an inspiration that women can do these trades.

Women's strategies for training and the workplace

In the interviews, women mentioned strategies to make working in non-traditional trades more comfortable for them to be able to continue.

- Women trainers as someone whom the women trainees can easily relate to for inspiration
- Companions in training and at work – either other women or family members
- Flexibility in work schedule to accommodate household obligations and family concerns
- Stationary location such as home or shop for the security of the woman and comfort of her family members

Women trainers: Women who had been one of only a few women in their training suggested that having a woman co-trainer in the training would have helped for them to be able to discuss their problems and as an inspiration for them to continue in the work. While most women said that they preferred all women classes, a number said that they liked mixed women and men classes because the men had existing skills, which pushed the women to learn faster and be competitive.

Companionship: Almost all of the women interviewed commented that companionship of other women in the training and the workplace was critical to their continuation the trade. Their strategies included finding ways of working with other women, such as working as a group of two masons and two labourers on construction sites, or having female colleagues working together in a hotel or welding shop. The company of family members was also a strategy. There were three instances where a woman doing well in a trade such as poultry farming or mobile repair had called her husband to return from working abroad to come and help with the business.

Four women respondents worked in trades in which their brothers already had businesses. Two women had convinced their husbands to join them working in a trade after they had started their own enterprises -- a woman in Hetauda who had started a furniture shop and a woman in Mahendranagar who had started a mobile repair shop. Both women took the training first, started their enterprises, and then convinced their husbands to leave other employment to work with them in their shops.

The demonstration effect: Inspiring and training other women: In every trade, women aspired to become a trainer, which they perceived as a safer occupation than working in an open male-dominated shop. As a trainer, they said they could inspire other women. Becoming a trainer would give other options to deal with the uncertainty that would occur after their marriage depending on the reaction of their husband and in-laws to the particular trade. As a trainer, women said that they would be more likely to be able to continue with the trade after marriage. The demonstration effect is seen in the case study below.

Lessons learned

Several lessons were learned about how to help women make themselves more confident in non-traditional trades:

More support for women in self-employment: Since self-employment tended to offer higher income and more flexibility, measures to assist women in establishing their own small enterprises would promote more employment. These measures would include lower interest loans and perhaps even working space in 'women-friendly' workshops, as suggested by the T&Es.

Training for women in family trade: Training women whose families are already involved in specific non-traditional trades would increase the numbers of women working in these trades to help reach a 'tipping point' where the trade would be perceived as being socially acceptable for women.

Facilitation of networks for past trainees: Networking past trainees either through a saving cooperative or other means would build solidarity among the women and they could more readily find women colleagues with whom to engage in the non-traditional trade in a more women-friendly environment.

Refresher training for L1 graduates: With village women who have not had opportunities for secondary education, it is better not to promote trades that require measurements and calculations, which are learned during higher education. Refresher training is especially important in trades where the technology is advancing quickly, such as computer, television, and mobile phone repair.

Bishnu Lamichhane became a widow when her husband was killed working overseas in 2009. "I started to train in furniture making in a class with 5 women and 15 men. The other women dropped out because it was hard. By the end, I was the only woman with 20 men but everyone helped me to learn. Since I have worked here, many women have come and two women who dropped out from the 2011 training came back to ask for training."



Case studies

Women working in non-traditional trades

Babita Nepali trained in aluminium fitting and was initially the only woman in a class of 20. She convinced a woman in another class to join her class so that there were two women and 18 men. "The boys helped me learn and did not try to dominate me at all. The teasing was in a family way and the teacher was very encouraging. I have always been the only woman at the job. We women need to ask ourselves what we would like to do."

Mina Pandey was 32 when she took furniture maker training with 17 women and five men. She bought machines and other equipment from her uncle to open her furniture workshop and asked her husband to join it. Now they have hired another man in their shop. "It would be good if the graduates could start our own cooperatives to save and take loans to start enterprises because the interest rate on loans is very high, making it difficult to pay back the loan."



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Mamta Basti in Bara trained in computer hardware after her 10+2. She has worked for a year for an internet service company. "There were more boys than the girls but there were no cases of harassment during the training. We had a good time teasing each other but it was all in good humour. My girlfriends and I would easily ask our trainer or male friends when in doubt. The male friends were cooperative. In the office, I am the only girl. My co-trainee gave me the job because I am good and competitive. My salary is good at Rs. 7,000 a month and it has increased over my working period. My family is supportive and I give my salary to my mother."



Anita Chaudhary in Kailali had adult education for nine months. Her family are

ex-bonded labourers. She took training to make sweets and snacks. "I sell noodles and snacks from a cart by a bus stop. I took a loan of Rs. 10,000 from a women's group to set up my small business, but paid back the loan in a year. I earn about Rs. 5,000 a month. My husband is supportive. I suggested that he take the EF masonry training so now, he is working. We both make decisions on how to spend the money. As an ex-bonded labourer, I feel my life has changed for better. Before my parents had to work in the landlord's farm but now I can exercise my own decisions in my life."

Gita Kandel was 23 when she took reception and cashier training in 2012 after she completed her schooling. There were 22 women in the training. "The trainer was frank and friendly so we had no problems asking him questions. Now, I work as a cashier in a Finance Company and earn Rs. 12,000 a month. I give most of the money to my parents who are farmers. They are very satisfied because my office is 15 minutes from home and is inside work. It is very important for me to work in a safe working environment."



Lila Chaudhary took mason training three years ago. Her husband is in the village doing farming. She has been living in Dhangadi alone for three years to work. She has five daughters and a grandchild. "There were 15 women and 15 men in the training. Most women who took the training are not working. I send money to the village for my daughters' education. I have not stopped working since the training. People used to tease me about my work but now they understand. Now it has become my habit to do this work. I bring three women from my village to work with me as a team of four women with two masons and two labourers."



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