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HOW TO INCREASE ACCESS OF WOMEN TO EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

AN IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE



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Jobs are important for women and girls because the income they earn garners them respect and the power to make decisions in their families and communities. The income is important for helping families out of poverty. Yet women often face difficulties in accessing the labour market due to a variety of reasons such as lack of education, poor economic condition, family and household responsibilities, and limited technical skills. Challenges also remain for women and girls to overcome the perceptions in many communities about women's roles and the kinds of work that are socially acceptable for women and girls.

The Employment Fund (EF), established under a bilateral agreement signed between the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and Government of Nepal (GoN), is implemented by HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation Nepal. It provides vocational skills training to out-of-school youth, who are poor and socially discriminated. EF has been working in Nepal since 2008, through selected training providers, with an outcome-based financing approach. It has trained close to 100,000 youth, with an average annual coverage rate of 15,000. Out of these trainees, around 50% are women.

Under a contract with the World Bank, EF implemented the Adolescent Girls Employment Initiative (AGEI) from 2010 to 2013, connecting 4,410 young women aged 16 to 24 to skills training. 65% of the graduates were gainfully employed after the training.

EF's experience reveals that women often face difficulties in accessing opportunities in the labour market. They are affected by their lack of education, lack of marketable skills, poor economic condition, household responsibilities, and social restrictions.

Increasing access of women to employment opportunities requires a focus on trades that create opportunities in the market. It also requires tackling their social situations; especially garnering family and community support for their training and eventual employment. Women also have particular requirements that can make it easier for them to access training and employment services such as training organized close to their community, mentorship, childcare facilities, and toilet facilities.

To attract women to EF programs, additional components were introduced. These included a comprehensive communication and outreach strategy, life skills and business skills training, encouraging the training providers to include women in training for non-traditional trades and enhancing qualifications of trainers – specifically women trainers.

Lessons learned during this process inform this "how-to" guide, which serves as a manual on overcoming the barriers women face in accessing the labour market, and ensuring the training they receive results in productive employment opportunities. This manual focuses on the things to keep in mind for programs that aim to achieve employment of women and girls. It is divided into three phases: the pre-training phase, training phase, and the post-training phase.



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PRE-TRAINING PHASE

Before training starts, target groups of women must be identified. Based on an analysis of the local market and the particular characteristics and constraints of the target group, a list of trades to provide training in should be created. Trades that are flexible enough to accommodate a woman's household and child rearing responsibilities are most attractive to women.

Target communities then need to be reached with information about the training programs through a robust communication campaign. Such outreach should include measures to enlist family and community support for the training and employment of potential trainees. Family and community support is especially important for women trainees who are often bound by gender roles and household responsibilities.

If the training is provided through training and employment service providers (T&Es), there must be mandates and incentives for them to include women in the programs. These include a minimum participation rate for women, and higher remuneration per woman trained. It is also important to adjust the eligibility criteria by introducing measures such as an extended age bar, or flexible educational criteria, so that more women are able to participate.

Create a List of Potential Trades

Rapid Market Assessment

It is very important to conduct a market assessment to find out which skills are demanded in the local market where the trainees will eventually end up being employed. EF worked through Training and Employment service providers (T&Es), training them on how to conduct rapid market appraisals (RMAs) before selecting a list of trades for training.

The market also influences potential trainees. In a report commissioned by EF, over 65% of EF graduates reported that the market influenced their choice of skill to be trained in. The report found that this has resulted in an oversupply of certain skills in some geographical regions. This applied to the selection of skills such as tailoring, assistant beauticians, cook and waiters. Thus, it is important to conduct not just an assessment of skills demanded in the market, but also the skills-gap in the market. A skills-gap analysis shows what the skills-sets needed for certain occupations are, and how many new entrants a potential trade can accommodate. This can prevent oversupply of new personnel in any particular occupation.

The RMA should result in a list of trades together with the number of new entrants that the market can absorb in that particular trade. This list of trades can then be used as a reference, which, tallied with other factors such as the woman's current skill level, social situations, and preference can help select a trade for training where she can be sustainably employed.

Details on how to perform a rapid market assessment together with a skills-gap analysis can be found in the EF RMA Manual [[link](#)]

Identify Flexible Trades in Secure Situations

For women, flexible trades in physically secure situations result in sustainable employment. Home-based enterprises are of interest to women because the timing is flexible to fit in with their household obligations and safety concerns. Employment opportunities with flexible working hours or arrangements where women can share the workload with other women are desirable. Part-time work could provide increased flexibility and allow more women to be employed.



Frances Klatzel

Gita Kandel was 23 when she took reception and cashier training in the year 2012. There were 22 women in the training. She is working as a cashier in the finance company where she completed her on-the-job training. She earns Rs. 12,000 a month and most of the money she gives to her parents who are farmers.

She says that it is very important for her to work in a safe working environment. In the future she will only work if the working place is safe.

"My parents are very satisfied because my office is 15 minutes from home and it is easy and inside work," says Gita.

After she marries though, she knows she will have to convince her husband to let her continue.

This is especially important for younger women in their child bearing and raising years. Trades where a woman can work in secure locations, at home or in a shop, should be emphasized. Trades where a woman has to travel long distances alone for work are seen as less safe, and are less likely to result in sustainable employment.

Adjust Eligibility Criteria to Accommodate Women

Introducing an extended age bar or flexible educational criteria for training eligibility will ensure participation of more women, as they are likely to have lower education levels or stayed at home to raise children.

Conduct an Analysis of Local Gender Roles and Issues

Women are often bound by gender roles in their families and communities. Some of the gender barriers they face include:

Restricted Mobility

In some restrictive societies in the southern plains of Nepal (the Terai/Madhesh), women are often confined to the household, and are unable to travel outside of their community for training or work. For instance, numerous proscriptions in Madhesi culture restrict women from leaving their homes to go to work in the bazaar or out in the fields. They are prohibited from interacting with men other than their family members.

During an EF “lessons learned” reporting trip, the first women that the T&Es took the team to interview were two Muslim women living in a small village. They had limited education but had been trained in TV repair. The jobs found for them were in a TV factory an hour walk from their



homes. They were two women working among 200 men. The women had lasted ten days in their jobs. T&Es were of the opinion that it was better to train Madhesi women in trades such as poultry and vegetable growing where they did not have to leave or travel far from their own homes.

Cultural Norms

Cultural norms also do not allow women to perform certain types of work. During the “lessons learned” analysis of EF, it was found that in some conservative Terai districts, women who were trained as barbers were not employed due to cultural prescriptions against touching men. One of the women had started a beauty parlour for women and other women were cutting the hair of children in their village at their homes.

Traditionally “Male” Occupations

To ensure employment and higher incomes for women, EF also worked on training women in traditionally “male” occupations such as electrical wiring, television repair, mobile phone repair, and masonry. Women trained in such non-traditional trades were interviewed to assess the barriers they faced during their training and employment. While there were a few issues during training, the gender issue was often complex for them in the working environment when customers sometimes doubted the skills of the women to perform the “male” work, especially mobile phone, computer, or television repair.

While EF found that there is value in helping women push the barriers of gender roles through gainful employment in traditionally male sectors, pushing too far from the existing gender roles can result in women being unable to find employment, or having to quit.

However, the situation across Nepal is extremely varied even within the Terai and the gender analysis needs to be highly localized. Certain cities such as Hetauda and Butwal are more progressive areas, where it is more socially acceptable for women to be working in a wide variety of trades. A careful assessment of the situation of women in a particular district and locale is important since their situation can vary greatly across the country. A deeper understanding and careful consideration of the social norms in the community and the employment environment is essential for women to be employed sustainably.

The analysis of local gender roles and issues should serve as a guide to help inform the trades to select for women trainees in the area. This should not discourage women from pursuing non-traditional trades, but to provide support to ensure they are adequately prepared for the additional challenges posed by their choice to step outside of traditional gender roles.

Understand the Starting Point and Future Plans of Potential Trainees

Apart from culturally prescribed gender roles, migration, marriage, child bearing, and a change in interest are all factors affecting the employment of women, especially in non-traditional trades. Married women in the villages definitely have the most challenges to engage in non-traditional trades. It is also difficult for women to leave their community and migrate for employment.

Current Skill Level

EF required applicants to provide a detailed history of their background, education, other training received to create a full picture of the trainee’s current starting point. Despite this, during the “lessons learned” research, T&Es brought up the need to understand where the participants are starting from. For example, electrician was a trade which saw a lot of interest from women. However, women who did not understand much English had a difficult time understanding the technical terms. A consultation will help with a better picture of the potential trainee’s current capabilities.



Frances Klatzel

Anjala Shrivastav is employed at Priyank Construction in Hetauda, where she was trained. The owner of the construction company hired five of the trainees based on their merits. Two girls were selected, and Anjala was one of them.

The employer is good, and her male colleagues help both the girls at work. She has full support from her family.

“Without my family support I would not have made it so far. Now I am taken as an example in my family.”

She is satisfied with the work. She is single, but says that this work is practical for married women too, as it does not require much mobility. They can come to the workshop and work from 10 am-5 pm. She is now earning Rs. 8,000 monthly, and is absolutely happy with her work. After going through training and getting this job, her confidence has increased. Because there is another woman working with her, she has no problem working with boys.

Chhatra Bam is the Managing Director of TRACE, a T&E in Kailali: “We need counselling in families for women to work, so we go to homes to convince the families.. We have gradually built the trust in the communities and of the employers. We take time to discuss issues to ease the doubts of the families.”

Namrata Thapa, a T&E Managing Director in Butwal: “It all depends on all family members, the big challenge is to build confidence and motivate the family with counselling. We sometimes bring a psycho-social counsellor to the life skill training to help the women.”

Future Plans

This consultation should also help understand those factors that end up being important in their eventual gainful employment, but are not obvious from the training enrolment form. This includes their plans for employment, their household responsibilities, and family support for their goals. The decision to marry and start a family affects the flexibility women have in terms of non-traditional trades. The study found that for almost all women who changed from working in non-traditional trades to traditional trades, stopped working, or never worked in the trade, family obligations and ‘life events’ such as child birth were the main reasons for stopping the work.

This conversation on their starting point and future plans will help the T&Es place women in the training program that is the best fit for their situation. For many trainees, they will not have thought carefully about their training and employment, and this conversation can help them think through their own plans after graduation from the training program.

Involve Family Members Early

Family support is crucial for women’s success in the workplace. A study on non-traditional trades asked how the woman’s family felt about her working in a non-traditional trade. In their responses, 100% of women interviewed stated that family support was essential for them to be



employed in any trade. Women stated either that their family support enabled them to work in the non-traditional trade, or that the disapproval of their families and household obligations caused them to leave the trade.

When asked how their families felt about the woman working in a non-traditional trade, women who were employed invariably said that they could not be doing this without their family and/or husbands' support. Women who were not yet married and had supportive parents or families are usually enthusiastic and confident about working in the trade.

The family support went either way – either it helped encourage the woman to take the training and work in the trade, or disapproval and family obligations stopped the woman from working in the trade. Women who were unemployed, had stopped work, or changed from a non-traditional trade invariably mentioned household obligations or family disapproval of their employment in the trade.

Comments from trainees and T&Es indicate that it is more difficult to get family permission for women living in a joint family, with her in-laws, than in a household of just a husband and wife. A woman, who had worked as a mobile phone repair technician in Birgunj, a conservative city in southern Nepal, and had also been a trainer, was suddenly told to stop working by her mother-in-law after the birth of her child.

Counsel Family Members

Involving the family early makes it easier to counsel them on the value of the woman's training and employment. If family members have given their approval before the training, they become less likely to pose hurdles during the trainees' eventual employment, whether in a traditional or non-traditional trade.

Family Financial Need

Financial need is a major consideration. Some women whose families did not need their income have been told by their parents to stop working in a non-traditional trade because it was an embarrassment to the family. For example, a young woman aluminium fabricator had had her mother come to visit the worksite and then tell her to leave the job. Some younger women who were not married had mothers who were single parents and needed the income.

According to T&Es, women with better financial conditions are often eager to take the training but not to be employed. In a study, several women said that they took the training to have the skills to fix items, such as wiring in their own homes, rather than for employment. Women from disadvantaged communities, who are already working as labourers, often needed more convincing to take the training. But once they were trained, they were more likely to continue being employed.

Family Trade

A common way in which women got employment was working in a family business with their brothers or husbands. A good way to ensure employment of women was to encourage training in the family trade, be it wood carving, mobile phone repair, or dhaka weaving. T&Es have targeted women whose families are already involved in non-traditional trades. Doing this strategically 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.

Recruit Champions

Once the cultural and family barriers are identified, counselling young women and their guardians to overcome some of these barriers should be done with the help of local champions.



Frances Klatzel

After Padma Devi Bam's husband died in the armed conflict, she did not know how to support her son and daughter. She stayed with her in-laws for some years even though they mistreated her. She left her in-laws' house with her children when she could no longer handle it. Her sisters supported her.

In the year 2012, she heard about a floriculture training on the FM radio. She took the training, and after that, she worked in a nursery for a month. However, she left that work because the nursery had to lay off some of the staff. Now she has been working at Hotel Sathi for the last two years.. She looks after the garden.

The employer is good. She is paid Rs. 8,000 per month. She says that salary is not based on gender rather on work experience. She wants open her own nursery but due to economic constraints she cannot do that yet. She is also keen to be a trainer, and she would like to take Level II training.

"Initially I felt awkward to work in a hotel, thinking what other people will say. But now I am fine with it."



Frances Klatzel

Siddha Kala Bayak was 21 years old when she took training to become a Building Electrician. She is originally from Achham, but came to Kanchanpur to work. She took training together with 12 women and eight men. She did not experience any difficulties taking the training alongside with men. They were trained by a male trainer. She was at ease to ask him questions.

After the training, Siddha worked with her elder brother in Dhangadi, Kailali. There was a new building being constructed, so the contractor hired all graduates of her training. But she preferred to work with her brother. He had also taken a Building Electrician training. Siddha has been working with her brother since training, and he gives her money when she needs it.

Siddha is presently taking a level II training to become a trainer. She wants to train women and help them get better work. The money she earns will help her to start her own shop.

“As women, we are so happy to have this opportunity.”

Community Leaders

A successful counselling strategy was enlisting the help of the community leaders such as Mukhiyas (the head of the community) in the Madhesi community, Badghars (leaders) in the Tharu community in the Terai since the locals listen to them. Schoolteachers and trainers can be part of the counselling in the hills and the plains alike. Community leaders, especially leaders of specific networks such as the single women’s network, or female community health workers, are also a very effective way to reach women, and they should be actively mobilized as part of the communication strategy of any effort to train and employ women.

Women Trainers and Graduates

Female graduates who were successfully employed were used as brand ambassadors. They are the living examples of the effects of the training and employment program, and are able to convince reluctant families that the effort will lead to productive results. This demonstration effect is able to convince families more easily—actions speak louder than words. Women trainers, most of whom were also previous graduates also worked as advocates to help ease family concerns.

The most effective way to garner family and community support for women’s training and employment are face-to-face interactions with family, friends, kin, and neighbours. Community leaders, together with T&E representatives and recent female graduates should work together, as part of a door-to-door campaign, counselling young women and their guardians to help overcome cultural barriers and taboos. Door-to-door campaigns can be a part of the communications strategy of the program, details of which can be found in the *EF Communications Manual*.

Mandates and Incentives for Training and Employing Women

Incentives

During the AGEI, EF had incentivized training and employment of women by ensuring that T&Es could claim a higher remuneration per trainee if the trainee was a woman. This was important in ensuring that T&Es made an effort to reach out to women. However, T&Es, during the “lessons learned” said that the higher amount per woman trainee was not sufficient to cover the additional financial and human resource costs of reaching a woman.

Mandates

In EF agreements with T&Es, a minimum women participation rate was also fixed. This quota for women was not replaceable by men participants, and T&Es who achieve the target for women’s participation were commended. This resulted in T&Es actively looking for women trainees in order to ensure the participation goal for women in occupational skills training was met.

While incentives for training providers or minimum women participation rates are important, they are not enough to ensure women are reached. A robust communication strategy is also necessary.

Conduct a Smart Communication Campaign

Smart outreach is important in programs aimed at training and employing women, especially as women are harder to reach. It is important to have a communication strategy, with an accompanying budget. There are many activities that can comprise a robust communication strategy. While details can be found in the *EF Communication Manual*, an overview is presented here.

Traditional, Non-Traditional or Self Employment?

Two EF “lessons learned” studies were inconclusive about whether traditional fields paid better than non-traditional fields. Variations in income were determined more by factors like size and volume of business, its location, and exposure and experience of entrepreneurs running the business.

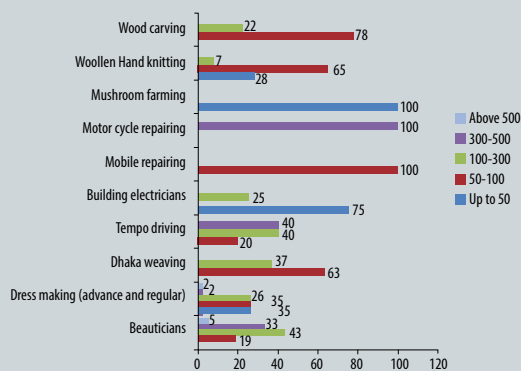
The studies were also inconclusive about whether non-traditional fields had better employment prospects in the long term. While there are many success stories of women doing well in non-traditional fields, there are also multiple instances of women switching from the non-traditional trades they were trained in, to more traditional trades that allow flexibility with household chores or raising a child.

Non-traditional trades require women to go out of their comfort zone. If pushing in this direction, it is important to know where the status quo/comfort zone is, and what the consequences of leaving it will be.

Both studies, however, indicated better employment prospects and higher salaries for those going into self-employment rather than wage employment. Promoting self-employment more vigorously would result in higher incomes that are also more sustainable.

Annual Income from Various Occupational Trades

Proportion of Respondents (%) by Annual Income Category (in NRs 000)



Source: A Study on the Access of Women to Skills Training: Lessons Learned and Experiences, Human Resource Development Centre (HURDEC) Pvt. Ltd. Nepal, October 2014

Social Mobilization

The most effective outreach strategy during AGEI implementation was social mobilization through outreach partners, i.e. collaborating with grassroots organizations to reach potential women trainees. Some of the local networks mobilized included mother's groups, cooperatives, health groups, non-formal education groups, single women groups, differently-abled groups, schools, and VDCs personnel.

These relationships were formalized with Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) signed with many of these organizations to enable T&Es to reach a wider group of women with information about the training.

Door-to-Door Campaigns

Door-to-door campaigns were introduced by EF in 2011-2012, organized together with these networks to reach women, as well as to garner family and community support for the training and employment activities. Door-to-door campaigners were people from the local community who spoke the local language. These campaigns were used mainly in rural areas, and were one of the most effective means of reaching women, and overcoming family resistance to their participation in the training. In a study, over 30% of women reported personal contact as the way they received information about the training and employment program.

Public Service Announcements and Skills Songs

Public service announcements (PSAs) about the training were created and broadcast through radio, especially local FM radios, which is a great channel to reach women. PSAs also played on TV, informing viewers about EF activities. EF also produced two skills songs to raise awareness of the importance of having skills. These songs were sung by popular singers of Nepal and were broadcast on radio stations around the country. They were also used in public events, and were made available for download on mobile devices. This proved to be a powerful way to motivate potential trainees.

Mobile Media

The EF utilized mobile media, distributing ring tones for callers to attract trainees, in particular women. A toll-free number was also set up at the EF Secretariat from October 2011 for queries and complaints. A total of 1,475 calls were made to the toll free number between 2011 to July 2013. It was important in reaching women with information, and also in creating accountability for T&Es.

Other

Other promotional measures included distribution of posters, banners, pamphlets, and calendars, and advertisement in the local newspapers. Where required, communication material was produced in the local language. Posters and pamphlets were created in Tharu language in Kailali and Kanchanpur and public announcements through FM stations in Birgunj were in the local languages; Bhojpuri and Maithili.

Before the training:

- *Conduct a market assessment to create a list of trades for training, with an emphasis on trades that allow flexibility, and can ensure physical security of the woman.*
- *Adjust eligibility criteria such as education and age so more women can participate.*
- *Conduct an analysis of local gender roles and issues to identify the constraints that women are working under and tailor programs accordingly.*
- *Understand the women's current skill level and future plans for employment thoroughly, through in-depth conversations.*
- *Involve family members early, and counsel them so they support the woman's plans for training and employment.*
- *Recruit champions such as community leaders, previous graduates, and social organizations to spread the message about the training and employment program, and to counsel hesitant women or family members.*
- *Ensure T&Es have a certain quota for women participation in their program. Incentivize training of women through measures such as higher remuneration for training and employing women.*
- *Conduct a smart communication campaign that involves in-person communication through credible messengers, and use of radio, which is an effective way to reach women.*





TRAINING PHASE

To ensure participation of women, the training venue needs to be located close to their community. Facilities such as clean and accessible toilets, and basic childcare facilities are important. It is also important to ease their participation by tackling anxieties and increasing their confidence through counselling and life-skills training. Women trainers and the company of other women trainees can provide support, ensuring successful outcomes.

Ensure Training Facilities Are Women Friendly

Women trainees appreciated the practice of consulting them on training facilities prior to the start of the training program to identify their specific needs. This practice was common among the T&Es conducting training programs in rural settings where it is difficult to find basic amenities such as training hall, good sanitation and drinking water facilities.

Facilities such as clean and accessible toilets are important to ensure the participation of women. Basic childcare facilities have proved to increase the participation of mothers in training programs.

Proximity of the training venue is also important. EF training venues were usually located at a place where the majority of the trainees were concentrated, with a maximum distance of 30 minutes' walk in rural areas.

Where possible, it is also would be ideal to conduct training within the women's own communities so they are able to attend to their household chores before and after the training. Having the training facilities close to home also ensures that family members know the location of the training venue, and know what goes on there. In conservative societies, this has been helpful in getting family support for training.

In urban areas such as Kathmandu, the distance to the training venue was slightly longer and women had to use public transport. To ensure women had time to finish their morning chores, training sessions in Kathmandu started slightly later at around 11.00 am.

Tackle Anxieties

The "lessons learned" study found that the first two weeks of training were very difficult for women. They were not used to being away from home, sitting in a classroom for long hours, and had very low levels of confidence in their own ability to complete the training and finding employment. Counselling prior to the start of course content can help ease some of these factors. A life skills component (described below) is also crucial, and is ideally offered at the beginning of the skills training.

Include a Component on Life Skills

Confidence is a major factor affecting how women will succeed in the workplace. Whereas men with Level I training will often go and open shops, women often feel that they do not have the skills required to be self-employed. Whether or not women continued in the non-traditional trade they were trained in also depended on their level of confidence and comfort in the working environment, which usually had more men.

The EF developed a training module on life-skills, which was introduced in 2010 and was fully integrated in training programs from 2011. The package included material that developed the confidence of the trainees as well as increased their knowledge on content such as reproductive health and other health-related issues, empowering them to make informed choices about their own life, to be aware of their capacities and capabilities, etc..

The training package was designed on the basis of the definition of World Health Organization (WHO) on life skills, which has three major components:

- **Interpersonal skills** – including social and interpersonal skills, including communication, negotiating/refusal skills, assertiveness, cooperative empathy.
- **Cognitive skills** – including problem solving, understanding consequences, decision making, critical thinking and self-evaluation.
- **Personal skills (self-management)** - including coping skills, managing stress, feelings, self-management and self-monitoring.

Apart from the core areas above, the training package also deals in the areas of gender and reproductive health, labour rights, and abuse of any kind, especially sexual abuse.

In the “lessons learned” study, all participants stated that they found the life skills training useful. The module, introduced only for women trainees, was extended to all trainees in 2013. The life-skills training was offered at the end of the occupational skills training. However, the lessons learned studies showed that there was value in offering the life skills training for five days at the beginning of the skills training to build the trainees’ confidence and help them overcome their doubt, hesitation and fear.

Recruit Women Trainers

Women graduates of the EF stated a high preference for women trainers in matters related with flexibility in training hours, opportunity to raise issues related to women, and degree of ease in



taking part in sessions. They saw women trainers as valuable for discussing personal issues that could impact their training and eventual employment. These issues included matters related to reproductive health, dress code, unwelcome behaviour from male colleagues, and family issues. Only 1% of graduates surveyed did not have any hesitation in raising their personal issues and problems with male trainers.

In another study, over 80% of women trained in non-traditional trades mentioned that they would have liked to have had one of their trainers be a woman to be able to share their personal experiences of working as a woman in what is traditionally seen as a “male” job. For those in non-traditional trades, women trainers serve as an inspiration to show them that women can do these trades.

With this in mind, EF supported several Level II and Training-of-Trainers courses for women in non-traditional trades including mobile phone repair, building electrician, mason, arc welding, and others to build a cadre of women trainers that will attract and guide more women trainees.

However, the same women were also of the opinion that in terms of delivery of course content, male trainers were more effective. For non-traditional trades, the best combination preferred in terms of learning and effectiveness of training content is a pair of trainers, consisting of a woman and a man.

Ensure More Than One Female Trainee

This is usually not a concern for traditional trades such as beautician, tailoring, or cloth weaving, where the level of participation of women is high. For non-traditional trades, however, this becomes especially necessary. In a study on the involvement of women in non-traditional trades, 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. All respondents said that they preferred to have other women in the classes. Over 80% of women would have preferred all women classes. While this might not be feasible, it is important to have at least one other woman in the class for mutual support.

Introduce Multi-Skilling for Those Trained in Seasonal Trades

EF introduced training in more than one occupational skill (main and secondary – multi skilling), especially for those trained in trades like brick moulding, which are seasonal. In a study commissioned by EF, multi-skilling contributed to an increase in participation of women, as they preferred flexible trades. Multi-skilling provides an opportunity to supplement the primary income of the trainees and gives the graduates more flexibility on the labour market and hence better opportunities for income-generation during off-season times in the main occupation. More information on multi-skilling can be found in the EF RMA Manual.

During the training:

- *Ensure training facilities are women friendly. This includes being located close to their community, and having toilet and childcare facilities.*
- *Introduce a component on life skills to tackle women's anxieties, and help build their confidence.*
- *Recruit women trainers so trainees can easily raise issues related to women. Women trainers can also share their personal experiences of working as a woman and encourage trainees.*
- *Ensure the companionship of other women in the class as it is critical to women's success in the training environment as well as the workplace.*
- *Introduce multi-skilling, which is attractive to women who need flexible employment opportunities.*



POST-TRAINING PHASE

Equipping women with marketable skills is necessary, but not enough to ensure their eventual gainful employment. Post-training, EF required its T&Es to provide on-the-job training to graduates. This allowed women with little social capital to expand their network, and get work experience. T&Es were paid their final instalment only after the graduate had been gainfully employed, and they actively courted employers to find jobs for their graduates.

Women also need handholding support when issues arise at work. The mentorship and company of other women at work is valuable. Self-employment is flexible and results in sustainable employment for women. Constraints in accessing credit and business services should be eased to encourage women to take up self-employment.

Require On-the-Job Training

T&Es were required to provide on-the-job training to graduates. On-the-job training was a crucial strategy that offered women employment for six months and work experience after the completion of their training. This also facilitated the transition of women from training to employment. On-the-job training is especially important for women who have little social capital, and a much smaller network through which they are able to look for jobs.

A study on non-traditional trades found that almost all employed women had gotten their jobs through either personal contacts or connections of the T&E provider. There is a huge need for T&Es to facilitate women graduates' networking with potential employers, and on-the-job training can be the stepping stone through which this can be facilitated.

Require T&Es to Place Graduates in Employment

Under the EF, T&Es were paid their final instalment only after the graduate had been gainfully employed. The most successful T&Es, meaning the ones who find employment for the trainees so that they can receive the final instalment from Employment Fund, had large networks of business, educational, and personal contacts who they engaged with in finding employment for the trainees.

The most successful T&Es were proactive, keeping track of job opportunities in the market, and engaging business owners on a freelance basis as trainers for the training so they would then hire the young women as employees after the training completion. Most T&Es meet with business owners and contractors on a regular basis to monitor the employment situation.

This kind of support from the T&Es is essential for women, who do not have a large social network of their own through which to find jobs.

"While 40% of men will find employment themselves, at most 10% of women will find their own work. Self-confidence is a challenge with women finding work." T&E comment in a focus group discussion

Tackle Employers' Biases

There was a general tendency among employers to underestimate the capabilities of women, especially if they were trained in a non-traditional trade. There was a general sense of hesitation about hiring those trained in skills such as building electrician or plumbing, expecting that they would be unable to travel to perform these services. This stands as a huge hindrance to their career and professional development.

Sanju Bajracharya is the Placement Officer of UCEP (T&E) in Thimi: "I keep track of the outside market through field visits to act as a bridge between job providers and trainees. I often find jobs at shops of past trainees, in newspapers, or through contacts to job associations. We have an 80% placement rate for women, depending on the trade. However, 80-90% of women usually leave their jobs after marriage and pregnancy. Very few keep working after a baby, but will continue with traditional trades. So, women want tailoring classes because they see other women doing it, and they can work from home because they need to be close by."

Findings: Impact Evaluation of the Employment Fund

The EF program had positive impacts on the following labour market outcomes that are both statistically and economically significant:

- 1 Employment rates;
- 2 Finding employment related to the skill in which youth were trained;
- 3 Earnings;
- 4 The proportion of youth earning more than 3,000 NRs (~40 USD) per month.

Alongside the sizable general impacts on employment outcomes, the evaluation finds that training courses in electronics, beautician services, and tailoring underpin most of the EF program's impacts. For women in the 2011 cohort there are also positive and significant impacts on a range of empowerment indicators, including control over earnings, self-regulation, and entrepreneurial orientation.

Notably, the impacts of the EF program are larger for women than they are for men. Women selected for training in 2010 and 2011 experienced non-farm and trade-specific employment gains of 20 to 22 percentage points, while the impact for men is not statistically different from zero. Women's earnings increased by 877 to 1142 NRs (equivalent to 12 to 15 USD) per month, whereas a statistically significant increase in men's earnings cannot be detected.

While creating longer-term relationships with employers, it is important to work towards overcoming these biases towards women through effective communication. Equipping women with the skills and confidence to be successful is also important in order to challenge these biases.

Promote Self-Employment

Two end-of-program studies conducted by the EF showed that while traditional and non-traditional occupations might not vary significantly in terms of income, self-employment resulted in higher incomes for women. This is especially true in a labour market context that is marked by the unavailability of jobs in the formal sector for people, specifically women, with low educational attainment.

Over half of the respondents in an EF "lessons learned" study also said that they aspired to open their own shops and be self-employed, even if they had a job. 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 of women.

Access to Credit

The major constraint to self-employment was access to credit. Many could not afford the investment to start their own business. Among the self-employed, 69% started their business with own investment whereas 31% obtained loan from various other sources. They also received financial support from members of their family to start their business. Only around 9% of the respondents were able to obtain loan from financial institutions such as commercial banks.

Obtaining loans is not easy for women, especially from formal sources such as banks, which require lengthy paperwork and collateral. The other major challenge is the loan ceiling amount when borrowing from cooperatives and savings and credit groups. The loan size limited the initial investment.

The EF had agreements with banks such as the NMB bank to ease the access to graduates to sources of credit for self-employment. However, experience showed that cooperation with banks like NMB was only fruitful in urban areas, which restricted access for many graduates from rural areas. T&Es also made efforts to build their own linkages with financial service providers. For example, Skill Nepal, an EF T&E, linked its trainees to various financial institutions, especially to cooperatives. It also supported graduates who were very poor with small, interest-free loans. Availability of low-interest capital is important in encouraging self-employment for women and men alike.

Business Skills Training

One of the components of EF was a business skills training module. The business skills training was five days long, and provided at the end of the occupational and life skills training. The module focused on three major components: entrepreneurial traits and characteristics, product identification and selection, and preparation of a business plan. While this was provided at the end of the occupational and life skills training, the normal tendency to set up businesses was after one year of employment, following the training.

This one-year period of employment was useful for graduates to develop contacts and networks, and familiarize themselves with the market situation. They were also able to save to invest in their new business, and developed the self-confidence to deal with customers. However, the business skills training can create a degree of awareness about going into self-employment. Providing business skills training later, when graduates are ready for self-employment, is ideal.

Ensure a Market for Products

Some trades required that there be a market for products such as bamboo crafts, leather shoes, or vegetables and mushrooms. While the RMA should inform whether there is a market for these products before training is provided in the trade, the market can change. It is advisable to encourage T&Es involvement in actively marketing these products once they are produced.

For instance, a group of women who had been trained to make leather shoes found that they had no market for their product after two months of work. Follow-up will be necessary in such instances as the graduates might be stuck for ideas. For example, they could be encouraged to make women's shoes, which they could market among their connections. T&Es could also help them explore markets that are slightly further away.

Provide Intensive Handholding Support

Especially for those in non-traditional trades, breaking into a male culture is tough. It is important to supplement on-the-job training with counselling, encouragement, role models, and job placement.

Successful T&Es regularly check in with their graduates to see whether they are still working, what constraints they are encountering, and help ease their transition from training to work. This kind of support is valuable for women who are largely navigating uncharted territories in their transition from home to the workplace.

CONCLUSION

Training programs that aim to successfully connect women to the labour market, and ensure their participation is sustainable, can introduce certain measures geared towards women. Some of these have to be introduced at the very beginning of the program, even before the trades are chosen, and they have to last until after the woman is already in employment.

It is especially important to be mindful of family and cultural forces as these can act as enabling agents or as hindrances in women's training and employment. Recruiting the family and community as champions for women's training and employment will ensure her success. Women also need additional support to build their skills and confidence, and flexibility to accommodate their particular needs and responsibilities. Programs that are sensitive to such needs can successfully train and employ women, ensuring better futures for the women, their families, and their communities.

After the training:

- *Require T&Es to provide on-the-job training to graduates. On-the-job training is crucial to expand the woman's social network, and to offer her work experience.*
- *Require T&Es to place graduates in employment by making it a performance indicator so they utilize their networks to find jobs for women.*
- *Tackle employers' biases against women workers through effective communication.*
- *Promote self-employment as it provides women with higher incomes, as well as greater flexibility.*
- *The major constraint to self-employment is access to credit, and measures to increase women's access to credit can help.*
- *Ensure a market for goods produced by women if they are trained in trades such as bamboo crafts, leather shoes, or vegetable farming.*
- *Provide intensive handholding support, even during their employment so women can overcome any barriers, and be sustainably employed.*



Frances Klatzel

Saraswati Malla separated from her husband when he took a second wife ten years ago. She has two sons aged 21 and 20. She re-married after the separation.

She took a training in vegetable farming, and received Rs. 8,000 equivalent of tools after the training. She took loan of Rs. 60,000 from NMB Bank and from her friends. The total initial cost of her enterprise was Rs. 240,000. Saraswati has been paying instalments to NMB Bank and of her friends based on an interest rate of 15%. She has rented six Ropani land. She pays Rs. 30,000 per year for the rent. Her friend has opened a vegetable and fruit shop that sells the vegetables of her farm. Saraswati has hired two staffs to work on her farm, and she hires seasonal labourers when required.

"It requires a lot of patience and dedication to work in the agricultural field. Many participants dropped out of the training, because they could not commit to the work. But I had no choice. I had to make a living."

She plans to take Level II training and be a trainer. She stood third in the Young Entrepreneur Award for Skilled People (YEAS) in the year 2014.

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