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OBSERVATIONS AND STRATEGIES REGARDING WOMEN IN NON-TRADITIONAL TRADES

Introduction

The Employment Fund (EF) in Nepal provides short-term skills training to women and men aged 16-40 years.¹ EF supports skills training by businesses acting as Training and Employment Service Providers (T&Es), which have the responsibility of finding employment for the trainees. The T&Es propose training courses in particular trades and locations after completing a Rapid Market Assessment (RMA) for each training session. EF conducts monitoring of trained graduates three months and six months after the completion of their training to verify their income and employment status. The final instalment for a training implemented by a T&E is based on the number of trainees gainfully employed six months after the completion of the training. Gainful employment is defined as a monthly income of Rs 4,600 equivalent to US\$ 47.

¹ Until 2011, the age range for both women and men was 16 to 35. From 2011 to 2013, EF changed it to 16 to 40 for women and 16 to 35 for men. In 2014, EF made it uniform for both men and women at 18 to 40.

Observations and Experiences of T&Es

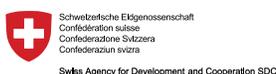
During focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews, the T&Es offered several observations and suggestions of their strategies regarding the training and the employment of women especially at younger ages in non-traditional trades. The T&Es also said that ten years ago, it was impossible to interest women in learning non-traditional trades, but now that has changed and some non-traditional trades are perceived as being more acceptable for women.

T&Es said perceptions of trades are changing as the numbers of women working in them increase so those trades are becoming more socially acceptable for women to work in them. Two such trades are mobile phone repair and bamboo crafts making. One T&E referred to these trades as transitional trades. It is likely that with growing numbers of women working in these trades, there will soon be a tipping point where these trades are perceived as "traditional" trades, which are acceptable for women.

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COMMENTS IN T&E FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS:

■ **Due to the household responsibilities of women, some employers are reticent to hire women and it is difficult to find employment for them.**

■ **Of 70 women trained in non-traditional trades, 20-25 will still be working in three years. Many will drop out in 1-2 years due to other responsibilities including fieldwork.**

■ **Many women like tailoring because they can fit it in with household chores and do it at home.**

■ **We need to understand women's situations, family pressure, and needs.**

Chhatra Bam is Managing Director of TRACE, a T&E in Kailali: "We need to counsel families to allow women to work, so we visit homes to convince families. We have gradually built trust among communities and employers and facilitate discussions to ease doubts that families may have."

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

T&E strategies to include women in non-traditional trades

The most successful T&Es, meaning that they 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 to find employment for the trainees. While they appreciated the social merits of women entering the workforce, several T&Es said that it was often challenging to meet the allocations for women trainees especially when requested to promote training and employment in non-traditional trades. T&Es revealed various strategies to encourage and prepare women and their families for her training and employment in a non-traditional trade.

Situation analysis: T&Es suggested that there is a need to do more research and analysis, a situation analysis, in a given specific location before doing training in the communities and to realize that the training will have no impact if the community members do not need it or cannot continue to work in the trade.

Counselling and exposure visits: T&Es said that it is important to present a clear orientation about the training and the trade before enrolling the women in non-traditional trade training. T&Es mentioned counselling before and after the training as a specific strategy to prepare a woman and her family for her to be employed after the training. This included visits to the women's homes to talk to them and exposure visits to the workshops so that the women and their families are more aware and can select the possible options.

Life Skills training before trade training: Several T&Es suggested offering Employment Fund's life skills training for five days before the training to build the confidence and awareness of a woman before she invests time in the training.

Family engaged in the trade: Some T&E strategies to increase recruitment of women included engaging young women from families already involved in the trade. The women would then work in the family business. T&Es mentioned that the working environment was much easier for women who had family members, especially men, already working in the same trade.

Pressure on women: A T&E admitted that he "puts heavy pressure on women, ... and tells them, 'You have taken the skill training, now work or we will lose our money.'"

Engaging business owners: Another strategy was to engage business owners on a freelance basis as trainers for the training. They would then hire the women trainees as employees after the training completion. Most T&Es said that they meet with business owners and contractors on a regular basis to monitor the employment situation.

T&E owned workshops: Some T&Es were companies with workshops, which gave women trainees the opportunities for on-the-job training and employment.

Giving tools to women: One T&E said that he gives tools to the women to encourage them to take training in non-traditional trades.

On-the-job training: On-the-job training was a crucial strategy of T&Es to offer women employment for six months and work experience after the completion of their training.

Diversification of trades: The more successful T&Es offer training in more than one trade and usually in several trades that are both traditional and non-traditional. The T&Es that made the most comments on the difficulties of finding employment for the trainees were often those that only offered training one sector of specialized trades, such as hospitality.

Duration of training

T&Es questioned whether the three months duration of EF training courses was sufficient for women who were often not used to using the tools required. T&Es suggested that in some trades a longer duration of training would help women develop skills in tasks in which they have no experience. The T&Es also mentioned the challenges in training women who were illiterate or had minimal schooling in several non-traditional trades that require measurements and calculations, such as television or mobile phone repair. Both T&Es and trainees commented that sometimes the three months training was too basic and that in trades such as mobile phone and television repair, the changes in technology mean that they need frequent refresher courses to learn the new technology.

Good practice

Women trainers and a special curriculum to encourage women

The T&Es were encouraged by Employment Fund's recent initiatives to develop more women trainers in the non-traditional trades because it will be more encouraging for women. They suggested that there might need to be a more specific curriculum for women. The T&Es did remark on the high demand and interest in the Level 2 training EF has offered and the fact that in each training session several women from other Level 1 training programs had enrolled.

Chhatra Bam is Managing Director of TRACE, a T&E in Kailali:

“Employment Fund should extend the time for women to learn a trade so more women will succeed. We need to teach women for longer to use tools and need to make finance available for them.” Comments by T&Es in FGDs included:

“Women work more honestly and it is more satisfying and more interesting to train women.”

“Do scoring to select participants by interest, need, ability to do work, commitment.”

“EF needs to see social and humanitarian factors allowing women to work”

“More people realize that they need to overcome cultural restrictions to earn money.”



Rakesh Shah of Creative Skills Society: “Women are more comfortable providing products and services for women. They will do non-traditional trades, but we need to make more effort for at least one year for employment to be sustainable for a longer time. We push them to work, then a family barrier arises or they need more updates in certain trades, so they quit. Changing the focus from construction trades to service trades would attract younger women with some education.”

Lessons learned and Conclusion

The need to make employment ‘sustainable’

In a key informant interview, the T&E, Creative Skills Society, suggested that it is necessary to start promoting ‘sustainable’ employment for trainees especially women. As noted above, a significant number of women leave employment in non-traditional trades for marriage and childcare. For the employment to be sustainable in non-traditional trades, the women usually need female colleagues, family support, and a need for the income.

The T&Es questioned the sustainability of non-traditional trades for younger women after they get married and have a child. A key to success will be creating the working conditions, whether near home or in a shop, that will offer the flexibility and security needed by women to take care of their children and other household obligations.

Sanju Bajracharya is the Placement Officer UCEP in Thimi: “I keep track of the outside market through field visits to act as bridge between employers and trainees. I often find jobs at shops of past trainees, in newspapers, or through contacts in trade associations. We have an 80% placement for women depending on the trade. However, 80-90% of women usually leave jobs after their marriage and pregnancy. Very few keep working in non-traditional trades after having a baby, but they will continue with traditional trades. Women want tailoring training because they see other women doing it, and they can work at home.”

Case study



Sarita in Kanchanpur took mobile phone repair in 2011. She is self-employed in her own shop. She convinced her husband to take Level I training and now they both work in the mobile repair shop registered in her name. She can often have her son with her in the shop, which she says she could not do if she was working in a factory.

“At the start, my mother in law was not supportive when I took the training but now she is happy. It is easier for me since my husband is also working with me in this business. When I cannot manage the time, he is in the shop. Now, I get respect from people and the customers.

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