



Romit Singh

IMPLEMENTATION AND RELEVANCE OF LIFE SKILLS TRAINING FOR WOMEN

Introduction

Women often face difficulties in accessing the labour market due a variety of reasons such as lack of education, poor economic condition, family and household responsibilities, limited technical skills and social reasons. 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.

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. To attract women, additional components were introduced, including a life skills training module.

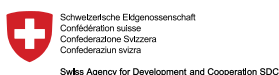
A study on "Access of Women to Skills Training" was commissioned in 2014 to document the process and strategies applied by EF to enable women between the age of 16-40 to acquire skills training for employment, as well as to gauge the contribution and impact of EF skills training in the lives of these women. This learning series is based on the study which reached 423 EF graduates, age between 16-40, who received training between 2010 and 2013.

This summary note focuses on the implementation aspects, and relevance of the life skills training provided under the EF.

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Overview of life skills training

The life skills training module is one of the core components of EF. The package was introduced in 2010 as a skills-plus package and was fully integrated in training programs from 2011. The module was introduced only for women trainees and extended to all trainees (women and men) in 2013. Among 29,344 women who underwent occupational skills training during 2010-2013, 16,851 (58%) participated in life skills training. Of the total women who participated in life skills training, 12% percent were from Category "A", including Dalits, 54% were Janajatis, and 34% belonged to "other" groups.

The main objectives of life skills training are to make adolescent girls/boys responsible for a healthy choice, to develop and reinforce ability to resist the anxieties and to avoid risky behaviours. The five days training package is particularly designed for adolescent/young adults of 16-24 years. The training package has three major components:

- **Interpersonal skills** – including social and interpersonal skills, 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.



Usefulness of content of life skills training

The life skills training was highly appreciated by the respondents. 82% of the respondents stated that it was very useful and 18% said that it was useful. The chart below summarizes the relevance of the life skills training.

Parts of the training content dealing with reproductive health and sexual abuse were seen as most effective and relevant, although reproductive health was not the core component of the training. The respondents vaguely remembered core components such as interpersonal relationships, self-management, decision-making, and goal setting because they could not really link these topics to their daily life. These core topics are normally recalled by trainees who have higher educational qualifications. There is no doubt that the life skills training is an important module but it is important to reconsider the relevance of individual sessions. The fact that the respondents were able to recall only a small section of the life skills training necessitates revision of the module's content.

Integration of the life skills training modules into other training modules can make it more effective, instead of keeping it as a separate and independent module. If the module becomes interspersed with the occupational skills training, it will enable participants to create linkages between the occupational skills and life skills. It is likely that the trainees will face matters on decision making, problem solving, and interpersonal relationships while they undergo the occupational training. These can be addressed if the life skills training becomes made an integral part of occupational training.

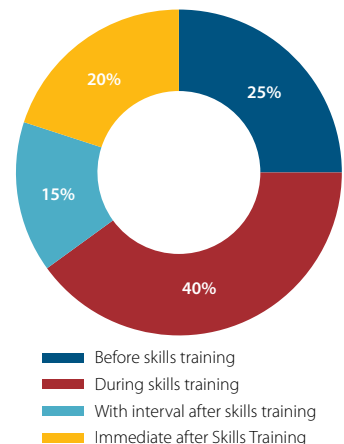
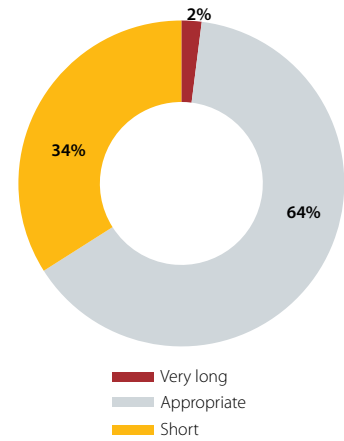
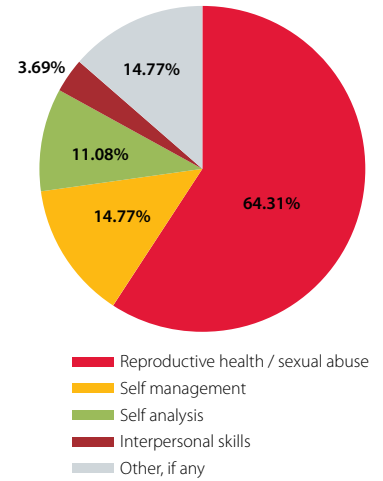
Timing and duration of the life skills training

Integrating life skills training into occupational skills training is important as a majority of the respondents were of the opinion that the life skills training should be part of the occupational skills training (40%). Only 15% of the respondents appreciated the current practice of providing life skills training after the completion of occupational skills training.



Lal Prasad Sharma

Usefulness of training content



Content delivery and trainers

Life skills module deals with personal and behavioural aspects of an individual. It is critical to ensure quality of trainers in terms of experience, maturity and understanding. The trainers for life skills training normally undergo a Training of Trainers (TOT) course lasting 10 days. However, this 10 day TOT is not adequate to fully equip the trainers to deliver life skills content. An ideal duration of TOT for life skills trainers is 21 day. This will provide adequate time for trainers to understand the course content, as well as acquire skills to deliver the content.

Effective delivery of training content is determined by the experience, knowledge and skills of the trainers. These become crucial when delivering training sessions on life skills that deal with individual feelings, attitudes and behaviour. Although the delivery of life skills training was rated quite satisfactory, there were cases reported where young trainers who had just completed higher secondary school were assigned to carry out the sessions on life skills. The trainees undermined the trainers and the whole objective of the package was defeated. The issue of maturity of trainers was also raised by the resource organisations and it was emphasized that this element should not be overlooked.

Regarding a preference for male or female trainers, 68% of the respondents preferred women trainers. The reasons for preference of women trainers could be that before 2013, life skills training was offered only to women; it was only during 2013 that the module was extended to men. In the current context, where life skills training is offered to men as well, T&Es were of the opinion that there should be a combination of men and women trainers.

Adding new dimensions to life skills training

T&Es were of the opinion that the sessions on life skills are too dense for the trainees. The fact that a large number of respondents find supplementary sessions on reproductive health more effective than the core content of life skills training shows that the core content lacks connection to the trainees' lives. The training manual needs to be simplified and made more practical.

Introduction of psycho-social counselling in the modular form during occupational skills training was innovative and effective. This package was designed for skills training for ex-combatants, both men and women. Realizing the effectiveness of this module, it was also introduced in occupational skills training by one of the T&Es. The elements of psycho-social counselling were implemented in three phases – in the beginning, middle and towards the end of the occupational skills training. The package focuses on the individual in the context of occupational skills training. The content and practice of psycho-social counselling can be adapted to life skills training which is currently very classroom based and deals with unfamiliar content.



Lal Prasad Sharma

Employment Fund Secretariat/ HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation Nepal

Jawalakhel, Lalitpur, GPO BOX 688, Kathmandu, Nepal
Tel: +977 1 5000 209, 5000 226, 5526098 Fax: +977 1 5524 991
Email: ef@helvetas.org.np
URL: www.employmentfund.org.np

HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation Nepal

Jhamsikhel, Dhobi Ghat, Lalitpur
GPO Box 688, Kathmandu, Nepal
Tel: +977 1 552 49 25
Fax: +977 1 553 11 09
Email: po@helvetas.org.np
URL: http://nepal.helvetas.org/en/
www.helvetas.org/

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