

EMPOWERING THE DISEMPOWERED – SKILLS AND EMPLOYMENT FOR DISADVANTAGED YOUTH



Poultry farmer Junuka Duwadi.

Barriers in access to the labour market for people from disadvantaged groups in Nepal are numerous: low educational attainment, lack of marketable skills, poor economic condition, limited access to markets and resources, and social exclusion. Traditional discriminatory social structures permeate the work place, and poor rural women and

men from disadvantaged ethnic groups are at the lowest level of the wage ladder (United Nations Population Fund, 2007). Challenges also remain specifically for women and girls to overcome the societal perceptions about their traditional roles and the types of work that are socially acceptable for them.

INCLUSION STARTS BEFORE THE TRAINING: COMMUNICATION AND FAMILY SUPPORT

An effective communication campaign is important to inform and attract the prospective participants about the trainings on offer. Targeted information spread through local radio stations and other channels reaches the targeted youth and encourages them to apply. Since the prospective trainees come from diverse ethnic backgrounds, speak different languages and follow their own societal norms, the training providers have to choose their communication means and content wisely. Their use of advertisement means ranges from “miking” (announcement via loudspeaker) across towns and villages, putting up posters at key public spaces and placing adverts in the newspapers, home visits and use of local radio stations to inform the locals about the upcoming trainings. Family and community support is crucial especially for women trainees who are often tied to gender roles and household responsibilities. Family members not allowing women to enrol in training, or to work at the end of the training, is a major obstacle in the career paths of girls and women. Addressing decision-makers of the family, normally male members such as fathers (in law), elder brothers and husbands, in the dissemination of information and discussing with them the advantages skills and employment can have for women, is essential. Chhatra Bam, Managing Director of TRACE, a training provider working with Employment Fund, says: “We need to counsel families to allow women to work, so we visit homes to convince the families. We have gradually built trust among communities and employers and facilitate discussions to ease doubts that families may have.”

INCREASED EARNING AND EMPLOYMENT FOR WOMEN

While traditional views tend to assert that women should stay at home to take care of the household, women can play a vital role in contributing to the household income and poverty alleviation. A rigorous impact evaluation of the EF proves that individuals selected for EF training programs significantly increased their non-farm employment and monthly



THE EMPLOYMENT FUND IN NEPAL

The Employment Fund (EF), established under a bilateral agreement between the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the Government of Nepal (GoN), is implemented by HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation. SDC, UK Aid from the Department for International Development (DFID) and the World Bank contribute their funds to EF under separate project agreements. The overall goal of the programme is to improve the living conditions of economically and socially excluded youth in Nepal. EF provides vocational skills training to out-of-school youth, who are poor and socially discriminated. The project has been operating in Nepal since 2008 through selected private-sector training providers with an outcomes-based financing approach.

In response to the massive need in reconstruction work caused by the devastating earthquakes in

April and May, 2015, the “Skills for Reconstruction” component was initiated. This component supports the Government of Nepal’s initiative in reconstruction by providing earthquake-resilient construction skills to members of households whose houses were destroyed by the earthquake. Specifically, disadvantaged youth are targeted so they can acquire skills that lead to gainful employment. By 2016, the component aims to have trained 3,000 youth in construction related trades incorporating earthquake-resilient technology, and to have supported the construction of 4,000 houses (with graduates’ participation) in the six defined working districts of the programme.

For more information, please visit www.employmentfund.org.np.

MECHANISMS FOR INCLUSION OF YOUTH FROM DISADVANTAGED GROUPS

The Employment Fund applies a positive discrimination system for the inclusion of people from disadvantaged groups. It encourages the training and employment service providers (T&Es) to include youth from poor and disadvantaged backgrounds in the training. For each placement of poor and disadvantaged trainees in a job with a salary above a defined minimum threshold, the T&Es receive a financial bonus. A specific focus is laid on women, who are considered disadvantaged even if they are from non-discriminated

groups because of their restricted positions in Nepal’s patriarchal society.

The financial incentive stimulates the T&Es to include women and other disadvantaged youth – people who normally struggle to gain access to skills and employment – in skills training and to place them in gainful employment. Employment Fund has trained around 100,000 youth. Out of all trainees, more than 50% are women, and 84% come from disadvantaged groups.

earnings after the training, as opposed to a control group who did not participate in EF training. Notably, the impacts of the EF program are much larger for women than they are for men. Women selected for training in 2010 and 2011 experienced an increase in non-farm employment of more than 20%, and their earnings per month increased significantly (Ahmed et al., 2014).

DETAILS THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Employment Fund specifically targets vulnerable and disadvantaged men and women (see textbox), such as people from disadvantaged castes and ethnicities, widows, HIV or violence affected youth, etc. Therefore, the Employment Fund put in place several specific measures enabling socially marginalized men and women to participate regularly in the training. Overall, a few small measures can make a big difference, such as

- setting the training hours so trainees who have to work to earn a living on a daily basis can participate. This often means providing only half-day training,
- choosing an easily accessible close training venue to reduce travel time and cost,
- compensating for travel costs if participants come from far away,
- covering food expenses during training hours and offering residential training,
- providing basic tools and equipment to facilitate labour market entry.

However, significant challenges remain in the inclusion of youth who have to earn their income on a daily basis. For them, in-kind contributions during the training period are not enough if they need to contribute financially to the household income. Therefore, EF trainings can only include disadvantaged youth who are not the (only) breadwinners of the family.



EMPOWERMENT BEYOND INCREASED INCOMES

Increased disposable income indicates that there is progress out of poverty, but there is more to it. In a qualitative impact assessment, EF graduates said that this income gave them independence and freedom, that they now have more aspirations and confidence, and that their increased income has created options and opportunities for them. The graduates highlighted that the skills they had received were relevant and they appreciated the recognition of their acquired skills through a skills test certificate.



Employment is also related to dignity and security. In the study, some graduates expressed their hopes of better working conditions in the future. These statements highlight the difficulty of finding formalized jobs in the large informal sector of Nepal's economy. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates that 96.2 percent of employed Nepalese work in informal employment (ILO, 2010).

LIFE SKILLS FOR SELF-CONFIDENCE AND ENHANCED EMPLOYABILITY

People from disadvantaged groups face many barriers in accessing education, and that is specifically true for women. According to the Human Development Report 2014, only an estimated 17.9% of women in Nepal have at least some secondary education, while the same is true for 39.9% of men. Due to low levels of education, the starting point to achieve gainful employment of those belonging to disadvantaged groups is much lower than for others. As a result, they often work in low paid and unskilled jobs¹. Such working conditions also take their toll on the self-esteem and confidence. The Employment Fund initially started providing life skills classes for women only, but then learned that they are also highly relevant to men.

¹ Unskilled women are mostly involved in agriculture and/or construction work on a daily wage basis.



Radhika Sahi teaching a Mobile Phone Repairing class.

SKILLS CAN TRANSFORM LIVES

Graduates who found employment thanks to training often talk about the transformation in their lives. They appreciate being financially independent and the respect that affords them in their community. They report an increased sense of self-esteem. This is especially true for women graduates working as trainers: "Being a skilled person, and on top of it a trainer, has been a big life change", says Radhika Sahi, an instructor in Mobile Phone Repairing. "I raised my living standards. And everyone knows me in my community. Before, I was just sitting at home; I was not special. Now, when the people see me walking past, they notice me. They refer to me as an example, a role model for others. It makes me proud, and it also encourages me in my pursuit to teach others and to create these opportunities for other women".

Increasing access of youth from disadvantaged groups to employment opportunities requires addressing their social challenges. Meeting their specific needs can enable them to access training and employment. Junuka Duwadi successfully runs her own poultry farm after having taken training with Employment Fund. She says: "If I had not taken this training, I would have never known what I am capable of".

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Editor: Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC, South Asia Division
Tel. +41 58 462 34 75, info@deza.admin.ch
www.sdc.admin.ch

Text: Sonja Hofstetter and Banu Shrestha, Employment Fund Secretariat, HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation.

Photos: Rohit Singh

Portrait Junuka Duwadi (page 1): Frances Klatzel
Portrait Radhika Sahi (page 4): Sonja Hofstetter

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