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## WOMEN'S ACCESS TO OCCUPATIONAL SKILLS TRAINING

### Introduction

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, 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. 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 graduates. This learning series is based on the study which reached 423 graduates, age between 16-40, who received training in occupational skills, life skills and business skills between 2010 and 2013.

### Motives behind women's enrollment in occupational skills training

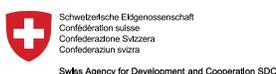
Women's primary motives behind joining skills training programs are to earn an income for themselves and their families through eventual employment or self-employment. Publicity and information measures applied by EF's training and employment service providers (T&Es) prior to the training programs played an important role in generating interest in the training programs among women. The promotional measures increased women's awareness of opportunities to generate income, thus attracting their participation in various occupational skills training.

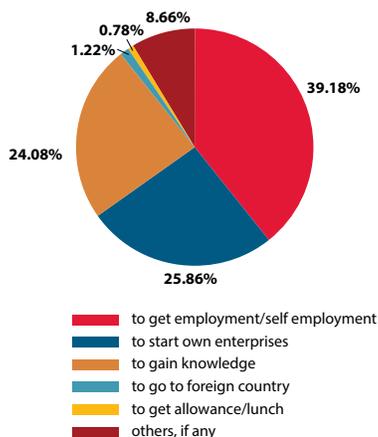
The chart indicates that the primary motive behind enrolling in occupational skills training is to find some form of employment or self-employment (39.18%). There is also a sizable number of women (24%) who simply applied for occupational skills training to gain additional knowledge for personal use, instead of remaining idle at home. Their

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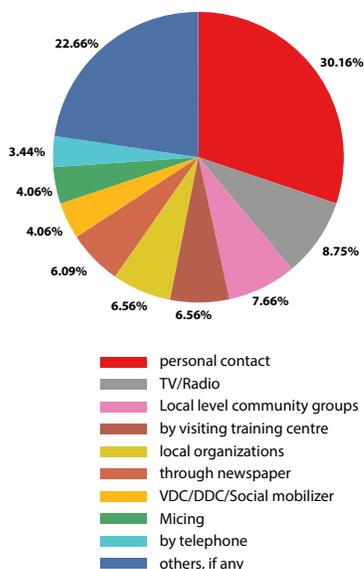


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### Type and effectiveness of various promotional measures



motive was to acquire skills that may come in handy at a future date, as the training was free of cost, the training venue was nearby, or they had low educational qualifications with limited opportunities for further education or employment.

### Various publicity measures used to attract women to skills training, and their effectiveness

Creative outreach campaigns are necessary to reach women, who have a smaller presence in public spheres. Various publicity measures were used by T&Es to generate interest in occupational skills among women.

As shown in the chart below, personal contact was the most effective promotional measure, reaching 30.16% of those surveyed. The personal contact was through door-to-door campaigns. Supporters were recruited to visit potential trainees and their families and address their concerns, helping them see the value of training and employment. These champions included community leaders, training coordinators, women trainers, and ex-graduates. Using training coordinators, women trainers and ex-graduates in the door-to door campaigns also helped attract women to non-traditional occupational skills training, as they could talk to people who had firsthand experience working in non-traditional trades.

### Challenges in reaching women with skills training

The tendency to acquire traditional skills is prominent among women, and selecting even lucrative non-traditional skills for training is still not common. The common perception is that non-traditional occupational trades require odd working hours, demand physical strength and require one to leave home frequently. Motivating women to participate in non-traditional occupational skills training is still a challenge. Moreover, these misconceptions are common not only among beneficiaries, but also their families, and even the T&Es.

Some of these challenges require a continuous education in the form of awareness programs, counselling, interaction with family members and the employers. The door-to-door campaigns carried out by T&Es prior to recruitment using ex-trainees to motivate young girls in participating in non-traditional occupational skills was very effective.

The 15-day period for promotional activities allocated in the program is not adequate for T&Es to reach women in remote locations to promote skills training programs. These women are usually among the most disadvantaged (Category "A"). The other major challenge in attracting Category "A" women to occupational skills training is that they are usually daily wage labourers who depend on these wages for a living. It is difficult for them to forego their daily earnings and join occupational skills training.

### Access of Extremely Poor Women to Training

A group of women living in the banks of Bakra river in Urlabari, Morang were approached for occupational skills training on Dhaka weaving. The T&Es targeted 60 households in that community. The women were interested in joining the training program but were dependent on their daily wages of around Rs.300 from crushing stones in the river bank to maintain their families. The T&E was not in a position to substitute their daily earning in the form of allowance for a period of three months. As a result, they refused to participate in the Dhaka weaving training. -Jhapa Technical School, Birtamod, Jhapa.

Information provided by T&Es is of a generic nature without any specific message targeted towards women. Many have not realised the importance of designing specific messages targeted towards women and Category "A" beneficiaries. Even those who have realized the importance of outreach do not have the time, money, or human resources to design and implement specific promotional measures to attract more women trainees.

## Lessons learned

Several lessons were learned about how to increase the access of women to occupational skills training and employment opportunities:

### Relevance and marketability of acquired skills

The occupational skills offered by the T&Es should match the demand in the market. There are instances reported where acquired skills do not match the demands of the market. As a result, trainees had to put in additional efforts to gain required skills in order to get employed.

This can be done in cooperation with the private sector, and organisations like the District Chambers of Commerce and Industries (DCCI). Although T&Es claim that they customize the course to suit the market need, the practice is yet to be institutionalised. Tailoring the occupational skills training to market demand depends on the kinds of relationships the T&Es have with private sector associations. However, these links are rather weak right now, and T&Es have not paid much attention to strengthening them either.

### Consultation with potential trainees

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

### Women trainers

The preference for women or men trainers was determined by the experience, capacity and maturity of the trainers. Developing women trainers in non-traditional occupational trades is effective as they can be role models for young girls and women interested in acquiring non-traditional occupational skills.

**“I took occupational skills training in repair of television. We were given skills to repair black & white television sets. I did not find any employment immediately after completion of the training because I did not know how to repair color television. With four of my colleagues, I rented a room in the local market and we started learning to repair color television for a couple of months. I was confident in repairing the color television and was able to find employment in a local electronic repair shop.”**

— **Neelam Lamichane**, 28 years old, Nijgad Bara



Lal Prasad Sharma

Women trainers were also preferred in matters related to flexibility in training hours, opportunity to raise issues related to women, and degree of ease in taking part in sessions. In terms of creating an ideal learning environment and delivery of content, the men trainers were perceived to be more effective. The best combination preferred in terms of learning and effectiveness of training content was a pair consisting of women and men trainers.

### Helping those with low prior education

The idea of offering short term occupational skills training is to provide alternatives for livelihoods to those who are school dropouts or from deprived and poor section of the society. Thus a lower education qualification especially among women becomes an integral part of the training process. There is need to use creativity to come up with measures that facilitate learning for women trainees with low education qualifications. Extra coaching, preferably in the local language; more focus on practical sessions to provide hands-on skills; and adaptation of teaching methodologies from functional literacy programs are helpful.

### Earning vs. Trade Skills

The monthly earnings of an individual trainee were determined by their skills and experience. Equally important was the nature and size of the business they worked in. An export-oriented business (pashmina knitting) normally pays higher wages to the workers as they demand a certain level of skill and experience. Certain occupational trades such as brick moulding enabled the trainees to earn good wages. However, brick moulding is a seasonal business and the trainees were unable to earn year-round. The seasonal nature of employment becomes important particularly for trainees coming from Category "A" background who have poor economic conditions and need to earn year-round. They may require additional skills, in the form of multi-skilling so that they have income throughout the year, and don't have to rely on seasonal income.

### Tackling employer biases

Employer biases towards women trainees are based on anecdotal evidence, and have not been systematically studied. Selected T&Es, in collaboration with the private sector associations such as DCCI can carry out an assessment focusing on issues like work productivity, quality work, efficiency of women graduates who acquired non-traditional occupational skills and are currently working or self-employed. This evidence based research can be disseminated to a wider audience, especially potential employers, to reduce the biases against women graduates involved in non-occupational trades.

## Case study



Frances Klarzel

### WOMEN ARE EQUALLY CAPABLE OF DOING "MALE" JOBS

Sita Sarki, 25, a permanent resident of Gulmi district in western Nepal has been working as a mechanical fitter for three years at Butwal Technical Institute, after completing her Level I training in 2012. She earns Rs. 6,000 per month, with 20 hours leave in a month. She is very satisfied with her work.

Her skills and dedication were highly appreciated by her employer and she was awarded a cash prize of Rs.2500, which motivated her to get advanced skills.

She has enrolled for Level II training on arc welding. Upon completion of her Level II training, Sita plans to undergo a Training of Trainers (TOT) course to become a trainer in her field. She is confident that she can set an example by becoming a woman trainer in a non-traditional occupational trade. She believes that trade skills should not be divided in terms of gender because women can do them just as well. "What we require is the confidence to demonstrate that we are equally capable".

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