



Deepak Gyawali

## NON-TRADITIONAL OR TRADITIONAL TRADES FOR WOMEN?

### Introduction: Why is employment important for women and girls?

Jobs are important for women and girls because the income they earn helps their families out of poverty, and garners them respect and the power to make decisions in their families and communities. Yet challenges remain for women and girls to overcome perceptions in many communities about the kinds of work that are socially acceptable for women and girls.

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. With the social perception of women's roles in the family and the community, a large percentage of female participants take training in traditional trades where more than 50% of those working in the trade are women.

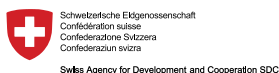
However, EF monitoring suggests that these traditional trades yield less income than non-traditional, stereotypically male-oriented, trades where over half of those engaged in the trade are men. In response to this conclusion, EF encourages women to participate in non-traditional trades where fewer than 50% of the workers are women, in order for women to have an opportunity to earn the higher levels of income and to demonstrate the capabilities of women in society.

As noted in the following findings, the social perceptions of various trades are changing as more women work in them. Two examples are mobile phone repair and bamboo craft making. "Transitional" trades may eventually reach a tipping point where enough women are engaged in these trades that society perceives the trades as 'traditional' or socially acceptable for women.

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A study on women in non-traditional trades in 2014 examined the perceptions of women on these trades and the factors that enabled them to continue working (or not) in a trade usually done by men. This qualitative study focused on examining the factors that affected 209 women trainees in 28 districts of Nepal, especially those in the age range of 16 – 25 years at the time of the training, and also conducted Focus Group Discussions with Training and Employment Providers (T&Es).

### Requirements – understanding situations of Women

T&Es asked a crucial question that affects women in non-traditional trades: **“what is the starting point of the trainees?”**

**“The outcomes for women depend on their families’ culture in the locality, as many families in the Terai will not let women leave their house.”** comment of T&E in FGD

This question is relevant at several layers: their education, home situation, cultural milieu and norms, family financial situation, companionship, mobility, - all of which affect their confidence and determination to step out of the social norms to do work usually done by men.

The first interview for this study illustrated the need for the question clearly: two Muslim women living in a small village had had limited education but were given training in TV repair. The jobs found for them were in a TV factory a half hour walk from their homes. They were two women working among 200 men. The women had lasted ten days in their jobs.

### Social context and family support

In this qualitative study, we asked the women how their family felt about her working in a non-traditional trade. When asked how their families felt about the woman working in a non-traditional trade, 100% of women interviewed said that family support was essential for them to work in any trade. Women said 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. Women, who were unemployed, had stopped work, or changed from the non-traditional trade, invariably mentioned household obligations, or family disapproval of their employment in the trade.

In the FGDs, the T&Es discussed concerns about the social contexts affecting whether women can work in non-traditional trades. The comments from trainees and T&Es indicated that it was more difficult to get family permission to work for women living in a joint family than in a household of just a husband and wife. Migration, marriage, family restrictions, child bearing, and a change in interest are all social factors affecting the employment of women in non-traditional trades.



Challenges encountered by the women in non-traditional trades were their social vulnerability and the perceptions of their families and their community members about women doing “men’s work.” Another challenge was that society does not believe they can do the job. They had to gain the trust of customers and employers about whether women could actually carry out the tasks involved in the trade effectively. Those women who are confident usually overcame this challenge by proving their skills while many women who are unemployed failed to get permission from their families, usually their husband or in-laws, to do the work or lacked confidence to have a job or be self-employed in the non-traditional trade.

The T&Es mentioned differences between the Pahadi community from the hills and the Madhesi community in the Terai. For instance, numerous proscriptions in Madhesi culture inhibit women from leaving their homes to go to work in the bazaar or out in the fields. The families totally prohibit women from interacting with men other than their family members. The T&Es said 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 to engage in non-traditional trades. The T&Es said that certain cities with high populations of migrant people, were more progressive, so it was more socially acceptable for women to be working in non-traditional trades.

Financial need: T&Es suggested that women from households with less financial need had less family support to work in non-traditional trades, whereas women in ethnic groups and from less affluent households had fewer family and cultural proscriptions. Two women, whose families did not need their income, had had their parents tell them to stop working in a non-traditional trade. For example, a young woman aluminium fabricator had to quit her job when her mother came to visit the worksite and the daughter that the job was an embarrassment to the family. In contrast, three employed young women had mothers who as single parents needed the income.

Getting work: Most employed women got their jobs through either personal contacts or T&E connections. Women got employment was working in a family business with their brothers or husbands. The employment rates also varied depending on the caste and the ethnicity of the women with higher employment rates observed among the Tharu ethnicity and lower employment rates observed among women whose families had less financial need for their income.

## Lessons learned

To address factors limiting the employment of women in non-traditional trades, the lessons learned suggest the following measures:

Situation analysis: A careful assessment of the situation of women in a particular district and specific locale is necessary since their situation can vary greatly across the country or in a district. A careful consideration of the social norms is essential for women to be employed sustainably – both in the respective homes of the women and in the employment environment. However, since the situation across Nepal is extremely varied even within the Terai ecological zone and actions or policies that aim to address a single constraint might not achieve the optimum results.

Matching the trades to be offered with the situation of the women: Given the overlapping household obligations for care of family members and limited mobility of many women especially in more conservative communities, it is important to match trades (whether traditional or non-traditional) with the given situation of women in a specific district, city, or community.

Flexible trades in secure situations: Women are interested in home-based enterprises because the timing is flexible to fit in with their household obligations and the safety concerns of their

**“Women need skills so that they can work close to home because their families will only allow them to do work close to their homes. Many women will leave a job for marriage and child delivery. In some cases, if a husband who is working elsewhere comes home, he makes the woman leave her job. Therefore, it is good to help women do self-employed work near their homes, for example producing poultry, vegetables, and bamboo crafts – or repairing mobile phones. Among women producing poultry, they are 90% Brahmin-Chhetri because they have the money to invest but will not do labour intensive work. These women do not work in masonry – those doing that work are all Dalit and Janajati.”** Comment by T&E in Kailali

## COMMENTS IN T&E FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS:

- **“While 40% of men will find employment themselves, at most 10% of women will find their own work. Self-confidence is a challenge for women finding work.”**
- **“Women often do not want to do non-traditional trades because there is not a favourable environment in their family and they doubt whether they can do the same work as men – we need to create a favourable environment”**
- **“Many women like tailoring because they can fit it in with household chores and do it at home.”**
- **“We need to understand women’s situation, family pressure, and needs.”**



families, who do not want them travelling to unknown places. Part-time work could provide increased flexibility and allow more women to be employed. This is important for younger women in their child bearing and raising years, with due consideration to the family support situation. EF could promote trades where a woman can work from home or in a shop, in a secure situation.

Greater support for counselling by T&Es: T&Es emphasised the importance of counselling to generate more awareness among the family members of potential women trainees and the larger community so that they are supportive of the women's employment in the trade. This could be expanded to include working with families to find ways to reduce the household obligations of the woman by helping her with her chores. The life skill training could be conducted for trainees for five days before they begin the trade training.

More facilities for women with financial need: The selection of women should focus on women whose families have a financial need. Their participation would be encouraged if more day-care facilities were available for their younger children.

This factor – marriage and child bearing and rearing – as part of the lifespan of women brings challenges to them staying employed in non-traditional trades. It was often a reason presented by the respondents for changing or stopping employment in non-traditional trades. Some hoped to return to the trade later, but others had learned another trade, like tailoring, which offered flexibility in the work schedule and a worksite close to the woman's home.

## Conclusions

Hence, there is a wide range of "starting points" -- at one end there are the women in villages, especially in some areas of the Terai, with no education. They are confined to their homes under strict cultural proscriptions on their behaviour and mobility. At the other extreme, there are young women in urban or some rural areas, who have some education even from a college or university, freedom to associate with society in general, and flexibility to move about for work. Most potential trainees are somewhere in between these two extremes in terms of their starting point, which may shift after they get married or bear a child.

The demonstration effect was important when both customers, other women, and the public saw women working in non-traditional trades. The demonstration effect has gradually created a 'tipping point' where more women are working in non-traditional trades that are in transition to being more socially acceptable as employment for women. Overall, employers appreciated the commitment and determination of women working in non-traditional trades.

In conclusion, ultimately, the factors associated with the personal, family, and social context of a given woman overlap with the training and employment factors to determine if she will have the capacity, confidence, and empowerment to make decisions about her own employment and her preference of trade – whether traditional or non-traditional.

## Case study



Frances Klatzel

### FINANCIAL NEED AND WORK IN A NON-TRADITIONAL TRADE

Kamala Pradhan studied until class six. Before the metal working training, she did not do any work besides household chores. She is now employed in a biogas company. "My life is much better than before. I am paid Rs. 3,500 per month."

She is not married and her mother is supportive of her work. "In the training, I thought I could not do this work. However, my mother and aunt convinced me to keep trying. There are four women and men at work. Everyone gets along like a family. I would like to keep working in the same field, but do not know what will happen if I get married."

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