

Charter of Demands- International Conference on Making Non-Traditional Livelihoods work for the Marginalised

The 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) indicates that “development will only be sustainable if it’s benefits accrue equally to both women and men (we would like to amend and add that when we speak of women, we consider women across intersections of caste, class, religion, differently abled women and gender minorities like transgender as well) and women’s rights will only become a reality if they are part of broader efforts to protect the planet and ensure that all people can live with dignity and respect”¹. The SDG’s envision gender equality as a key cornerstone, the force that will ensure the promise of ‘leaving no one behind’.

However, in a situation of rising inequality, existing structural barriers, gender disparities in education and gendered labour markets worldwide, women and other gender minorities’ participation in the workforce is limited to a very narrow set of jobs, which are often low-skilled. Being in low skilled jobs limits their opportunities for future training or upskilling to meet the demands of digitisation and automation, putting them at a high risk of unemployment in the changing labour market conditions. There is need to move beyond the traditional conservative approaches to skilling and livelihood.

We, a collective of practitioners, educators, advocates, entrepreneurs, artists, youth, women, academicians and development partners, have come together in New Delhi on 16-18 January 2019 in the “International Conference on Making Non-Traditional Livelihoods (NTL) work for the Marginalised.” This international conference aims to create a platform to deliberate on how to overcome existing gender disparities in learning opportunities and skills to ensure equitable technical and transferable skills (Target 4.4 of SDG 4), access to employment and decent jobs (as outlined in SDG 8).

Non-Traditional Livelihoods (NTL)² for the marginalised, constitutes a challenge to gendered notions of work and skilling, creates mobility, remunerative incomes and a sense of identity and dignity. It helps in bolstering their self-worth and leads to creation of equitable opportunities to challenge the current structural norms.

We believe that the State is at the centre of pursuit of sustainable development, and in particular, economic empowerment of women. Governments across the world have taken strides in initiating skills development programmes. However, much needs to be done to ensure that policies and programs reach out to the marginalised and transform the lived realities of women.

¹ Turning promises into action: Gender equality in the 2030 agenda for sustainable development UN Women (2018)<http://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/sdg-report>

² Non-Traditional Livelihood refers to livelihood practices that help women break stereotypes emerging from the intersections of gender, caste, class, religion, sexual orientation, disabilities and other marginalities and oppressive structures, within a dynamic context of space and time. NTL increases the set of viable livelihood choices available to women and give them access and control over skills, technology, market, mobility and resources. It creates economic stability along with psychological, social and political empowerment. Some examples of the same include training women to become drivers, masons, electricians etc

The state should adopt a systems approach that will guarantee the creation of an ecosystem of support that will enable the marginalised to have opportunities to learn, acquire/upgrade/refresh skills especially in NTLs, and use the same to pursue a life of dignity.

In this regard, we call on governments to:

1. Make available easy to access and understand information about skilling opportunities, jobs and market options that can be accessed by resource poor women
2. Provide counselling support for women to negotiate with their families the support required to pursue livelihoods of their choice.
3. Invest substantially in contextual skills training for the marginalised to formalise a skills training curriculum that recognises prior learning, goes beyond the technical skills and includes life skills linked to building of physical, emotional and cognitive capacities, skills required for decent work and livelihoods with dignity
4. Ensure flexible learning schedules that respond to women's needs and guarantee learning environments that are free of sexual harassment, violence, discrimination, social prejudices and stereotyping. Additional support such as counselling for family, safe transportation, hostels, scholarships must be made available to enable women to complete the training.
5. Invest in quality public services that will generate employment and provide a better quality of life to all. This will reduce the disproportionate time given to care work allowing women to engage in productive activities and even leave some time for leisure and rest.
6. Legislate quotas for women in all jobs across occupations (especially NTL) and across hierarchies to ensure that there is a critical mass of women in all sectors and all levels of economy.
7. Put in place social protection policies and conducive social infrastructure that can ensure women and gender minority workers in the informal sector and the formal sector are able to live a life of dignity.
8. Institutionalise gender disaggregated data system that monitors access, quality and outcomes of skills trainings must be collated, made available to all stakeholders and inform policy formulation and programme development by the Government.

Further, policies and strategies must be employed to address social protection and gender-sensitive markets:

1. Disproportionate burden of unpaid care work at home restricts women from taking up paid jobs, undertaking advanced education and skilled training and active participation in public life. We urge the state to recognise unpaid work which have been heightened due to non-availability of quality public services and design social protection policies that recognise and redistribute unpaid care work between women and men.
2. Investors, Markets and Work places need to be sensitised and incentivised such that they can be supportive to women, where they are treated fairly. (*They need to provide for creches, safe and hygienic wash rooms, counselling and support through gender desks, parenting leave, care giving leave, return-ships for people coming back to work, options for flexible work, part-time work.*)

3. Women need to be protected and provided economic social and other support (such as helpline services, safe shelter homes, quick redressal and punitive action) when they face a backlash (at home, on roads or at work place) due to their choice of work.

There is also need to broaden the movement within civil society and make conscious efforts to reach out and connect with diverse groups like other movements, skill providers, funders and the private sector (corporates and donors)

We urge the Civil Society to

1. Build linkages with labour movements, especially women in labour unions or women worker collectives to strengthen ties and transfer the thought leadership on skills and work. This will broaden the scope of impact
2. Create collectives and alliances as coalitions are the most powerful way forward not only to build advocacy with state but also with non-state actors like funders and private sector
3. Look inwards at their own policies and systems with respect to provision of a rights based social protection system to their own employees

We urge the Non-State- Private actors like Corporates and donors

1. Funders, donors and corporate investors have to prioritise and invest in NTL, supportive social protection policies and the missing link of a rights-based agenda in the context of skill building of women, girls and gender minorities. This will make conversations more actionable and instrumental, helping realize this radical agenda.
2. We live in a world where resources are being allocated very disproportionately in the hands of few, while others who need capital are being denied access. Strategic financing of programs within a paradigm of rights and empowerment can bridge the gap between these unequal power structures.
3. The corporate sector needs to invest and be accountable for creating markets that accept the marginalised in different roles across the hierarchy of job roles, governance around violence at work spaces and parental leaves.

Finally, we reiterate the need for an alliance of the state in partnership with civil society and the private sector in continuing to mobilise women to create awareness, provide information, have spaces for sharing and solidarity and creating facilitative and sustainable infrastructure and social policies to sustain women in the workforce. Only a healthy partnership between Govt. private sector and civil society can address the challenge of unemployment and underemployment, to ensure that no one is indeed left behind