

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON

making **NTL**
work. for the
marginalized

A stylized illustration of a person holding a glowing red lightbulb, symbolizing an idea or inspiration. The person is depicted in a simple, dark brown silhouette, standing on a small oval shadow. Their right arm is raised, holding a red lightbulb that has several short lines radiating from it, indicating it is lit. The lightbulb is positioned to the left of the main text, with a vertical line extending upwards from it to the letter 'N' in 'NTL'.

BACKGROUND PAPER

for International Conference on Making Non-Traditional Livelihoods (NTL) Work for the Marginalized

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Women's productive potential continues to be underutilized due to the entrenched inequality against women and the prevalence of gender based segregations in the job market. In the event of challenges like stagnating job market and rising unemployment levels, there is need to move beyond the traditional conservative approaches to skilling and livelihood.

This International Conference aims to create a platform to deliberate on how to overcome these 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).

To meet these challenges it also aims to make visible and learn from non-traditional livelihoods for women such as professional driving because it constitutes a challenge to gendered notions of work and skilling, creates mobility, remunerative incomes and a sense of identity and dignity.

This background note attempts to contextualise the key themes being discussed in the International Conference i.e the dilemmas surrounding the workforce participation of women and the role of non-traditional livelihoods in not only creating more opportunities but challenging gender norms as well.

Section 1

WOMEN AND WORK: THE CHALLENGES

1.1 The distinction between Public and Private and its impact on Women's Work


Of the many significant feminist struggles, the campaigns for women's rights to occupy public spaces and to participate in activities such as wage work, politics and public recreation are very important. The distinction between the public and the private sphere in society is however a rather recent one, dating perhaps to the second half of the 17th century. This distinction is closely connected with the large scale changes in the economy, trade, society and politics that Europe witnessed as a result of capitalist modernization. The nature of agriculture changed and a growing army of wage labourers very different from the earlier family based system of production became the order of the day. Thus, for the first time a distinction between the public world of employment and the private world of the home emerged. With capitalism and modernity, a complete separation of productive economic activity from the homestead and the household become the norm. Thus, began the separation of women from the economic activities related to the newly emerging capitalist market. Men came to be perceived as the rightful occupants of the public sphere and women who stepped out into the public were either doing so out of necessity or were morally suspect. The fact is that there are fewer women than men in public spaces, public transport, markets and offices. This made the presence of women in public spaces unless "sanctioned" a matter of speculation and curiosity (*Phakde, 2011*). Women's presence in the public sphere became a source of anxiety, discomfort and was often met with violence. This has on the one hand created a culture of fear and silence amongst women, while men on the other hand, feel a great sense of impunity. With new ways of organizing the economy and production, women found themselves pushed out of waged work that came to characterize capitalism. Economic activities that were carried out from homesteads now increasingly shifted to new locales outside the home.

Feminist politics has questioned this division in various ways. Women's assigned roles in the private sphere have been thoroughly interrogated by feminist writers and activists. There has been a consistent demand to be integrated into the public sphere, and others have rejected this division. While still others have argued that values such as care, nurturance and cooperation, traditionally associated with the private sphere, should be incorporated into the public sphere as well (Squires, 2008). As a result of several feminist campaigns and needless to add economic imperatives, women's labour and work has remained consistently significant, albeit rendered anonymous or insignificant. Women face considerable challenges while working in the public sphere, because they are not accepted as rightful occupants of the public world of waged work and employment and often subjected to violence- both overt and subtle.

a) An occupational segregation- men, women and other gender tend to congregate in specific occupations. Women being segregated in professions like home based piece rate wage work, beauty and wellness, secretarial or sales work which have over the years become 'feminised' and considered low skilled and therefore low paid.

b) A persistent wage gap between genders

There is obviously no one single explanation for these inequalities, however it is clear that these are not just a matter of individual choice alone, rather these inequalities are produced by structural barriers that prevent women from accessing many opportunities that the economy might provide men with (Crompton, 2006).

 **Globally, the labour force participation rate among prime working-age women (aged 25-54) stands at 63 per cent compared to 94 per cent among their male counterparts**

UN Women



The global gender pay gap is 23 per cent according to UN Women

It is a fact that women have moved into managerial roles, but they still remain under represented in the top most rungs of management. The patterns of work and the organization of the workplace continues to assume a normative male worker. While, women have breached the fortress to a certain extent, the challenge is that the neo-liberal economy has reconfigured work in such a way that it has become less and less congenial for people who have care giving responsibilities (Crompton, 2006). It sets up a false choice between 'encumbered' worker and 'un- encumbered' worker.¹

Workers are actively encouraged to opt for flexible careers and jobs, however it is women who seem to be congregating in these jobs, once again creating inequality albeit in new forms.

1.2 Women and Work – From a feminist lens

Work is an area of contentious debate within feminist politics - what constitutes as work being a very important dividing line in these debates. It is agreed that 'work is a purposeful human activity' (Andolsen, 1998). Feminist thinkers have examined very carefully the gendered nature of work- specially the distinction made between productive and reproductive labour. Women are generally responsible for the daily tedium of house work which has been described by Angela Davis as 'invisible, repetitive, exhausting, unproductive and uncreative' (Andolsen, 1998). In addition, the reproduction of children and the care and nurturing of children i.e reproductive labour is also performed by women. A milestone in thinking about women's work has been the importance attached to mothering as work which is credited to feminist philosophers such Sara Ruddick and others (Andolsen, 1998). This perspective views that mothering is not just a spontaneous

response of a woman to her child, but rather involves creative thinking and discerning judgement. This made it possible subsequently to argue that mothering therefore is work that men too could perform. However, unfortunately, the dominant and mainstream discourse still does not give the acceptance to these roles as 'Work'.

Hence, from this perspective emerge the set of challenges that are presented before women when they join the waged workforce. Questions of paid maternity and child care leave continue to haunt the debates around women's work. It is a fact that women require equal access to wage labour, however it is equally important that the current nature of the workplace itself needs to be reconfigured to allow for more opportunities and greater dignity of work for women. Workplaces and domestic spaces have to review the organization of work to ensure that there is greater and more equitable division of labour both at home and at work. The 'invisible labour' performed by women in terms of emotional labour should certainly be acknowledged.



Women average 2.6 times as much time on unpaid care and domestic work as men do
World Bank

The neo-liberal agenda with its focus on self-interested rational individual who seeks profit maximization and capitalist accumulation of wealth as the end goal; instrumentalised women's role in the economy as being "cheap," "docile," "nimble-fingered," (*Enloe 1990; Salzinger 2003; UNRISD Research Paper 2012*) giving an illusion that they can be easily integrated in the world economy albeit on an unequal footing. Such large-scale incorporation of poor and working-class women into global capitalism draws from dual and somewhat contrasting ideologies, of the family that wants to instrumentalise

women's labour while drawing support from the feminist idea that work is empowering for women.' (*Radhakrishnan & Solari, 2015*). It is this contradiction that lies at the heart of the inequality in women's work participation and lower value accorded to their work.

1.3 The Indian context: Declining rate of women's workforce participation

Recent global trends of work force participation as well as the Indian context illustrate that economic growth has not generated an equivalent growth in employment or diversification, especially for women. The structure of the Indian economy is such that most of the employment is generally in the informal sector with 93% of the workforce either in the unorganized sector or in contractual segments of the organized sector with more or less the same work insecurities as the unorganised sector of the economy. Entrepreneurship and self-employment are being promoted by the government but data shows that most people in the self-employment category have very low earning and are primarily underemployed own-account workers ². Even more than men, and substantially so, women workers remain stuck in low-value-added but arduous work, including agriculture.



80% of women in India are either self-employed or engaged in casual work with minimal income, without social protection and job security

(Ali, 2017)

¹ Workspaces work on an ideal type of an 'unencumbered' worker, especially for managerial and professional jobs where the worker can expand their timelines to be available beyond work hours. The encumbered worker, most often a woman burdened by care giving or household responsibilities does not fit these 'ideal' assumptions which leads to gender segregations and pay gaps across gender. (Acker, J. 2006)

² Azad-ASPBAE Study, 2017, Financing Options for Skills for Work of Marginalized Women

This is in part because they lack access to certain types of training and work opportunities and in part because they are identified with work that is backbreaking, like transplanting rice or removing weeds from rice beds.

Even with education and skills training, women encounter more barriers than men, especially in rural, informal and traditional economies. These barriers range from an inability to access educational opportunities due to distance (not being allowed to travel far due to concerns of safety from their family and community) to being allowed to access skills training only in certain trades and occupations deemed by the family and community as acceptable for them. The Fourth Annual Employment-Unemployment Survey conducted by the Labour Bureau during the period January 2014 to July 2014 has shown that the Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) is 52.5 % for all persons. Women account only for 24% overall (26.7% in rural areas and 16.2% in urban area). Women's LFPR has been low (and falling) over the last two decades in India and ILO underscores "...the key long-run issue (being) the lack of employment opportunities for India's women, owing to factors such as occupational segregation", noting social norms and other akin factors.

There are multiple issues faced by women in India which include the primary, if sole responsibility for care and reproductive work being placed on women, gender stereotyping of occupations and spaces, prevalent socio-cultural norms restricting women's mobility, limitations based on caste, among others. It is in this context that it will be useful to refer to Shramshakti: Report of the National Commission on Self-Employed Women and Women in the Informal Sector 1989, as a result of a commission set up by the Government in 1987 and headed by Magsaysay Award winner and Rajya Sabha member Ela Bhatt. One of the important findings was that most women interviewed were their families' sole bread earners,

yet they continued to earn less than half of what a man earned. The commission also discovered that for women who were involved in traditionally male activities like transplanting, harvesting and threshing paddy, treading pulses and breaking stones, the census, recognized them only as housewives which is reflective of our deep seated socio- cultural biases.

India is challenged in terms of engaging women in the productive sector, not only because of the challenge of skilling women, particularly marginalized women amidst the constantly evolving demands in the job market but also because of limitations set by socio-cultural norms and practices at both the micro-level and the macro-level for their participation. Besides socio-cultural norms at the household level, women also face challenges of violence in public places and a hostile work environment that act as deterrent in their seeking employment or in persuading the families to let them pursue productive employment.

Section 2.

SKILL PROGRAMS DECENT LIVELIHOOD AND EMPOWERMENT FOR WOMEN

Women and the question of empowerment have been closely linked points of discussion both within the academia as well as grass root organizations. While the term empowerment presents certain conceptual difficulties and challenges, yet it is accepted that empowerment is a somewhat fluid and multidimensional concept that is contingent upon a host of social, economic and cultural factors. There is an agreement however, that an important element for empowerment is increased autonomy for girls and women. Autonomy however, does not get created in a vacuum, it is closely related to the kind of opportunities that young girls and women are provided with.



A generation of girls risk being left outside the labour force or trapped in vulnerable or low quality employment, due to a lack of skills and gendered expectations of their roles as caregivers.- ILO and UNICEF study

These opportunities would range from access to education and skills, mobility and financial independence. Policy makers both at the national and international level have come to accept the centrality of access to education and skills as being central to the possibilities of building communities with empowered women who are able to negotiate life with informed and meaningful choices.

However, it needs to be noted that globally gender parity in education has not really translated into access to decent jobs for women. Often, education and skill training for women is also gendered and results in training that is restricted to certain specific skills only. These would more often than not be skills that are acceptable to young women's families and communities but not necessarily those which are remunerative or have professional opportunities and a career path.

Skills by themselves are also not sufficient in the journey of women towards empowerment. In India for instance, the limitations of educational attainment and health and nutrition act as severe impediments. Yet another challenge that women face is that employers often prefer men, despite the same skills training. Also, it needs to be mentioned that besides some foundational skills (such as literacy and numeracy) and technical skills there is a critical need for transferable skills such as self-confidence, communication and decision-making. A rights based approach to training is also crucial to enable women to overcome structural barriers and challenge the status quo, giving them the ability to negotiate with a range of stakeholders at home, community, market and state. These are crucial for female youth to find decent work, become entrepreneurs, and access further training and learning³. The other crucial need today is to create more spaces for women within markets, breaking the gendered division of labour so that women can access livelihood opportunities which were earlier considered off limits, such as transportation and construction.

Many feminist initiatives today have realised this need and are training women in the traditional soft skills, but also in non-traditional livelihoods such as masonry and electrician work. Studies have also shown that young women are keen on acquiring and accessing non-traditional opportunities, and are convinced about their abilities to engage in these occupations. (Gathoskar, 2016). They are also motivated to want more opportunity for themselves and in non-traditional livelihood options. The girls and women who were interested in non-traditional opportunities, like electrician skills, seemed to be questioning the frameworks that govern and even control their lives. They were clear that their capacities, including technical aptitude, were no less than their male colleagues or their male partners.



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. (Charter of the Non Traditional Network in India, 2017)

³ International Labour Organization and United Nations Children's Fund, GirlForce: Skills, Education and Training for Girls Now, ILO and UNICEF, Geneva and New York, 2018

Section 3

NON-TRADITIONAL LIVELIHOODS (NTL) An opportunity for challenging gender norms and generating employment opportunities

There is a growing movement in the development sector that is facilitating women's engagement in the non-traditional livelihood or NTL through multi-module skills development programme. Breaking into an entirely new path, this involves a serious change of mindset for women and their families and investment from both women and the organization providing training in terms of time and resources, before, during and after the training. The organizations providing skills development in NTL for women also facilitate their employment by linking them to employers, organizing them to undertake projects collectively, providing infrastructure for them to undertake work as well as a supportive environment during their initial period, i.e an on job supportive structure.

As a way to transcend limitations of job opportunities for women and facilitate jobs with higher pay and room for professional growth, groups working on Non Traditional Livelihoods are opening up spaces to expand women's productive engagement by training women in jobs and professions traditionally 'reserved'/undertaken by men, e.g. taxi and auto driving, masonry, carpentry, hollow blocks making, LED bulb making, electrical installation and management, etc.

In the context of social change, NTL therefore challenges the status quo helping women to access remunerative livelihood options that have been traditionally male dominated. It allows women to earn more income than they would have got in jobs traditionally assigned to women, e.g. domestic service, care-giving, etc. However, women's participation in NTL is new and employers are yet to accept women in productive areas that have been traditionally dominated by men (e.g. taxi and auto companies, construction firms, etc).The work environment in places traditionally employing only men therefore lack infrastructure for women, e.g. rest area, toilets, changing rooms, etc.

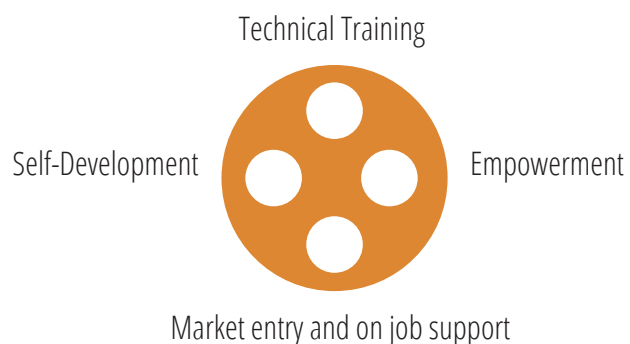


Azad Foundation's NTL model

TRAINING AND EMPLOYING RESOURCE POOR WOMEN AS COMMERCIAL CHAUFFEURS

Azad Foundation's model of skill development and livelihood generation is an innovative model which focuses on ensuring that the needs and aspirations of both the learners and the market are met in order to build the bridge between education and employment. Azad's Women on Wheels (WoW) programme provides a transformative capacity building training around self, empowerment and technical skills i.e. professional driving based on adult learning principles to urban resource poor women helping them challenge patriarchal norms regarding gender stereotyping of work and creating opportunities in a male dominated area 'driving'. Its employment partner, Sakha provides remunerative and safe employment options to women trained by Azad. The model enables the transition from training to gainful employment. Driving is a highly male dominated occupation and women drivers constitute a challenge to gendered notions of work and skills; the training in both technical and life skills within a rights based perspective is provided by Azad, along with sustained emotional, financial and social support. This aims to create mobility, remunerative income, as well as a sense of confidence and identity for the women learners.

AZAD'S SKILL ++ MODEL



Section 4

HARNESSING THE POTENTIAL OF NTL Need for supportive markets and enabling ecosystem

Gender norms are the product of a patriarchal system, which in intersection with other marginalities like caste, ethnicity, race, class, sexuality, disability and others, generate controls over women's labour and sexuality. Historically there have been restrictions on women's mobility and public participation relegating them to the private domain of unpaid care and domestic work which helps in regulating their sexuality and extracting unpaid reproductive labour out of them. NTL has the potential to play a significant role in questioning gender norms surrounding paid and unpaid, productive and reproductive work and thereby challenge gender segregated labour, technology and skill markets. It enables inclusion of women in occupations that generate higher wealth for the workers, families and the state as a whole. Moreover, if women are to join the workforce in larger numbers, especially in NTL sector, such gender norms have to be questioned and the structure of subordination has to be challenged.

To scale this potential of NTL there is need for policy advocacy that promotes NTL and draws linkages with its potential to promote decent jobs, economic growth empowerment and in the long run a more gender inclusive market. Governments all over the world should make a commitment not only to generate jobs for women but to also challenge gender norms through conducive gender just policies and the governance system. Without an active effort by the state to change gender norms that place women in subordinate positions, the dream of livelihoods with dignity for women will remain unfulfilled. In addition, there should be financial investment in training of women in NTLs not just to address skill needs, but also transformational skills i.e generating rights awareness and self-development which will enable women to challenge and negotiate with the social and cultural constraints that have in the first place denied them entry into these skill domains. This implies

integration of rights based training on gender and legal rights, sexuality and reproductive health and self-development training in communications, self-defense, first aid etc., with skill training. This will ensure that women not only earn decent wages but that they are able to make decisions, i.e exercise control over the use of their wages. Significantly, it needs to be remembered that many studies have shown that to encourage women to participate in the labour force, investments need to be made to ensure there exists an enabling infrastructure at various levels. Women, especially those from marginalised communities require safe public transport, well-lit roads and lanes, they require safe and hygienic toilet which are easily accessible, hostels for working women, shelters for those who might be facing violence at home, creches for child care, among others. Investment in all of these will boost the potential of female workforce that will benefit the women, their families, communities and the nation (Ali, 2017).

While skilling is a means to make women employable and a part of the workforce, building an ecosystem of gender sensitive policies, practices, workplace infrastructure, resources including financing, among others, would enable more women to engage in the productive sector. It is deemed crucial to make the link between social, economic and political issues and build an ecosystem to get women into the workspace. Skills development programmes must, thus, take cognizance of this reality and include the facilitation of this ecosystem into skills development framework.

In order to reduce women's unpaid work time (reproductive work at home), it is not enough to invest in labour saving technology, crèche, parental leave etc; Perhaps more importantly, it is to direct efforts at redistribution of household responsibilities between men and women so that both can share the responsibilities (and perhaps fulfillment that come out of it) of unpaid domestic and care work as well as paid work.

Women's economic empowerment will always be constrained till the reproductive and care work remains only the responsibility of women.



South Asian women put in an extra 5 hours of work on a daily basis as compared to the men, as per a study by UN Women.

Another important factor limiting women's active participation in the workforce is the extensive violence faced by women at homes, on the streets and the workplace. Providing livelihoods with dignity cannot be isolated from issues of domestic violence and sexual harassment which are violations of women's fundamental right to bodily integrity. Violence and the threat of it, is used as to not allow women to take decisions on any aspect of their lives including those that relate to their work choices. Such violence also leads to depression, demotivation and inability to work to one's full potential. Therefore, any attempt at bringing women into the work force must take into account preventive, awareness related and support measures for women to help them deal with violence at home and public spaces. An effective way might also be to engage with men on issues of gendered notions of work, unpaid care work and violence to enable them to become allies in the process.

Section 5

SDGs IN RELATION TO THE WORLD OF WOMEN AND WORK AND PROMOTION OF NTL

The need for promoting decent work, equal pay for equal work, equal access to economic assets and opportunities, and the fair distribution of unpaid care work is also inbuilt in the Sustainable Development Goals. This set of 17 holistic and integrated goals was adopted by world leaders

in 2015 to guide world's development agenda and discourse based on the principle of 'leaving no one behind.

In countries of the global south, small scale, handicrafts and domestic industries have often been held up as solution to the problem of mass poverty. Many women in such locations are engaged in the production of finely crafted luxury goods for women of the wealthier nations. This however does not do away with the already existing sexual division of labour (*Mies, 2012*). The work site shifts to the domestic space and the existing feudal and domestic ties get further reinforced by the women worker's seclusion and domestication. NTL has the capacity to provide a scope to challenge gender norms aiming towards reducing gender pay gaps, provide 'decent jobs thereby having a direct linkage with SDG 8 on decent work and SDG 5 on gender equality.

SDG 8 complements SDG 10 of reducing inequality within and among countries. Evidence suggests that inequality between women and men in a household is a strong contributing factor to overall income inequality in society. For reducing inequality it therefore becomes necessary generating sustainable employment as well as decent work for women.

However, to achieve the goal of 'decent work' and gender just market, there is need for a more comprehensive look at education and vocational trainings and how they can encompass foundational, technical skills along with rights based transformational skills with an understanding of gender and other intersectionalities and their role in stratifying the patriarchal social order that we all live in (which relates to SDG 4 on quality education). Further, sustainable infrastructure whether safety in public spaces, existence of hygienic public sanitation facilities, safe public transport and others i.e SDG 11 on Sustainable cities and communities are equally important as a supportive ecosystem to sustain women's work participation as discussed above.

UNDERSTANDING THE POTENTIAL OF NON -TRADITIONAL LIVELIHOODS USING THE LENS OF SDG



These are some of the visible intersections that relate to the world of women and work that will be discussed in the conference. Overall, the International Conference will establish the transformative potential of NTLs, in overcoming gender disparities in work and employment. It

will deliberate upon the capacity of NTL to disrupt the gender norms around livelihoods, ensuring gender equality, which is a key corner stone of the promise of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of 'leaving no one behind'.