

CATALYZING NON-TRADITIONAL LIVELIHOODS FOR WOMEN

NEW EDUCATION POLICY 2020



an analysis report by



NON TRADITIONAL LIVELIHOODS NETWORK



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FOREWORD

The Non-Traditional Livelihoods Network (NTLN) is a collective of 42 members committed to increasing women’s workforce participation, particularly in occupations and trades traditionally closed to them. Established in 2016, the network envisions dismantling the deeply ingrained gendered division of labour that confines women (cis and trans) to low-skilled and low-paid work. Through training opportunities, policy engagement, and structural change, the NTL Network strives to break occupational segregation and expand economic opportunities for marginalized women across intersections of gender, caste, class, religion, sexual orientation, disabilities and other marginalities.

Despite the marginal growth in Female Labour Force Participation Rate and an increase in the percentage of women and girls gaining formal education in the recent years, their participation in non-traditional livelihoods (NTL) remains dismal. This is largely due to deeply entrenched gender norms that continue to shape perceptions of women’s capabilities, restrict their mobility, and limit their access to vocational skills.

One of the key strategies to disrupt the cycle of economic exclusion is equipping women with non-traditional skills—such as driving, carpentry, plumbing, masonry, electrician, etc¹—that enable access to decent, remunerative livelihoods along with control over skills, mobility, financial resources, technology, market and overall wellbeing and dignity of life. The New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 presents a unique opportunity to bridge this gap by integrating vocational education for women and girls within India’s formal education ecosystem. However, there is no specific provision within the NEP for introducing non-traditional skill training.

This study conducted by the NTL Network, led by its members Azad Foundation and the Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST), critically examines the NEP 2020 to assess the scope of incorporating non-traditional skill education in the broader framework of transformative education for women and girls. It provides a review of the policy and implementation status of NEP across 10 states,

¹https://kamlabhasinawards.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Examples_of_Non-Traditional_Livelihoods.pdf

highlighting the opportunities, gaps and challenges hindering women's access to NTLs and recommends strategies to promote NTL through NEP.

This study aims to engage with policymakers, skill institutions, civil society organizations, practitioners, and stakeholders working towards gender-just skill education and empowering marginalized women in India. We hope that this study will be used as a guiding document to integrate non-traditional vocational education for girls and women within the overall educational policies and framework.

We extend our gratitude to Siddhi Pathak and Chandrayee Dey for their invaluable contributions in conducting and shaping this research.

Secretariat,

Non-Traditional Livelihoods (NTL) Network India

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED

FLFPR – Female Labour Force Participation Rate

GDP – Gross Domestic Product

NEP 2020 – New Education Policy 2020

NTLs – Non-Traditional Livelihoods

CSOs – Civil Society Organizations

UT – Union Territory

IDI – In-Depth Interview

FGD – Focus Group Discussion

SEDGs – Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Groups

STEM – Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics

NIEPA – National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration

HEIs – Higher Education Institutions

SCERT – State Council of Educational Research and Training

ICT – Information and Communication Technology

ITI – Industrial Training Institute

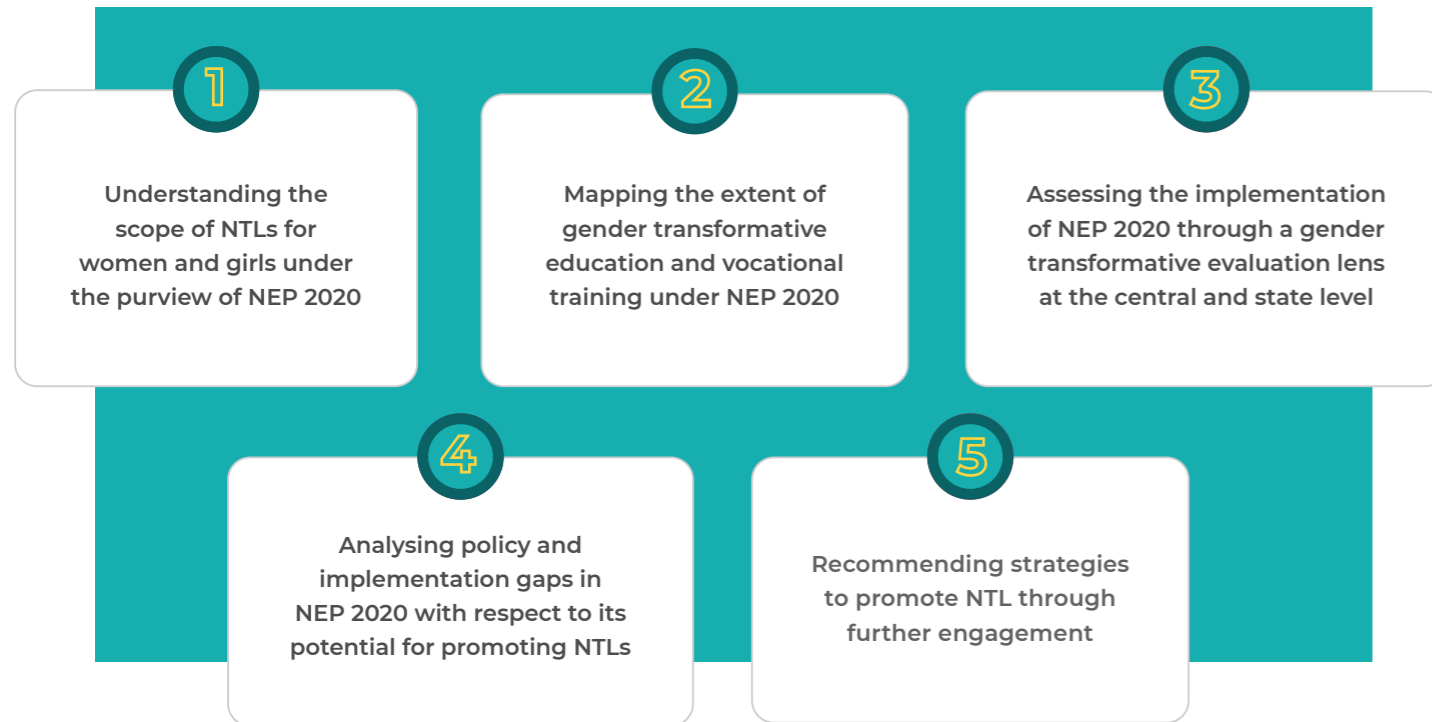
INTRODUCTION & RATIONALE

Economic trends show that the growth in Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR) is slow and incommensurate with other factors that influence it (such as increased per capita GDP, or increased literacy) due to socio-cultural factors such as gender norms that cause women to be engaged in traditional gender roles. The percentage of women and girls gaining formal education has increased. However, this has not translated into their participation in the workforce because of the gap in vocational skill training that still focuses on skills based on traditional gender roles for women and girls. It is, therefore, necessary for both education and employment to be sensitive to and respond to gender norms that inhibit women from participating in the workforce. In this regard, this study attempts to understand the scope of these pathways at the policy level, through a detailed review of the New Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) and its implementation status across states. It aims to understand the scope of gender transformative approaches to education and skilling within the NEP 2020. The NEP 2020 places a high focus on vocational education at the school level and gender inclusion in its policy document. Along with economic empowerment for women, non-traditional livelihoods (NTLs) play the more significant role of breaking gender stereotypes and biases within households and communities for women to expand their choices. It is therefore necessary to examine this claim of the NEP 2020, vis-a-vis the on-ground realities, to understand the following:

1 Where within the NEP does the scope for NTLs lie, if at all?

2 To what extent will the implementation of NEP help in the promotion of NTLs through the three aforementioned pathways to women's empowerment?

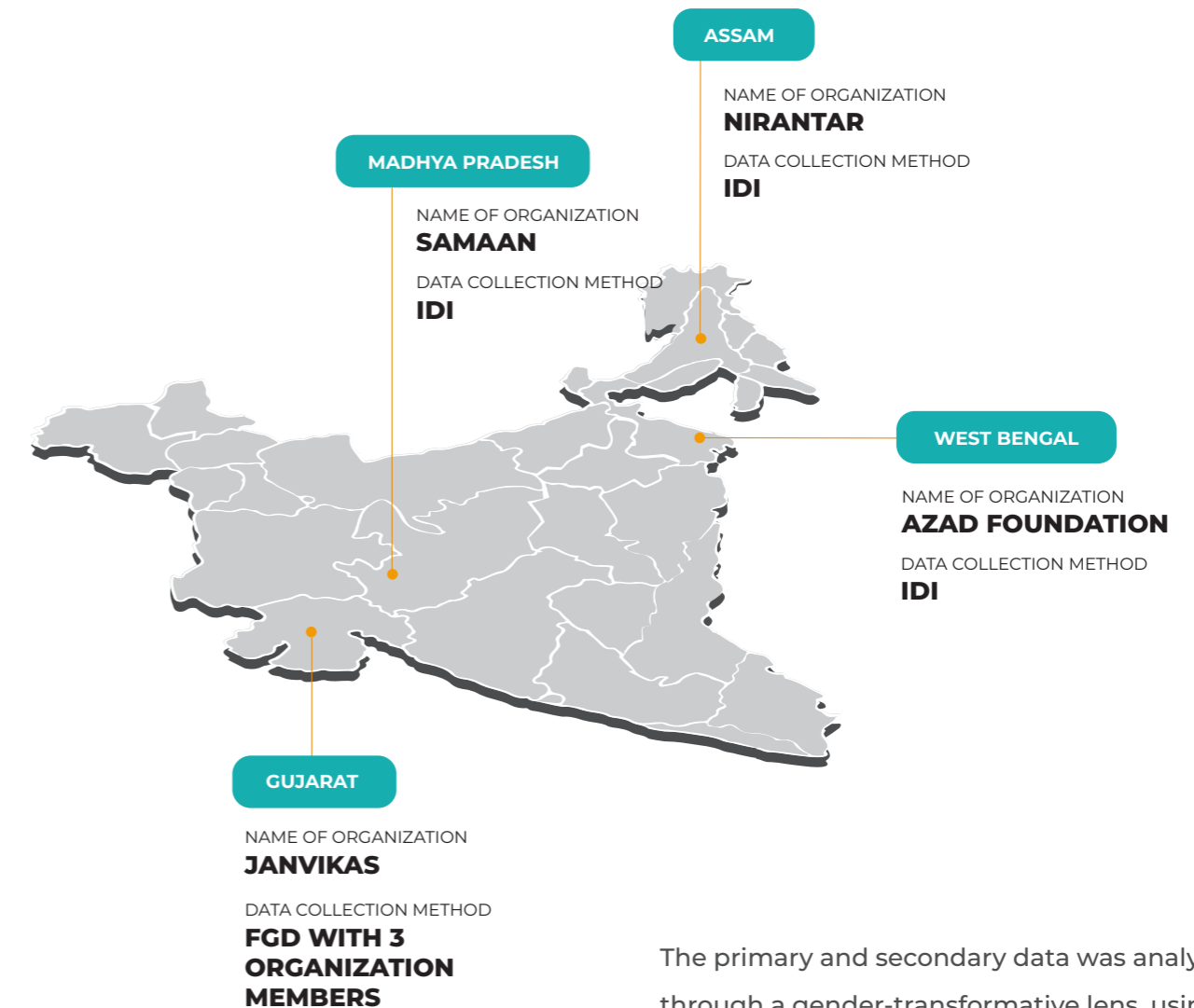
KEY OBJECTIVES



METHODOLOGY

The study uses a combination of methods including gender-transformative systemic review and meta-analysis of secondary literature on the NEP 2020, and qualitative data collection with CSOs that are members of the NTL Network. Nine states and 1 Union Territory (UT) were sampled for the secondary meta-analysis on understanding the implementation status based on the presence and reach of the NTL Network, including, Delhi, Bihar, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Assam, West Bengal, Kerala, Odisha, and Maharashtra. Of these, primary interviews were collected from CSO representatives of 5 states.

STATES & ORGANIZATIONS COVERED FOR QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION



The primary and secondary data was analyzed through a gender-transformative lens, using conceptual frameworks such as Gender Awareness in the policy context by Kabeer & Subrahmaniam (1996), the Resources, Agency, Achievements framework of women empowerment by Kabeer (1999), and the Schools to Work transition continuum, to understand the opportunities and limits to empowerment, and scope for non-traditional livelihoods under NEP 2020 and its implementation.

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN THE NEP 2020

THROUGH A GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE LENS



NEP 2020 brings aboard some landmark changes in terms of inclusivity - gender sensitivity, gender inclusion fund, gender sensitisation, multilayered marginalization of women and overall access and equity for socio-economically disadvantaged gender identities across all stages of education. However, a cursory glance at the policy document reveals that the term 'gender' appears only 16 times and it discusses gender in terms of gender sensitivity as a basic human value and some gender identities as a category of socio-economically disadvantaged groups. The following are the key features of the NEP 2020 policy document with respect to vocational education and gender inclusive provisions:

CURRICULUM FLEXIBILITY AND INTEGRATION OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

One of the guiding principles of the NEP 2020 is that there exists no hard separation between vocational and academic streams of education in order to remove the hierarchies between the two and facilitate a seamless integration of vocational and academic education. For this, it includes provisions such as inclusion of vocational education courses from Grade 6, flexibility of courses, bagless days, hands-on vocational experiences rooted in the local context, among others. All these provisions highlight a more hands-on and practice-based approach to the curriculum, where students will be exposed to vocational education right from the Grade 6. However, viewing these provisions through a gender transformative lens, there is no explicit mention on how the curriculum should address gender barriers and power structures that inhibit girls and women from participating in vocational education, especially in non-traditional fields.

SERVICE ENVIRONMENT AND CULTURE

The NEP 2020 acknowledges the role of school environment and culture to ensure unique learning experience for students, highlighting the importance of a range of infrastructural resources including working toilets, clean drinking water, clean and attractive spaces, electricity, computing devices, internet, libraries, and sports and recreational resources to materialise a safe, inclusive, and effective learning environment and a shared space involving teachers, students, parents, principals, and other support staff. It aims to address some of the challenges with respect to teachers and trainers (for vocational education), such as inadequacy of teachers, and poor quality training of teachers, by way of recruiting teachers in a shared manner in school complexes, and hiring local experts as master trainers in traditional arts and vocational crafts. All these provisions for teachers aim to reduce their challenges and improve learning outcomes for students in vocational education. However, there is no mention of a rigorous gender sensitivity training for the teachers, who are highly influential stakeholders in the lives of students and have the power to shape their thought-processes and world view. The policy provisions for teachers, fail to recognize that teachers are part of the same gendered societal structure and must be trained in order to avoid the perpetuating of the cycle of gender norms at the school level.

EQUITY AND INCLUSION

Section 6 of NEP 2020 addresses equity and inclusion, identifying female students from socially and economically disadvantaged groups (SEDGs) as facing compounded marginalization. While it takes an intersectional approach to gender disparities within SEDGs, it lacks concrete support measures or affirmative actions to combat nuanced marginalization effectively. NEP proposes initiatives like expanding Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas (KGBVs) and creating Special Education Zones, alongside a Gender-Inclusion Fund to

improve access for girls and transgender students. However, the policy falls short in addressing cultural barriers, sustained participation in higher education, especially in STEM fields, and lacks a monitoring framework for fund usage. Although gender sensitization for teachers is emphasised, there's minimal engagement with families or communities to support these norms, and limited support for women's vocational education, failing to address indirect costs and family responsibilities that impact access to adult education.

REIMAGINING VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

The NEP 2020 aims to mainstream vocational education by integrating it into school curricula, targeting 50% of students by 2025 to increase exposure and participation. It seeks to address the perception of vocational education as inferior but lacks a comprehensive framework to dismantle caste and gender stereotypes, especially regarding traditional caste-based vocations. The policy encourages local skill mapping and collaboration with industries to bridge the skill gap, yet it misses an explicit gender focus, potentially reinforcing traditional gender roles rather than challenging them. For instance, without specific guidelines, girls might face barriers like restrictive mobility norms that prevent equal participation, especially in schools following the hub-spoke model for vocational facilities. The policy outlines potential innovations, such as apprenticeship and incubation centres, which could support women in non-traditional fields like STEM and entrepreneurship. However, it falls short by not explicitly prioritising resources or specific measures to ensure girls benefit from these models. This limits the NEP to being gender-responsive rather than gender-transformative, as it lacks a clear roadmap to enable women and girls to pursue non-traditional vocations confidently and freely.



Therefore, the NEP leaves much to the discretion of implementing agencies, risking replication of existing vocational education models without addressing gendered socio-economic barriers.

IMPLEMENTATION STATUS OF THE NEP 2020



The NEP Implementation Strategy document, developed by National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA) in 2020 acknowledges gender disparities and challenges in education but lacks actionable guidelines to transform social norms perpetuating these gaps. For school education, it highlights resource-based solutions like the Gender Inclusion Fund but overlooks learning deficits among disadvantaged groups. In higher education, it addresses gender barriers superficially, without tackling underlying issues like limited hostels, lack of role models, and social norms affecting female enrollment in STEM. While diversity policies are recommended, the document lacks clear state-level implementation guidance. In vocational education, it provides projections and collaboration goals but fails to address gender norms and barriers that restrict women's participation and choice.

REVIEW OF CENTRAL LEVEL GUIDELINES AND SCHEMES FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF NEP 2020

Gender-aware guidelines within India's NEP emphasise inclusivity but lack targeted, gender-transformative provisions. While documents like *Jeevan Kaushal 2.0* and *MULYA PRAVAH 2.0* aim at universal skills and values, they are largely gender-neutral, missing specific empowerment strategies for women and marginalized genders. The *SEDG Guidelines* and *Community Engagement in HEIs* provide some gender-specific measures, such as inclusive spaces and empowerment courses, yet fall short of challenging entrenched societal norms. Two documents with potential for gender transformation—*Basic Facilities and Amenities for Safe, Secure Environment for Women and Women Cell*, and *Global Citizenship Education*—acknowledge power structures and suggest sensitization, yet offer no implementation plans. Five other guidelines, including those on Multiple Entry and Exit and University-Industry Linkage, are gender-blind, ignoring barriers like workplace bias or vocational access issues for women. Overall, while NEP documents aim for inclusivity, a lack of specific, actionable gender-responsive steps risks reinforcing existing inequities instead of dismantling them.

STATE LEVEL IMPLEMENTATION

MADHYA PRADESH



An early NEP 2020 adopter, has introduced various initiatives at school and higher education levels, including a State Curriculum Framework, early childhood education programs, and vocational courses in select schools. However, vocational education remains gendered and limited to special schools like CM Rise and Excellence schools due to infrastructure and resource constraints. Despite these steps, the state's NEP implementation lacks gender-transformative measures, which perpetuates traditional gender roles and does not fully integrate vocational education across regular public schools.

RAJASTHAN



NEP 2020 implementation began with a Higher Education Task Force directing state-funded universities to establish micro-task forces, though a consolidated roadmap is still in development. Vocational education, coordinated with Samagra Shiksha, is offered in gendered patterns: girls' schools focus on IT, Beauty and Wellness, while co-ed schools offer male-dominated sectors like Security alongside female-oriented courses. Additionally, the reliance on contract-based vocational training partners has led to issues with teacher payments and job security, affecting the quality of vocational education delivery.

KERALA



The Kerala government, critical of NEP 2020 for promoting a corporate-driven and culturally narrow education model, published a report highlighting concerns about its exclusionary nature and lack of public funding. The state argues that vocational education, as outlined by NEP, should not replace foundational academic learning nor function as superficial job preparation. Instead of adopting NEP 2020, Kerala implemented its own curriculum with progressive elements like gender-neutral uniforms and textbooks depicting men in household roles, promoting gender inclusivity and challenging traditional norms.

GUJARAT



NEP 2020 implementation began with two task forces for school and higher education, focusing on initiatives under Samagra Shiksha like gender audits, girls' nutrition, sanitation, and self-defence training for girls, although these measures place responsibility on girls rather than addressing structural safety issues. Vocational training for girls in KGBVs leans towards traditional skills, while "bagless days" provide students exposure to limited vocations, with girls often selecting gendered roles like beauty and sewing. A roadmap for higher education NEP implementation includes broad inclusivity measures, but lacks transformative gender-specific guidelines, leading to a diluted impact on-ground.

BIHAR



An early NEP 2020 implementer, has launched multiple initiatives, such as experiential learning, ICT labs, and capacity-building programs under the Bihar Education Project Council (BEPC). Gender-focused programs include self-defence training, menstrual health management, and financial literacy for adolescent girls, which aim to enhance self-efficacy and decision-making. However, there is a lack of emphasis on expanding non-traditional livelihoods (NTLs) for women, particularly in higher education to support seamless school-to-work transitions.

MAHARASHTRA



Maharashtra has established an NEP Steering Committee and sub-committees to support NEP 2020 implementation in higher education, incorporating flexible curriculum options like Multiple Entry-Exit, vocational skills, and community engagement projects. At the school level, vocational programs aligned with NEP focus on fields like technology and agriculture, though a consolidated NEP school plan is still pending. While implementation appears gender-neutral, further on-ground data is needed to understand its full impact, particularly at the school level.

DELHI 

Delhi's Directorate of Education has adopted the NEP 2020's 5+3+3+4 structure, actively engaging stakeholders for curricular improvements. The SCERT's Annual Report 2022-23 highlights gender-focused measures, such as revising textbooks with gender perspectives, conducting gender audits to eliminate biases, and creating gender-inclusive content. These transformative steps are evident in school education, but questions remain regarding gender parity integration in higher education institutions across the Union Territory.

ODISHA 

Odisha's NEP implementation in higher education focuses on quality improvements, such as virtual labs, syllabus revisions, and digital transformation. The state has also committed to upskilling schools via the PM SHRI scheme, benefiting millions of students, but these initiatives remain largely gender-neutral, lacking targeted measures to close gender gaps.

ASSAM 

Assam's NEP implementation emphasizes structural reforms, curriculum updates, and vocational training in 1200 schools. However, issues like limited computer facilities, a lack of gender perspectives among educators, and restricted vocational course choices for girls persist, while efforts like monthly stipends for girls are aimed at improving retention but face sociocultural barriers.

WEST BENGAL 

West Bengal rejected NEP 2020 and drafted its own state policy, focusing on early education, teacher development, and expanded ICT infrastructure, along with a gender focus through programs like Kanyashree. Despite these steps, limited vocational options and high ITI cut-offs restrict non-traditional livelihoods for girls, highlighting continued gender disparity in educational access and vocational training.



OPPORTUNITIES FOR GENDER SENSITIVE EDUCATION AND TRAINING

NEP 2020 aims to improve inclusivity, with provisions like the Gender Inclusion Fund and a focus on equitable education, creating opportunities for girls and marginalized groups. However, while these initiatives can increase access, they do not always guarantee that girls and women will make non-traditional choices if they still face societal constraints. Therefore, gender inclusion funds need to evolve based on social and economic contexts of the beneficiaries, particularly for girls and women. As Kabeer (1999) suggests, resources alone do not equate to empowerment unless conditions allow for real choice, highlighting the need for deeper structural change.

LIMITS TO RECOGNITION OF WOMEN'S UNPAID WORK AND AGENCY

Agency, or the power to make and pursue life choices, is constrained in NEP 2020 by the lack of gender-transformative provisions. Although the policy promotes access, it does not address barriers like unpaid labor and gender-based violence, which limit women's ability to pursue non-traditional livelihoods (NTLs). Real empowerment would require NEP to challenge these norms, enabling women to make choices beyond traditional gender roles.

LIMITS TO GENDER SENSITIVE MARKETS FOR EMPLOYMENT

NEP provisions for industry engagement primarily provide exposure but lack gender-sensitive measures to address biases in hiring, wages, and work conditions, which are crucial for promoting NTLs. Industry-institution linkages should foster supportive environments for women, such as equitable wages and gender-friendly workplaces, but these aspects are absent in the current policy. NEP supports skill development for girls and women, aiding school-to-work transition, but addressing both market (demand) and skill (supply) aspects is essential for sustainable employment. Without interventions on the demand side, like market readiness and industry involvement, education alone is insufficient to ensure successful transitions to non-traditional employment.



While NEP 2020 offers promising changes, it is limited by its alignment with existing norms and minimal structural change, impacting its empowerment potential. To foster true empowerment and adoption of NTLs, recommendations for NEP include adding gender-sensitive practices and policies that encourage non-traditional choices and challenge traditional gender norms.

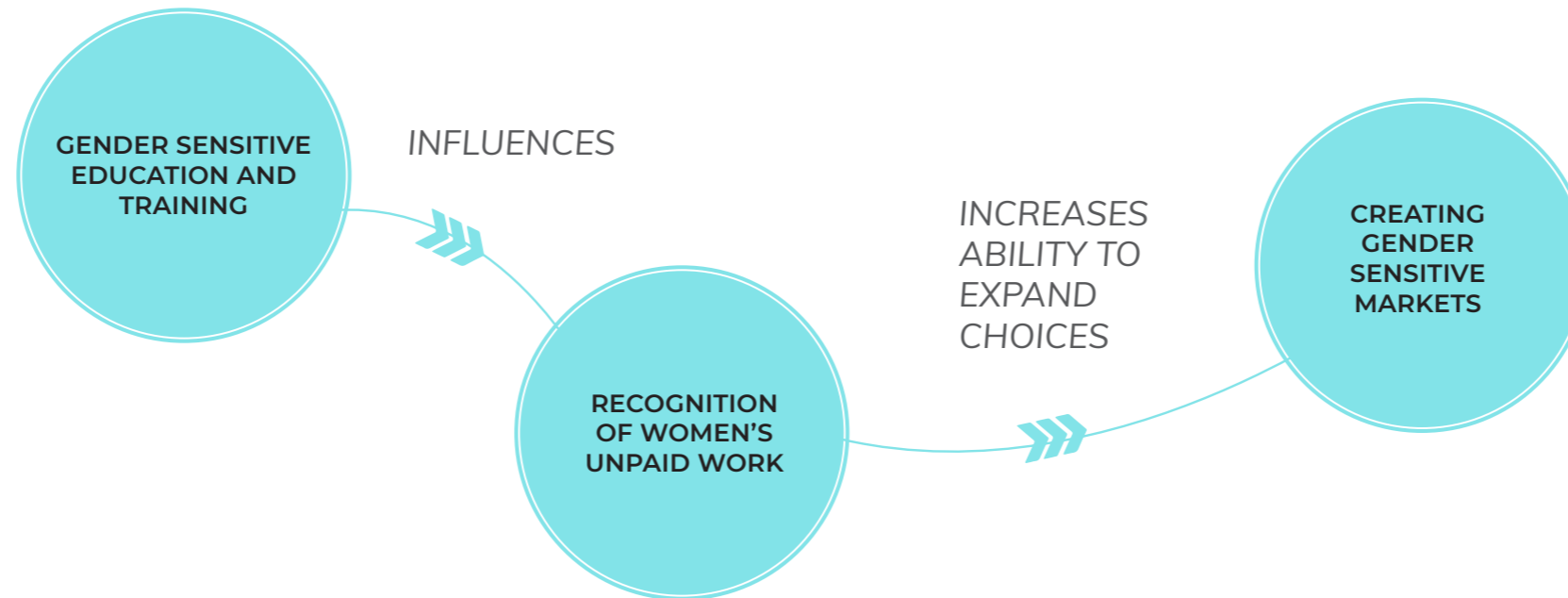
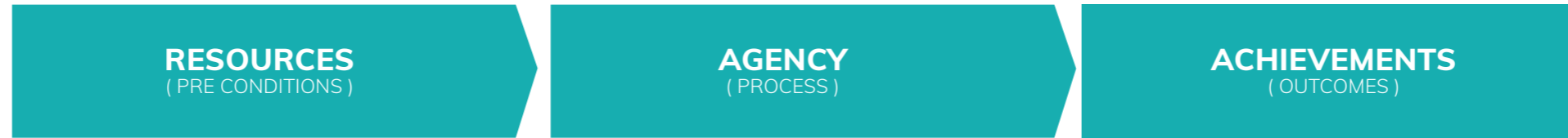
SCHOOLS

Process of preparing young people for the transition, equipping them with necessary skills, knowledge, values, attitudes, etc.

TO

WORK

Process of making the actual transition



OPPORTUNITIES WITHIN NEP

- Gender sensitivity is mentioned as a theme under curriculum
- Gender Inclusion Fund
- Women as a group within SEDGs
- Equitable and inclusive education to bridge gender and social gaps
- Enhancing gender balance in HEIs

Lack of strategies/ roadmaps to leverage these opportunities.
Lack of addressing disequalising norms to promote inclusivity.

LIMITS WITHIN NEP

- No recognition of women's unpaid work
- Does not address gendered and casteist norms and power structures that cause the gender inequalities
- Key constraints that hinder women's participation in non-traditional education and employment (GBD and GBV) not addressed
- Employer (industry) engagement focused on research and innovation, exposure, internships for students, incubation, etc.
- No directive on addressing gender biases at work or creating jobs with gender friendly measures (eg creches)



Choice is an illusion. Opportunities exist.
However are choices translated to **non-traditional livelihoods**?



RECOMMENDATIONS

REFORM CURRICULUM WITH CSO PARTNERSHIPS

- Identifying the relevant CSOs to engage in curriculum development
- Partner with them to create inclusive curricula that challenges gender norms
- Conduct gender focused skilling assessments to align with local needs as pilots
- Roll out the curriculum encouraging women's participation in non-traditional careers

GENDER SENSITIVITY TRAINING FOR EDUCATORS AND POLICY LEADERS

- Organizing training of trainers to equip the teachers, thought leaders and policy makers with necessary knowledge and skills on gender transformative education
- Develop strategies for the smooth implementation of gender transformative education
- Create toolkits for self-examination and promoting diverse role models for encouraging equal participation across genders

COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION FOR GENDER EQUITY

- Engagement with communities both continuously and contextually in education reforms
- Enable community participation in challenging and transforming gender norms
- Multi-dimensional engagement in the form of campaigns, media engagement
- Shift perceptions to create a gender-just ecosystem and improve participation of women in non-traditional livelihoods

ENABLE ACTIVE STUDENT PARTICIPATION

- Inclusion of students as important stakeholders in building skills related to decision making, vocational choices
- Building confidence of students to challenge gender norms
- Creating specialised programs to build social, technical and financial skills
- Empowering girls for non-traditional career paths



PROMOTE NON-TRADITIONAL CAREERS WITH RESOURCE ALLOCATION

- Channelise the necessary resources for girls to pursue non-traditional careers
- Resources may include vocational courses, career counselling, scholarships etc.
- Circulate inspiring stories of success, role models of those choosing non-traditional career paths as part of the curriculum
- Create more avenues for girls to take up non-traditional vocations

INDUSTRY SENSITIZATION FOR SCHOOL-TO-WORK TRANSITION

- Locate barriers at workspace that can hinder gender inclusive participation through gender audits
- Address the barriers and create an enabling environment through safety measures, facilities like creche etc.
- Build industry and workspace sensitisation on equal pay and gender friendly policies
- Enable participation of women in non-traditional sectors and ease of transitioning from school to work

DEVELOP GENDER-INCLUSIVE MONITORING AND EVALUATION FRAMEWORKS

- Build gender-disaggregated data to assess effectiveness of programs
- Create frameworks for monitoring and evaluation based on analysis of the gender-disaggregated data
- Use these frameworks for guiding future policies that promote non-traditional livelihoods for women

BRIDGE THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

- Identify CSOs working on digital literacy for women and girls
- Collaborate with CSOs to build digital skills and access for women and girls
- Create channels for addressing the specific gender-related challenges and biases in technology
- Include both learners and educators to foster an inclusive digital learning ecosystem



To foster gender equity in education and career pathways, the recommendations include CSO partnerships to reform curricula, gender-sensitive training for educators, community engagement, digital access initiatives, and industry sensitization. Additionally, targeted funding, monitoring frameworks, and student inclusion in decision-making are crucial to support women in non-traditional careers.



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