



Institute of Social Studies Trust

BEYOND THE NORM

**SCOPE OF NON-TRADITIONAL LIVELIHOOD SKILLING
FOR WOMEN IN ACHIEVING
WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT**

A Synthesis Report



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SCOPE OF NON-TRADITIONAL LIVELIHOOD SKILLING FOR WOMEN IN ACHIEVING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Authors

Anweshaa Ghosh, Prama Mukhopadhyay and Sudeshna Sengupta

Program Lead

Anweshaa Ghosh

Research Team

Prama Mukhopadhyay, Sudeshna Sengupta, Risha Ramachandran and Arya Chandran (For Kerala)

Reviewed by

Dr. Nisha Dhawan, Country Director, India, EMpower (The Emerging Markets Foundation)

Dr. Jahnvi Andharia, Director and Research Fellow, Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST)

Ms. Meenu Vadera, Founder member and Executive Director, Azad Foundation

Ms. Dolon Ganguly, Chief Functionary, Azad Foundation

Dr. Veena Nair Sarkar, Thematic Lead – Research Policy Analysis and Communication

Edited and Designed by

Mandar Mehta

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In recent years, there has been growing concern regarding the declining female labour force participation (FLFP) in India and therefore, various policies and programs have been developed to stem this downward spiral.

While, women have always 'worked', in their homes, in fields and in public spaces, their work has been undervalued and invisible in national data accounting systems. Globally women are less likely than men to participate in the paid labour market due to the 'male breadwinner' ideology which dictates policies of hiring, work space design, use of tools and technology, etc. which is mostly denied to women. Also, even when they do enter the workforce, women's work tends to mirror the roles based on gendered division of labour. This makes women most likely to find work in underpaid, semi-skilled or unskilled, care or domestic work.

Concerns over such descending rates of FLFP along with the limited choices of paid work that is available for them, makes it absolutely necessary to not only diversify the kind of work that is accessible for women in the market, including in domains that are considered "non-traditional"; but also understand the kinds of barriers they face, while aspiring to join decent work. Based on this premise, various CSOs have provided training to women in non-traditional livelihoods (NTL), linked them to the market and advocated for policy change in order to mainstream women in non-traditional livelihoods. The CSOs have also reached out to traditionally 'left-behind' communities and have further developed entrepreneurial efforts in order to create livelihood choices that hitherto were non-existent for these women and communities. The Non-Traditional Livelihoods Network was founded in 2016 with an aim to break the occupational segregation across intersections of gender, caste, class that formerly limited the scope of economic activities for disadvantaged women and communities.

This research was conducted in partnership with selected member organisations of the Network. The qualitative study used a 360-degree case study method to understand the processes and challenges of NTL skilling and its impact on agency, aspirations and manifestations of empowerment or disempowerment in women's life. This study foregrounds itself in Kabeer's (1999) framework of women's economic empowerment which she envisages as a process of change which occurs through the three interrelated dimensions – resources, agency and achievement. This framework was useful for this research as NTL skilling of women entails a process of change with an aim to develop an agency for the women to have the ability of making choices which are essential for their well-being. In addition, the study also makes use of the evaluation framework of "Small Wins", in each of the case narratives. This helped in looking at various levels of small wins which could, over time, together result in transformative change through non-linear processes and feed into the process of change as described by Kabeer (1999).

Case studies were selected and analysed using a gender responsive and intersectional approach essentially because these case studies were vastly different from each other in terms of the location, intersectional identity of the participant, types of skilling they were engaged in and the structure and motive of the skill-imparting organisation. The case narratives were analysed vis-a-vis the impact felt from the interaction of the four institutional spaces (espoused in the Care Diamond) - family, community, market and state. This research, however, in addition looked at the role of the organisation in terms of availability of resources, the skilling process, building of aspiration and the eventual formation of agency and achievements of the individual journey towards empowerment via NTL skilling experience.

In this study, the case narratives point towards the agency women used against all odds to access these skills for bettering their lives. The organisations played an important role in developing an aspiration to move from the 'traditional' forms of skilling to a 'non-traditional' form of skilling of women in low-income families and communities. It is an essential source of resource which helps women in their process of change. Besides

technical skilling, the gender just curriculum which included imparting information on gender, sexuality, legal discourse, financial literacy, etc., were found to be vital for women to be able to complete her skilling process and move towards economic empowerment.

In terms of agency, the research finds mixed results. The study recognises that there is a shift in perception and personality between the 'before, the skilling' and 'after the skilling' journey of a woman. Her agency, however, can be curtailed by a number of factors, including the barriers she may face in her life from a variety of institutional spaces. While, the organisation and skilling program have equipped women with ability to negotiation with family and community, the women are still not able to push their agency in the market given the neo-liberal economy one resides in and hence 'informality' continues even though there are efforts to provide decent jobs to women who are part of the NTL skilling process. Similarly, negotiation with the state is still done at an organisational level and voices and representation from ground up is at a varied stage across the Network.

Further, women find it difficult to access and complete their skilling journey owing to the care burden and time poverty. In addition, gender norms around mobility, risk aversion, lack of resources, non-familiarity with tools and machines, gender digital divide, among other reasons, also act as barriers towards any transformative change in the lives of women. Organisations have to invest time in laying the ground with the family and communities to bring women till the skilling centre, even before the technical training begins. Consequently, this makes skilling for women and especially in NTL time and resource intensive which may not result in big figures. Hence, achievements in terms of numbers would not be conclusive and one needs to unpack and understand what level of agency has been achieved by the woman through the skilling process to define success.

Some of the obstacles and challenges faced by women have come from social beliefs and gender norms of what entails women's work. Furthermore, community sanctions further strengthen these notions and it is only when the family is supportive, that one finds women to be able to achieve and assert their agency of choice. Further, market and state interventions are essential for NTL skilling to become mainstream for women. Inter and intra institutional interaction and action would be required for mainstream and scaling up of NTL initiatives for women. For example, while government skilling schemes are, at best, gender aware, technical inputs from CSOs who have years of experience and have developed models of successful NTL skilling systems can help make these initiatives more gender responsive and eventually gender transformative.

SECTION I: INTRODUCTION

Women and Work and The Gendered Nature of Skill-Gap in India

The last four decades of Indian history is marked with rapid economic growth along with a rise in population with increasing rates of urbanisation (World Bank 2014, World Bank 2015). It has also been the time when women's education, marital age and child-bearing patterns have changed with primary school enrolment of girls reaching a parity with that of the boys and women's rate of attending secondary and high school doubling in the country (World Bank, 2014; Neff et al, 2012, Kapsos et al, 2014). Such positive changes however did not get reflected in women's participation in paid labour force, which has remained dismally low with India having one of the lowest female labour force participation (FLFP) rates in the world.

Even though, it is often argued that this reduction in the rate of FLFP has, at least to some extent, to do with an increasing number of women of working age enrolling in secondary schools (ILO, 2014), the research conducted by Klasen and Pieters (2015) has shown that the perceived rate of decline persists even when that number is accounted for. Thus, in spite of India having what is called a 'demographic dividend', with the number of people in the working age bracket being higher than that of the dependant age group, the country cannot reap its full benefit since nearly half of its population remain out of paid labour force (Desai, 2010). Beyond women's contribution to growth, a low FLFP also has implications on the degree to which women can benefit from the country's economic growth. Employment and earnings are robust determinants of bargaining power, with impacts on female and children's well-being (Klasen and Pieters, 2015).

While, a lot of this absence in the labour force can be attributed to the large proportion of women's work that remains unpaid, due to a narrow understanding of 'gainful activities'¹, other contributing factors like women's restricted access to knowledge systems, especially to the more 'specialised' kind (Nathan, 2022) and the lack of relevant skills which renders meaningful and decent employability (ILO, 2000, ICRW 2020) also seems to be crucial. In fact, a lack of knowledge "in the higher valued monopolised areas of the knowledge economy" (Nathan, 2020) can be considered to be one of the key reasons due to which women end up not being able to access relevant employable skills in India today (ORF, 2022).

Research also suggests that there is a possible relationship between the economic status of the women participants, and their motivation to earn supplemental income by joining skilling initiatives. Conjectural evidences also show how access to resources and time available for women to substitute household tasks with paid work opportunities are proxy variables that play a role in deciding women's education and skill levels (ICRW, 2020).

Such variabilities turn out to be even more complicated in the real world, especially when seen through the lens of intersectionality as caste, religion and sexual identities gets tangled with gender identity, furthering the social inequity as highlighted by the India Discrimination Report (2022)².

It should however be noted that skills should not only be seen as a link to employment, but as a comprehensive mechanism to enable women to make better work choices. Skilling is about building capacity for entrepreneurship as well as to cater to the demand for such skills in the wage/labour market (ICRW, 2020b:20).

Unfortunately, the decision of choosing any skill training programme most often is not entirely of the women as studies highlight. In case of unmarried women, it is usually the male members of her natal households and in case of married women, it is usually the male members in her marital family that enjoys the right to have the last say (ICRW, 2020).

Researchers have further highlighted how in certain families with semblance of 'free will' for the women to choose

¹ See Jain, 1996, Valuing Work: Time as a Measure for detailed understanding

² <https://www.oxfamindia.org/knowledgehub/workingpaper/india-discrimination-report-2022>

and make their own decisions, the shift from a 'male breadwinner' standard ends up operating under a "far, but no farther" gendered paradigm (Raju, 2013) In such scenarios, women are encouraged to embody modern cultural ideals along with the traditional ones, which ultimately does not change the dynamics of care and housework, making women bear the double burden of both care work and economic activity, ending up in what is often termed as 'time-poverty' (Hyde et al.,2020). This often leads to women being finally forced to drop out of the skilling programmes due to her lack of time as domestic and care work remains her foremost priority (EY,2020). In fact, often the seats reserved for women in Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs), a national level technical course for those who have passed class 10th, are left underutilised forcing the ITIs to open their female exclusive seats to the males to cover up for running the expenses of the institutes (EY, 2020)

Among the other most important determinants affecting women's choices of enrolling into skilling courses, the most influencing ones seem to be

1. Institutes distance from home (Oraa & Ali, 2017; ICRW, 2020; EY, 2020),).
2. The availability of safe transport to facilitate travel to the institute (EY, 2020; ICRW, 2020, Menon et al, 2019, IWWAGE, 2021)
3. Duration of the course, since most often women will have to delegate her share of house and domestic work to someone while she is away (Oraa & Ali, 2017; Menon, et al, 2019; EY, 2020; TQH, 2020)
4. Basic amenities and infrastructure like toilets, hotels, creches for women in these institutes (Menon et al, 2019; TQH, 2020; ICRW, 2000a, b; EY, 2020)
5. Digital divide which women face in the country, especially since most of the enrolments in skilling programmes have turned 'digital' (ORF, 2017; EY, 2020; TQH 2020)
6. Lack of career counselling, post training advice and placement offers making trainees lose motivation (TQH, 2020; EY, 2020)

These barriers along with various other challenges that women have to face in their day to day lives, lead to 'occupational downgradation', making women choose jobs requiring lower skills or participating in part-time works in the informal economy, less likely to have any kind of social benefits (Dutta 2019).

Unfortunately, while the India Skill Report 2015³ talks of a skill-gap among Indians across the gender spectrum, according to Labour Bureau data from 2013-14, only 3.8 percent of India's adult women had ever received vocational training at that time, compared to 9.3 percent of men (ORF, 2022). This seems to be particularly unfortunate, for there are as many as 40 skill development programmes running by 18 ministries or departments under GOI (Government of India), with the MSDE (Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship) being the nodal body responsible for coordination of all these various programmes (Oraa & Ali, 2017; TQH, 2020).

This makes it essential to delve further into this gendered pattern of skill gap and explore how and when skilling can contribute in empowering women in India.

The Indian Skilling Experience and the Skill Mismatch

While, there have been ample evidences of how skill training makes individuals more likely to get absorbed in the labour market (ILO, 2000, ORF, 2020, ICRW, 2020; Fletcher et al, 2017), research suggest that the skilling experience for India especially when seen from the lens of its relation with employability, has not been entirely linear⁴. Skill and qualification mis-match, especially when seen in light of what the youth aspires, seem to be one of the key reasons why CMIE data (2021) finds graduates who had higher education having the highest unemployment rate⁵. Infact, according to recent data, more than 50% of Indian youth is not on track to have the education and skills that is necessary for employment by 2030⁶. To improve this, there seems to be an urgent need to prepare the youth for being industry-ready and close the skill gap in the employment landscape through providing them with skills that

³ <https://www.cii.in/Publicationform.aspx?PubID=43240&ty=pub>

⁴ See <https://socialfinance.org.in/skilling-and-employment/> for a detailed picture on how India faces an overall skilling crisis
<https://www.financialexpress.com/education-2/role-of-vocational-education-and-training-in-reducing-unemployment-in-india/2638364/>
<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/voices/the-aspiring-youth-and-the-skill-gap/>

will matter in the present-day work pattern. This would apart from other things mean, becoming aware of relevant and employable skills that would be responsive to the technologically and digitally driven market of India today. This gets further highlighted through the annual India Skills Report (2022), which has re-emphasised the need to up-skill the youth of the country today in technology and digitality for the coming future.

Historically, women across societies and cultures have had restricted access to knowledge systems which has predominantly been the purview of men. This has had an impact on gender relations in that women's exclusion from the socially higher valued forms of knowledge define them as of lower capability, status, and power." (Nathan et al. 2022, 13). This essentially means encouraging women towards certain specific trades that the society feels would be in-sync with their "nurturers" and "caregivers" identity as opposed to others which symbolises 'higher and more specialised skills' (ICRW, 2020). This is possibly why there is a greater enrolment of women in certain kinds of skilling initiatives over the others.

In fact, there is a societal stereotype which tries to imply that women are structurally less adept in science, technological, engineering and mathematical (STEM) skills that are considered to be most important to get better work opportunities today. Unfortunately, what such a situation often translates to is a simple superficial attempt to 'bandage the leaky pipeline' by simply "gender washing" and "making STEM pink" (Heyback and Pickup, 2017). This often gets reflected through increasing efforts to bring more women in STEM, which then as researches often suggest increases the retention of women in STEM skilling through the creation of female role models (Hermann et al, 2016). Feminist scholars however feel a need to go beyond this level by critically looking at the very ontology of the STEM fields, which often leads to making these spaces hegemonic and exclusionary. This would then mean shifting the conversation around the underrepresentation of women/girls in traditional scientific fields from just "bringing them in" to recognizing the importance of how gendered being shapes what and how people know (Heyback and Pickup, 2017)

Such a nuanced understanding seems particularly relevant in explaining why women are not only offered, but also prefer "non-engineering" courses outside the purview of STEM. Such a segregation of the skilling courses where women end up acquiring skills, considered as 'low hanging fruits', make them not worthy enough to be considered for high demand, high skilled work, forcing them to remain in low waged, non-technical/non engineering trades like dressmaking, ornamentation and Computer Operator and Programming Assistant (COPA) (EY, 2020). Unfortunately, while nearly 24 sectors in the Indian labour market are supposed to have an incremental demand for manpower within the year 2022, women enrolment in these sectors in the ITIs have been highly disproportionate, giving an idea as to why women in India suffer a massive skill deficit.



Image: Archana Women's Centre

Thus, there is a need to push women's entry into non-traditional forms of skilling initiatives which can not only help her gain access to better work opportunities but also help in bridging the pay gap.

As Nikore et al (2021) highlight the concentration of women trainees in non-engineering, non-labour intensive, 'feminised sectors', exclude them from the high worth jobs as men tend to get employed more and with higher wages when they graduate from training institutes (CENPAP, 2012: xiii-xiv).

Non-Traditional Skilling – what does it mean for women?

With an increasingly more technical and digitally driven market, we can expect a lot of 'traditional', 'manual' and 'non-technical' job losses. This would most likely affect women a lot more than their male counterparts as researchers suggest that almost 12 million women in India can run a risk of job loss in the face of automation by the year 2030 (Madgavkar et al, 2019). Their numbers would be more because of "lower access to digital technology and participation in STEM fields than men" (Madgavkar et al, 2019).

This would mean the need to train women with more 'relevant' and employable skills for "a shifting job landscape also implies newer jobs being created that will require newer skill sets" (Madgavkar et al, 2019). This has also been acknowledged by the research commissioned by MSDE, which highlights how India's move towards adoption of "Industry 4.0", "involving big data, high computing capacity, artificial intelligence, analytics and robotics" – will set the stage of India's economy and while 'some' jobs might be threatened by redundancy, others will grow rapidly. Hence skilling infrastructures should accommodate such dynamic scenarios, it suggests (EY,2020).

Unfortunately, according to research carried out by EY and FICCI (2016) women's enrolment rates in the ITIs are much higher in the sectors where job losses are most likely in the coming years. On the other hand, jobs related to areas such as business and financial operations, management, computer, architecture and engineering, are likely to gain more demand. These are the highly skilled sectors, from which women have maintained a distance, the reason why the skill gap is likely to increase in the days to come (Quoted in EY, 2020) This disruption in the industry therefore seems to only further repercussions for female employees who already have a low representation in the labour market.

This is where our research comes in, to understand the importance of skilling women in what is considered as 'non-traditional' and how that can lead to women's economic empowerment. While there is no fixed definition of which work can qualify as 'non-traditional', vis-à-vis 'traditional', there are several ways through which it can be approached.

Research conducted by ICRW exploring women worker's experience of working in Non-traditional livelihood (NTL), attempted to see NTL as "non-women concentrated" jobs vis a vis traditional-livelihoods (TL) which are "women concentrated" (ICRW, 2020).

EMpower uses the terms "non-standard income" and "non-gender normative" to imply non-traditional livelihood among women (EMpower, 2010). Emphasis of EMpower is on women breaking the normative expectation of what they can do, allowing "young women into new public spaces, even if they continued to work in familiar and more traditional sectors", away from the domestic and home.

The Azad Foundation, as a part of the NTL Network, that it has brought together along with other key organisations working in the same fields, has defined NTL as "livelihood practices that help women break stereotypes and challenge the gender division of labor emerging from the intersections of gender, caste, class, religion, sexual orientation, disability and other marginalities and oppressive structure, with a dynamic context of space and time. NTL increases the set of viable livelihood choices available to women and gives them access and control over skills, technology, market, mobility and resources. It creates economic stability along with psychological, social and political empowerment" (NTL Network)

A closer look at the operationalization of all these organisations and their programmes however reveals, that what is common in all of them is the problematization of gendered structures by trying to give women a space into male dominated jobs/ roles with high visibility in the public domain through an extensive training programme. (ICRW, 2020) While some of these roles can be directly challenging ideas like labour intensive jobs to be only meant for men, others might be attempted to impart technical and other life skills to equip women for the present labour market (Gothoskar, 2016).

Such impetus in breaking the barriers, has been seen as simultaneously building capacities of women to question their subjective position in socio-economic hierarchies as their location in the labour market is not insulated from this positionality (ICRW, 2020).

Research in the skilling landscape and especially in the non-traditional skills domain, reveals how young women trainees seem to gain a great deal of self-confidence from engaging in these training processes: from negotiating with their family to enrolling in a programme to postpone marriage and to actually participate in a course. The questioning of gender-based binaries in the skills-training opportunities (by participating in non-traditional trade courses) has made it easier for them to even question other stratifications and exclusions" (Gothoskar, 2016).

Such a gain in the overall agency and decision-making power of women invariably has its 'spill-over' effect within the family and the community as highlighted by researchers like Sivasankaran, 2014; Kalsi, 2017 and Fletcher et al, 2017.

Importance however needs to be given to map women's aspiration with the kind of skilling opportunities they end up getting. Such a mismatch is what leads to a lot of women ending up not getting into the labour force in spite of

getting trained in the ITIs. Such instances as highlighted by the ICRW research, often crop up when women come and get enrolled in the ITIs with a wish to get a salaried job. Instead, they end up being pushed towards entrepreneurial roles (ICRW, 2020). This has its obvious predicaments in a country like India as Boeri's argument for being critical of the 'gendered entrepreneurial subject' seems especially relevant (Boeri, 2018).

The autonomous worker described in the gendered entrepreneurial subject relies on herself, gaining independence. But this economic performativity often places the responsibility of finding work on women while ignoring the need to support her in her other duties, adding on to the informalisation of the labour even further, argues Boeri. (Breman 2013; Boeri, 2018).

A 'decent work' paradigm should therefore always be there to supplement the idea of women's economic empowerment as has been argued by feminist activists and researchers. (Balakrishnan, 2002 and Sudarshan and Sinha, 2011). It also means that skilling does not end with training the participants, but by also supporting them in the placement and post placement stages. While the government initiatives under MSDE do see the importance of hand holding its participants to get placed in the market after its training courses are over, the real numbers of alumni getting jobs through government skilling initiatives has not been very high in recent years. According to the Sharada Prasad Committee set up by the skill development ministry to review the performance of various sector skill councils, National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), through its partners, could only manage to skill around 600,000 youth till September 1, 2017, and could place only 72,858 trained youth, exhibiting a placement rate of around 12 per cent (MSDE,2016).

It is in this context that the present research tried to dive deep and explore how, when and why do NGOs and CSOs become enablers in skilling women especially in NTL and what are the key learnings that these journeys have to offer to shape policy perspectives around skilling in India.



Image:
Archana Women's Centre

Non-traditional Livelihoods Network And Its Skilling Initiatives

It is in this context of low FLFP and women's lack of empowerment in the Indian economy, that a few organisations and individuals created a coalition in 2016, known as the Non-Traditional Livelihoods Network (NTLN). The network, initiated by the Azad Foundation, New Delhi, felt a need to come together with an aim to increase the set of viable livelihood choices available for women, by giving them access and control over skills, technology, market, mobility and resources (ICRW, 2020).

The network also realised the need to make this process a part of the larger project of creating a gender sensitive ecosystem. A wide range of domain including the domestic and public sphere constitute the broader ecosystem that women have to navigate through in their daily lives, and the network acknowledged that only if each of these sectors serve the position of a supporter, enabler and facilitator, can women successfully pursue their work aspirations (NTLN, 2019; ICRW, 2020).

Hence the network attempts to work with, "the socially and economically marginalised women from urban & rural India, as it advocates for gender equality through facilitating / organising skill development and/or adult education programs for generating livelihoods in general, and non-traditional livelihoods, in particular".

The skilling initiatives that NTLN organises are however particularly observant about the insufficiencies of the government aided programs and attempts to remain keenly aware of the challenges that women have to face in their everyday lives, while accessing these skill development initiatives. Such an approach towards skilling, the network feels, could facilitate women's access to greater livelihood options, helping them "break stereotypes and challenge the gender division of labour emerging from the intersections of gender, caste, class, religion, sexual orientation, disability and other marginalities and oppressive structure, within a dynamic context of space and time" (NTLN, 2019).

Section II: METHODOLOGY

Scope of the Research

This research stems from a need to critically explore and understand NTL skilling as a process, and understand how women negotiate with different challenges at each of the stages in this process, starting from the phase of pre-skilling to the entry of the participant into the market. The point of entry for this research was to look at the aspirations of these women which are influenced by the intersectionality, location, availability of resources and prevalent gender norms. These negotiations and challenges are felt from various actors across the institutional spaces of family, community, market and state. A crucial facilitator of this journey is the organisation that imparts the skill and supports the women and young girls in negotiating across these four spaces as discussed before.

Figure 1: Stages of Skilling



It is this exploration of women's skilling journey that seems relevant from the purview of the ISST, especially due to its long-term engagement with research on women and work. ISST has been exploring diverse issues directly related to the ecosystem of women's work from a gender transformative perspective. ISST's work with domestic workers over the last decade, along with its recent engagement with adolescent aspirations and women gig workers in India, have made skilling as one of its key emergent focus areas. The study on gig economy⁷, explored women workers in the non-traditional sectors and the present research aims to build upon it by specifically looking at the skilling initiatives in the non-traditional sectors. For this purpose, the research has been undertaken in partnership with the NTL Network.

It is the network's definition of non-traditional livelihood (see box on page 09) that the research uses, to explore the research questions that follows.

When and how does skill development in NTL contribute towards women's economic empowerment?

This would mean exploring:

- What are the aspirations of women in NTL and how are they involved in non-traditional forms of skill development? How do skilling opportunities extended by the organizations within the network match the aspirations of women?
- What are the resources and processes required at various stages of skill development in the NTL sector that is necessary to transform discriminatory social relations using a gendered intersectional lens?
- What is the nature of agency shown by women in NTL across socio-economic and political institutions? In what ways do families, communities, market and state respond to non-traditional skilling of women?
- In what ways does NTL skilling facilitate women's relationship with technology? To have a better understanding

⁷ https://www.isstindia.org/publications/1623413826_pub_Women_Workers_in_the_gig_economy_in_India_-_An_Exploratory_Study.pdf

of the field and to sharpen the research questions an inception workshop was organised online wherein two external experts from the field of NTL and skilling as well as internal researchers from ISST provided their comments and insights.

NTL Network's definition of Non-traditional Livelihoods

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. Non-traditional livelihoods increase the set of viable livelihood choices available to women and give them access and control over skills, technology, market, mobility and resources. They create stability along with psychological, social and political empowerment.

Source: Process document of the NTL Network, 2019

Planning for the Research

The research was designed as a qualitative study which involved in-depth case narratives of selected participants chosen from within the pool of skill-trainees of some of the member organisations of the NTL network. The sample was drawn on the basis of a framework in agreement with the partnering organisations within the network. Certain conditions were however considered before locking on the location of the research – the organisations from the network will be selected based on mutual agreement, language proficiency of the research team, Covid – 19 pandemic related travel restrictions, budgetary considerations and the sampling framework (discussed below). Data was collected between January – July 2022 across four states in India (see table below)

The case studies have attempted to get an in-depth understanding of the ecosystem of particular participants attending various kinds of skilling initiatives offered by the skilling organisation. This entailed collecting qualitative data from various relevant actors across the four institutional spaces and the skilling ecosystem of the particular study.

The research also looked into existing literature and various published and unpublished organisational and network documents⁸ to understand the network's point of view towards these skilling endeavours. For a well-rounded understanding of NTL skilling as a process and the way it is perceived by the network, key informant interviews and FGDs were also conducted with the following:

- **Relevant members of the skilling organisation**
- **Skill program participants in selected organisation**
- **Representatives of other partner organisations in the Network**
- **Members of the Steering Committee of the NTL Network**

Before finalising the research tools, a round of pilot testing was conducted with the skill trainees and the trainers of the ISST community centre at Kalyan puri, New Delhi.

A total of 46 in-depth interviews (including eight case narratives and KIs) and 3 FGDs (with skill project participants in three locations) were conducted. The eight case studies were conducted with skill participants from the following organisation partners of NTL Network:

⁸ <http://ntlnetwork.in/resources/>

Name of Organization	Skilling profile of the organisation	Type of NTL Skill Programme (as per case narrative)	Location
Archana Women's Center (AWC)	Primarily engaged in skilling women in non-traditional livelihoods	Mobile repairing and Grass cutting using machine	Kottayam district, Kerala
Azad Foundation*	Primarily engaged in skilling women in non-traditional livelihoods	Four Wheel driving	Delhi, Kolkata*
Center for Youth and Social Development (CYSD)	Engaged in skilling of youth (male, female and transgender) from resource poor communities in various skill initiatives. The four-wheeler driving programme engages women only	Four Wheel driving	Bhubaneshwar, Odisha
Jabala Action Research Organization	Primarily works on implementing programmes with girls and women who have been trafficked or belong to areas prone to either trafficking or unsafe migration owing to lack of economic opportunity.	House Painting district, West Bengal	Birpara, Alipurduar, West Bengal
Magic Bus	A large-scale skilling CSO for men and women from resource poor communities pan India.	Entrepreneurship Development Program	Delhi-NCR

* KI interviews and FGD was also conducted in the Kolkata centres with 2-wheel trainees

To maintain confidentiality, names of all respondents apart from those who were representing the CSOs were fictionalised.

Sampling Framework

The network has a wide range of partnering organisations with a variety of expertise and while all of them define their respective pathways to the NTL approach by center staging opportunities for training and access to the labour market, there is no predefined criteria to identify and select these skills and trades (ICRW,2020). In order to zero down on the relevant organisations, a series of in-depth discussions were carried out with NTL Network's National coordinator, the Steering Committee members as well as the proposed partner organisation with whom the case studies would be developed.

The present research therefore used a Purposive Maximum Variation Sampling technique to capture a wide range of perspectives to maximise diversity within the selected sample. This would mean selecting cases/participants on the basis of four categories (up to 2 cases per category, total 8 in-depth case studies).

These are:

- **Case Category I (CCI):** Cases that break gender stereotypes in terms of sectors (For instance cases of women in male dominated sectors from a point of view of gendered mainstreaming of sectors)
- **Case Category II (CCII):** Cases wherein new technology was accessed that was hitherto not used in this specific instance (for example use of mobile phones in platform economy to get work, even if it is in sectors, otherwise considered as 'traditional')
- **Case Category III (CCIII):** Cases wherein non - traditional gender roles are adopted (For example, skilling for managerial or entrepreneurial roles even if it is in the traditional sector)
- **Case Category IV (CCIV):** Cases wherein access to the skilling programmes itself is non-traditional (For example in cases when they mean breaking prevalent socio-cultural traditions and norms)

Such a sampling framework was adopted to include a wide range of training programmes and participants from an intersectional perspective in its study population.

The following matrix was used as a guide to ensure that maximum numbers of social categories were covered across the four case categories.

Case Category (CC)/ Social category and its sub-categories	Different religious categories (Sub-category: Hindu/ Muslim/ Christian)	Different castes (Sub-category: SC/OBC/ General)	Gender (Sub-category: Cisgender –Male or Female/ Trans/ non-binary)	Marital status (Sub-category: never married/ live-in/ married/ widow/ separated)	Age groups (Sub-category 16-25/ 26-35/ 36-45/ 46-55)	Disabilities (Visual impairment/ Hearing impairment/ Loco motor impairment/ any other)	(other) regional (state - urban/ rural)
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Note: The study attempted to break the heteronormative matrix of gender and includes one case study of a transgender woman. The rest of the case studies however are conducted with cis-gender women participants.

Limitations of the Research

It is important to note that the study is limited in its scope in the following ways:

1. The study concentrates mainly on the skilling journey of the participants and only discusses the market in particular cases where the participant was employed.
2. The researchers had to rely on participating organisations for access to the women whose case narratives are presented here. The sampling framework was provided to the organisations to narrow down on the possible cases, but the researchers did not have control over this process of selection and listing. As such, the case narratives presented here are 'the best possible scenarios' (from the respective skilling programme) and do not include other possibilities such as those who may have dropped from the skilling process or are not necessarily interested or unable to pursue NTL skilling or livelihoods post skilling due to varied reasons.
3. The case studies selected under the study are in no way representative of the experiences of all trainees in a particular or varied skilling programme offered by the organisation. Similarly, the study represents a limited number of skilling programmes being provided by the various organisations under the Network and elsewhere and is thus not representative of the entire NTL skilling programmes running in India.
4. The study includes one case study of a transgender woman and an attempt has been made to discuss this singular experience as separate from the cis-gender women's experiences. However, it is important to highlight that the report largely concentrates on experiences of women in the heteronormative matrix of gender. There is a need for more research to understand skilling realities for other gender and sexual identities.

It is particularly important to note that the study does not in any way aim to evaluate or compare the various skilling programs across the varied participant organisations who are part of this research. Each case narrative represents only one participant from a pool of many who have undergone the particular skill-training and would have had their own experience of the same. The comparison cannot happen as each skilling program and structure, design and experience of each organisation is different from each other (there is only some possibility of comparison in case of participants from the same skilling course from the same organisation). There is also a caution to not consider any of the case narratives as “best practice” given these are individual experiences. The main objective of the study is to understand the shared experience of the case narratives and envision a pathway for NTL skilling to achieve women’s economic empowerment.

Conceptual Framework

The study posits itself on the feminist idea of empowerment which feminist literature describes as a socio-political and economic process that is complex, non-linear, contested, and entailing negotiations and compromises with uncertain outcomes (Ghosh et al. 2022). For the purpose of this research, Kabeer’s (1999) empowerment framework – agency, resources and achievement – fits well with the overarching definition of NTL as described above. Kabeer (1999) locates empowerment in the context of power - ability to make choices; when denied this ability, it leads to disempowerment. She encapsulates empowerment as a process of change which enables the person to make strategic life choices ‘in a context where this ability was previously denied to them’ (1999, 437). This process of change occurs through the three interrelated dimensions – resources, agency and achievement:

Resources include not only material resources in the more conventional economic sense, but also the various human and social resources which serve to enhance the ability to exercise choice [...] The second dimension of power relates to agency—the ability to define one’s goals and act upon them. Agency is about more than observable action; it also encompasses the meaning, motivation and purpose which individuals bring to their activity, their sense of agency, or ‘the power within’. (Kabeer 1999, 437-438)

Using the three inter-related dimensions of change, this particular framework helped the research make sense of the process of change (at varied levels) that women and girls go through as they embark upon the journey of NTL skilling.

Moreover, while analysing the case narratives, the researchers found that a macro-change resulting out of NTL skilling is a long – drawn process since the skilling process itself in most cases is resource heavy, time intensive and requires inter-institutional action to succeed. This is why while ‘big changes’ through these skilling endeavours often are not easily observed over a short-term period, there are various ‘smaller wins’ that can be noticed through the process. Such small wins have the potential to accumulate into a series of small wins that may finally result in transformative change (Termeer and Dewulf, 2018: 6). This is why the research makes use of the evaluation framework of “Small Wins” in each of the case narrative, to look at the various levels of small wins that can, over time, be compounded to result in transformative change through non-linear processes (Termeer and Dewulf 2018) and feed into process of change as described by Kabeer (1999).

Understanding the Small Wins Framework

Firstly, small wins refer to concrete outcomes. From sensemaking theory, it stems that only when people have implemented an activity does it become a lived experience on which they can jointly reflect. Small wins thus always go beyond nicely framed promises or creative ideas only. Secondly, small wins are always examples of in-depth change and thus include a change in routines, beliefs or values. Whereas superficial or first-order change means improving current practices within the existing logic, in-depth or second-order change aims to radically change these practices by altering values, frames and logics underlying them (Argyris & Schon, 1996). Small wins differ from quick wins or low hanging fruit, which are first-order changes where people take fast and easy steps to solve simple issues and gain easy victories (Bryson,

1988; Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2012; Vermaak, 2013; Weick, 1984). Pragmatically, it is often easier for governments to cherry-pick the least wicked parts of problems or to address symptoms only, rather than tackling underlying social causes (McConnell, 2010; Sterner et al., 2006). Thirdly, the steps are of moderate importance. They are mostly located at a micro or local level because only that level allows people to effectively meet complexity and turbulence (Vermaak, 2013). In the context of complex non-linear systems, change is only small within a short time period because it can accumulate (Braybrooke & Lindblom, 1963). Many authors thus refer to small wins as intermediate outcomes (Ansell & Gash, 2007) or even as seeds for transformative change (Urpelainen, 2013; Weick, 1984). Small wins must not be confused with the term best practice, because things can always be done better (Roe, 2016). The final characteristic is its positive judgement, as not all small steps qualify as small wins and could also constitute small losses. Furthermore, a small win for one person could be a small loss for someone else. This is the most difficult element of small wins because it depends on the values attached to them, which differ from actor to actor and change over time (Lindblom, 1959).

Reference: This paragraph has been cited from Page 7 of the following article:
 Catrien J.A.M. Termeer & Art Dewulf (2018): A small wins framework to overcome the evaluation paradox of governing wicked problems, *Policy and Society* <https://doi.org/10.1080/14494035.2018.1497933>

In each of the case narratives, the following table of characteristics and indicators has been used to understand the small wins for that particular case narrative. It is important to state that these small wins are not comparative across the case narratives (unless they are from the skilling program in the same organisation). For the purpose of this study, the small wins table provides a glimpse of the overall analysis from a small wins framework. By doing this, it helps in understanding the potential of the skilling programme in understanding the journey towards economic empowerment and transformative change.

Table: Characteristics and Indicators of Small Wins Framework

Characteristic	Indicators
Concrete outcome	Visible Results
In-depth changes	Second and third order changes
	Radical new practice
Moderate Importance	Micro or local level
	Intermediate
Positive judgment	Improvement
	Step forward
	Related to shared ambitions

Source: Termeer and Dewulf, 2018

SECTION III: CASE NARRATIVES

Socio-Economic Profile

In an attempt to keep up with the sampling framework the research team in consultation with the network partners identified 8 respondents from resource poor backgrounds coming from diverse social and geographical locations.

Out of these, four were Hindus, two Muslims, one Christian and one belonged to the tribal community. Amongst the Hindu respondents as well, the research tried representing diverse caste locations as 2 respondents out of the 4 were from OBC background, 1 from SC and 1 from a general caste category. Majority of the respondents barring one however ended up being from an urban or semi urban location.

The study however did manage to maintain a mix of married (3 respondents) and unmarried/single women (5 respondents) as an understanding of how family structure influences women's choices around livelihood was of a key interest of the present research endeavour. The table below shows the distribution of the case narratives across the case categories sampling matrix (explained in the earlier section) along with their socio-economic profile:

Table: Case Category Distribution and Profile of Case Narratives

Case Category	Case* Narrative	Religion	Caste/ Tribe	Gender	Marital Status	Age	Location
CC1	Manasi	Hindu	SC	Female	Married	35	Bhubaneshwar
	Nasreen	Muslim	OBC	Female	Never married	20	Delhi
CC2	Diksha	Hindu	General	Female	Married	29	Kottayam district
	Leeza	Christian	OBC	Female	Married	48	Kottayam district
CC3	Naina	Hindu	OBC	Female	Never married	22	Delhi
	Shaheen	Muslim	OBC	Female	Never married	24	Delhi
CC4	Malti	Hindu	SC	Transgender (identifies as a female)	Never married	38	Bhubaneshwar
	Bandana	Sarna/ Hindu	ST	Female	Never married	20	Birpada (semi urban)

* All names have been anonymised

Note: The Disability column has been removed as there was no such participant who had any form of physical disability

CASE CATEGORY I: BREAKING THE GENDER STEREOTYPE

CASE NARRATIVE 1: DRIVING ACHIEVEMENTS

Organization Profile and the Skilling Programme: Centre for Youth and Social Development (CYSD), Odisha

Starting its journey in Odisha more than 40 years back, CYSD has been working to empower and enable the marginalised communities in the state by extensively working in three major areas of intervention. These are in the field of helping people gain sustainable ways of livelihood, facilitating participatory governance and working towards reducing disaster vulnerability.

Under the sustainable livelihood wing, CYSD has been providing training to young people between the age of 18 and 35 from low-income communities of Bhubaneswar. While, most of these training opportunities (such as four-wheeler driving, gardening, etc.) are extended to cis and transgender women, there are certain specific programmes like training in retail jobs that are provided to interested individuals across the gender spectrum.

As a part of these training initiatives, the organisation with the sponsorship of Mahindra finance and the support of Maruti Suzuki Driving school, started training young women and girls from the slum areas of Bhubaneswar in driving four wheelers. The programme was designed and structured following the lines of Azad Foundation's Women with Wheels⁹ (WOW) programme.

Till date 109 women has been trained as drivers under CYSD's WOW programme. The WOW programme implemented by CYSD includes a comprehensive package of FGDs in communities, family counsellings and training on driving.



Name: Manasi Das

Age: 35 years

Religious and / Caste/ Tribe Identity: Hindu, OBC

Marital Status: Married

Education Status: Until 11th class (dropped out in 12th class)

Family: Husband, mother and two daughters

Non-traditional skill acquired: 4-wheel driving

Organisation: Center for Youth and Social Development (CYSD)

⁹ Earlier Women on Wheels

1. Identity and Social Location

Manasi Das is a resident of a slum in Patharganj, Vani Vihar of Bhubaneswar, in Odisha. She lives there with her mother, husband and two daughters, one seven years and one three years old. Her sisters and brothers also live nearby. She is currently employed by the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) as a sanitation vehicle driver. Her present status of work stems from her long-term association with CYSD. It is through CYSD's WOW initiative that Manasi got the opportunity to learn driving.

Manasi's family has a number of male members who had been working as drivers, but she is the first woman in her family and her neighbourhood community to learn driving. Manasi's father was an auto driver and her brothers are also into driving autos. When interviewed, Manasi was however the only earning member of her natal family with a regular employment. All the rest of the male drivers in her family are self-employed. Manasi's husband Sudhir is also a driver of a garbage collection vehicle like her. He however got employed after Manasi.



Image: ISST

As a child Manasi grew up in Bhubaneswar where her natal family lived. Her father was the sole earning member of the family back in those days. As per Manasi's mother, Lakshmi, the family could comfortably manage with what her husband earned. Financial problems started arising when Manasi's father was diagnosed with liver cancer. This was when Manasi was still finishing her secondary education. For a while, Manasi continued her education with the sponsorship of CYSD¹⁰. However, within a few years, her father's terminal illness followed by his untimely death, forced Manasi out of formal education. It was a time of tremendous economic hardship. The expenses of treating Manasi's father were so high that after his death, Lakshmi, had to start earning by working as a domestic worker in neighbourhood households to make both ends meet. This was also the time when Manasi felt the need to contribute to the family income and hence started earning money as an actor in street theatres that would be organised by organisations like CYSD and other NGOs. As per Manasi's account, she was in class 8th or 9th when she started doing these street theatres. She belonged to a locality where Patha Utsav (Street Festival) was celebrated from 6 am to 8 am on every Sunday. This was how she got exposed to the idea of acting in plays. After her father's death, Manasi decided to continue participating in these theatres more regularly to earn a living. Soon Manasi got married and had to move to her in-law's place in a village near Cuttack. She gave birth to her first child within a few years and soon thereafter the couple decided to move to Bhubaneswar due to limited earning opportunities in the village. Manasi and her husband migrated to the city when she was pregnant with her second child.

2. Aspirations: Motivations towards NTL skilling

Manasi always had the aspiration to build her own identity in life. She wanted to earn for the family and help her husband. After coming to Bhubaneswar, she re-established her connection with CYSD and came to know that the organisation has started offering several kinds of livelihood training programmes to women. Manasi got interested with the variety of the trainings programmes that were being offered. These included gardening, tailoring and housekeeping. She could however not manage to get enrolled in any of it due to her advanced stage of pregnancy. Within 15 days of giving birth to her second child however, Manasi heard about CYSD's driving training programme. This was something that immediately attracted her. She could initially not believe that it is possible for women to learn driving. Growing up in a family full of male drivers, the idea of a women driving a four-wheel vehicle was novel and fascinated her. This was when she decided that come what may, she would get enrolled to the course.

The path to operationalise her decision to join the programme was however not easy, since her younger daughter

¹⁰ Manasi was one of the many sponsored children of CYSD. These children received financial assistance from CYSD during their early education years

was just about 3 months old then and still required breastfeeding. Her elder one was also about five years old and needed supervision. Fortunately for Manasi, she could successfully negotiate with her mother and her younger sister who agreed to look after the children when Manasi was gone.

Remembering how the entire family rose to the occasion to support Manasi's dream, Lakshmi says:

Manasi asked me, whether I could look after her two children. I realised that it was important for her and if I would not support her, she would not be able to meet her dream. I even asked her husband and he too said that if we could look after the children, then he would let Manasi go. That is when we (Manasi's unmarried sisters and her) told her that we will take care of your children. You can go without worrying. (Interview, Bhubaneswar, February 2022)

It was however not only about making alternative informal care arrangements for her daughters. Manasi had to also take permission from all her intimate natal and marital family members. Even though her in-laws were against her driving lessons, she decided to ignore their objection, for they were staying in a village in Cuttack, far away from Bhubaneswar.

Her husband Sudhir's supportive role had been mentioned by Manasi a number of times. Being a trained driver himself, Sudhir helped Manasi conceptualise the theories behind driving. He also encouraged her by asking her to not pay heed to the negative comments made by his own family members.

Sudhir however acknowledges that it took him some time before he could actually start believing that Manasi being a woman, would also be able to drive. This however did not stop him from encouraging his wife since he wanted her to be happy. (Interview, Bhubaneswar, February 2022)

It was hence with the support of the family that Manasi could finally access the training of her choice.

Image: ISST



3. Opportunities and Skilling

The training programme was conducted by CYSD for a group of 20-25 girls between 18 to 35 years. Seven of them including Manasi would travel in a group from their locality to the training centre. It took them 30 to 45 minutes. They had to change auto twice and walk from the auto stand, remembers Manasi (Interview, February 2022).

The training sessions were divided into practical and theoretical classes. The driving classes were taken by trainers from Maruti Suzuki Driving School with whom CYSD had a project partnership. The classes were of half an hour duration. Manasi described her driving training as follows:

First, we did not have any knowledge about driving. We took a simulation class, then a class on basics. In the class on basics we learnt about the various car parts like the clutch, brake, lights, switches, indicators and steering. We had known nothing about cars until then. In simulation classes we were taught to drive the computer (simulated) vehicle. The duration of simulation classes was five to seven days. The driving school's vehicles have double clutches and brakes for both the trainer and the trainee. (Interview, Bhubaneswar, February 2022)

The classes would take place daily except Sundays and second Saturdays. Every trainee was allotted the vehicle for half an hour. Mr. Shah and Mr. Biswajit, both trainers from Maruti, praised the women participants for being able to pick up driving skills fast. It was a first for them as well, for earlier they had only trained women who wanted to learn driving to drive their own vehicles while these were women who were coming to learn driving to make an earning out of it.

The theory classes not only comprised driving lessons, the participants also learned how to map and track locations on their mobiles. They were also trained in self-defence, spoken English, communication skills and dress code. After the theory classes, they were then taken to the road for practical classes which would help them get first-hand experience of driving on the road.

Manasi said that they were also provided with the phone number of the local police station and were taught how to escape or defend in case of any emergency. They were also trained to use the first aid box in case of any accidents. What Manasi liked the most however was the gender sensitization classes. She especially liked the way CYSD staff members tried raising awareness in the community about gender division of labour and how the society should not expect women to do all the housework and men to be the sole income earners in the family.

After completing her training, Manasi was employed by Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) to drive vehicles for garbage collection under "Mu Safaiwale" campaign of the state. Her working hours was from 6am to 2pm. She and two other girls would go to collect waste, segregate wet and dry waste and dump it in the allocated ground. She earned a salary of Rs. 10500 and received Rs 9000 in hand after deductions. Manasi was also receiving benefits of the Employee's state Insurance (ESI). Her first bank account was opened in the Canara Bank.



Image: ISST



Image: ISST

Manasi seems positive about BMC as an organisation and the people with whom she works. She says it was difficult to communicate with people initially while collecting garbage. People would generally behave rudely if for some reason the timing for collection of garbage could not be maintained. The Municipal body however keeps the vehicles well maintained, she says and in the 18 months that she has been working, the vehicles did not break down even for a single day. Both the local state agencies-BMC and the police emerged as enabling factors for Manasi.

4. Reflections– what worked, what did not work

Manasi's journey highlights certain challenges that she needed to negotiate before she could attend the skilling programme. In her case the role of her supportive family became an immensely important and influencing factor. Her biggest challenge was her child care responsibilities and it was through the support of the members of her entire natal family that she managed to access the training that really interested her.

Her husband's supportive role also seems to be one of the key enabling factors in her journey. In spite of having an initial awkwardness around the idea of women drivers, Sudhir decided to support his wife. He also helped her by encouraging her to ignore the initial grievances of his own family members.

In Manasi's words:

Sudhir is different than most other men. He believed that my learning driving can help others since I can then become a role model for other people in the community. They could then take inspiration from me and learn to drive. It could then also encourage other men to allow their wives to learn driving. (Interview, Bhubaneswar, February 2022)

Such a ripple-effect seems to have already begun in the community. In the words of Sudhir:

Often, I receive phone calls from my friends and they tell me how my wife is driving and how we should also encourage our wives to learn driving. (Interview, Bhubaneswar, February 2022)

The initial adversity of hearing words of discouragement from others living in the neighbourhood too has started transforming.

When we started learning to drive, people would look at us as if we are something strange. Today they see me working as a BMC driver. Now they have stopped passing their comments, says Manasi. (Interview, Bhubaneswar, February 2022)

Manasi also talks about how the training programme not only helped her learn a skill, but it also taught her to respect diversity and accept people across caste, class and gender differences. She also remembers how she had made friends with her co-participants, as each got a place to share their problems with one another. The partnerships of CYSD with Maruti Suzuki Driving School also helped Manasi. She shared a good relation with the Maruti trainers. After the training they gave participants their number to contact in case they needed help with driving knowledge.

What however enhanced Manasi's journey was the active response of the state as she got placed by the BMC as the Sanitation Vehicle driver. Manasi seems happy and proud of being part of the government's "Mu Safaiwala" campaign. She has also received the best driver award for the south east area of Bhubaneswar. She was chosen from amongst both men and women drivers driving garbage collection vehicles. She feels that her job is important as she is contributing to the nation by clearing plastic and other garbage from the society besides just earning an income. She is also proud to be a part of Swachh Bharat Mission of the country.

Her stable job has helped her family to come out of financial hardship that they were facing in the city. The regular income has given the family a sense of financial security. Access to her new job was a positive outcome of the CYSD-BMC partnership.

Training in a non-traditional occupation has increased Manasi's level of confidence significantly. After bearing the negativity from her neighbourhood during her training days, she feels proud when people from her community finally see her driving a vehicle. In her words:

Government should highlight to us how we are driving the vehicle. In Odisha most of the women do not know that a woman can also drive. People should be made aware. In villages girls are aspiring to do better but their reach is limited. Government should support by providing bus, PCR and other vehicles and inspire women in the village. The women, who think they cannot do anything, should be given opportunities (Interview, Bhubaneswar, February 2022)

Commenting on how the training programme could be improved, Manasi says that money should be paid to the participants for travelling to the training venue and the training hours could be increased so that training could be completed in fewer days. She feels that the trainees should be provided employment as soon as they complete the training programme. It is interesting to note that in spite of leaving a breastfed child at home, Manasi did not expect a child care provision at the training centre. However, she feels that the government should provide crèches for women to come out of home for paid work. She also underlines the advantages of having public toilets on the roads while driving.

Journeys like that of Manasi's seem to have created an enthusiasm in other state bodies and in the market as well as the Airport Authorities and Kalinga Institute of Medical Sciences (KIMS) are now showing interest to employ female drivers. This seems to be a major win of the journey.

5. Positing the case study in the small wins framework

The table below provides a glimpse of how the four-wheeler driving course impacted Manasi's life with the help of a set of indicators drawn from the small wins framework.

Characteristic	Indicators	Findings in case study – Manasi (CYSD, four-wheeler driving course)
Concrete outcome	Visible Results	Taken up a driving job to earn a living
		Improvement in family's standard of living
		Able to influence other women in a positive manner
In-depth changes	Second and third order changes	Change in social attitude towards women drivers and social acceptance of women drivers among those who experienced Manasi's journey
	Radical new practices	BMC and other government and private bodies now planning to employ more women
		Manasi has a regular job as a driver - a first in her family, village and community
Moderate Importance	Micro or local level	Increase in interest among local women to be trained as drivers
	Intermediate	A group of women drivers trained breaks cultural stereotypes at a local level
		Learnt computer and mobile operating skills as enabling skill to be in touch with technology
Positive judgement	Improvement	Improvement in family income, quality of life, more equal spousal relation
	Step forward	Feeling of dignity and confidence, visibilising oneself, negotiating life on the road as an everyday challenge
	Related to shared ambitions	Local level increase in aspiration among women in being looking at driving as a respectable occupation

CASE NARRATIVE 2: WHEELS OF CHANGE

Organization Profile

Starting its journey in May 2008 from New Delhi, India, Azad Foundation aims to enable women disadvantaged by gender, caste, class, ethnicity, religion, race, colour and sexuality, to empower themselves with knowledge and skills to build a gender-just society and earn a livelihood with dignity in jobs and markets that have traditionally been closed to them. Presently Azad works in eight cities in India- in four cities directly and in four cities with partners.

Right from the beginning of its journey, Azad's programme aims to empower socio-economically marginalised women, within the age group of 18-35, by first providing them with the skill of driving four-wheelers and two wheelers and then helping them get an entry into the market through their strategic partner organisation, the Sakha consulting wings private limited.

The programme is mindful of the need of creating a supportive eco-system through preparing feminist leaders (both young women and men) from the communities for the success of such an initiative and therefore engages in constant dialogue at various levels including with the families of the trainees and with the local communities from which the trainees belong, attempting to make the journey holistically meaningful.

The programme also attempts to make each of its trainees ready for the job market and hence has designed its curriculum accordingly by going beyond providing mere technical driving skills to these women, as the training modules also include lessons on Spoken English, Communication, First-Aid, Work-readiness, Self-defence, Gender patriarchy, gender-based violence and Legal rights and Sexual and reproductive health.

In addition, the programme also financially supports individual trainees on a case by case basis. It also takes cognizance of the psychosocial well-being of the trainees and help them get mental health advice from trained professionals if and when needed.

Over the years Azad and its Women with Wheels programme has reached several other cities including Jaipur, Kolkata and Chennai. Besides, the programme has also been adopted by many other organisations working with similar ideals and motto.

During the COVID 19 pandemic lockdown, Azad realised how the increased proliferation of the e-commerce industry could open up new job opportunities for women and accordingly responded by expanding the scope of the Women with Wheels programme as training in two-wheelers was also initiated in Kolkata and Delhi.



Name: Nasreen

Age: 20 years

Religious and/ Caste /Tribe Identity: Muslim, OBC

Marital Status: Unmarried

Educational Status: BA 3rd year (ongoing)

Family Unity: Parents and sibling

Non- traditional Skill acquired: 4-wheel driving

Organisation: Azad Foundation, New Delhi

1. Identity and Social Location

Nasreen, born and brought up in a lower middle-class neighbourhood in the North-Western parts of New Delhi is the youngest daughter of her parents. Her father, a daily wage labourer is the only breadwinner of the family, as her mother remains inside the confines of her home due to her failing health. Nasreen lives with her parents and one of her elder sisters while two of her elder brothers have moved out of their parental home. Nasreen's eldest sister is married and lives with her in-laws.

Growing up in a conservative family, Nasreen was shy and unconfident as a child. She would be scared to move out of her home alone, and would always need the permission of her brothers to venture out. As a school going student too, Nasreen would feel anxious even talking to her teachers.

I could feel my heart thumping when something was asked in class. I could never answer questions asked in school. (Interview, Delhi, March 2022)

I was always so scared, Nasreen recollects (Interview, Delhi, March 2022) Nasreen was also not allowed to go too far from home or come back late at night. Hence, after school, when she got admitted to a college which was a little far away from her immediate neighbourhood, Nasreen decided to not let her mother know of its exact location. She would still be very nervous while commuting in public transport to her college and would invariably skip classes on days when her friends would not be accompanying her.



Image: Azad Foundation

Nasreen however started feeling the need to share the financial burden of her father from a rather young age. Her brothers would not contribute towards the family expenditure and Nasreen's elder sister, who lives with them could also not earn and be financially independent due to her fragile health.

My father is old. He is around 60-65. And he still has to continue labouring every day, Nasreen says empathetically. (Interview, Delhi, March 2022).

A few years back when I got Typhoid and was detected with severe anaemia, my father would have to pay for all my medicine and food... Whatever he was earning, he was having to spend it on us. There was no scope of saving anything, Nasreen remembers. (Interview, Delhi, March 2022)

2. Aspirations: Motivations towards Non-traditional Livelihood

At school, Nasreen's teachers had given her an option to fill up a form for a fashion designing course that was being offered by the ITI. Nasreen says she was interested in it, since she had already known stitching. However, the enrolment fee for the course was too high and hence she had to let go of it.

In the days to come, Nasreen however started feeling the need to start earning even more acutely.

Father would always talk of selling our home and getting us married, but I did not want to get married. I wished to do something on my own and for them. (Interview, Delhi, March 2022)

This was when she came to know of a driving course being offered by the Azad Foundation, Delhi from a friend, and she was immediately attracted towards the idea of driving a four-wheeler.

My mother remains ill most of the time and we face a lot of difficulty when we have to take her to the doctor. So, I thought it would be good if at least I can learn driving. (Interview, Delhi, March 2022)

She was also informed that the organisation would help her find a job after she finishes her course. This made the programme appear even more appealing. However, when Nasreen proposed the idea of joining the course to her family, they seemed reluctant.

Her mother was absolutely against the idea of her daughter learning to drive. She was even more averse to the idea that she would be doing a job in the 'men's world'. Nasreen's elder brother too was not happy with his sister's plan of going out to learn driving. But Nasreen was adamant.

My mother said I do not want you to go out and work. Not driving at least. Do whatever else you want. Sit back at home and earn by sewing if you want, but you tell me, what is the demand of a tailor these days? Every street has a tailor. I wanted to learn nothing else but driving. (Interview, Delhi, March 2022).

Commenting on how women and girls like Nasreen start getting attracted towards a future that is commonly considered 'non-traditional' for women, Snehalata, the Programme Director of Azad Foundation, New Delhi says:

One of the most important impetuses that makes these women attracted towards our programme is their need to establish their own identity. They know, if they continue with their stitching or knitting work, they would be like just any another woman lost in the crowd. But if they learn driving, they would be able to make themselves stand out, become recognisable faces in their own community. (KI Interview, Delhi, January 2022)

This seems true for Nasreen as well, since she had clearly lost interest in being another home-based worker, sewing and stitching as her mother had suggested. Her aspiration was steered towards doing something 'non-traditional'.

This was when Nasreen's elder sister intervened who managed to finally influence her father to let Nasreen join the course. The condition however was that Nasreen would never drive professionally, or take up any driving job even after completing the course.

But Nasreen decided to go ahead and enrol herself into the programme and strategize as and when things happen in the future.

3. Opportunities and Skilling

Nasreen joined Azad's four-wheeler training course in September, 2020. This was also when the first phase of Covid 19 lock-down had just eased out.

I was just sitting at home, not doing anything much, so I thought why not [to enrol in a course]. (Interview, Delhi, March 2022)

Trainees initially have to pay Rs. 2000 to enrol for the course. We call it a commitment fund, says Snehalata (KI Interview, January 2022). Trainees have the option to pay it at one go, or in instalments, she informs. This minimum amount is taken just to ensure trainees' regular presence in the training course. Azad bears all other costs of the trainees, including paying for getting their Driving License (DL), and giving them a mobile phone and uniform as and when they get placed with a job which costs around 60000 per trainee.

Nasreen managed to get the enrolment fee from her father.

The driving lessons would take place near Tara Chowk, around 8 kilometers away from Nasreen's home.

Azad had however initiated the provision of door-to-door pick-up and drop of its trainees during this time, to maintain Covid precautionary guidelines, informs Lalita, one of Nasreen's trainer from Azad (Interview, Delhi, March 2022).

Nasreen however had to finish all her household work before going for her driving lessons. Being the only physically capable woman of the family, Nasreen had to take up the larger share of domestic duties which included chores like cooking and washing. This would invariably make Nasreen late for her pick-up time and she would almost always have to go to the training ground on her own.

I had to cook for my parents and sister and finish up all the washing of clothes before leaving home... Sir would ask me to meet him at 9.30 am from near my house, but I could almost never make it. Then I had to take an auto for myself to go and attend the training session, complains Nasreen. (Interview, Delhi, March 2022)

This obviously had an implication on her daily commuting expenses. Initially she would take an auto rickshaw which would cost her a lot more money. Later, as she slowly got accustomed to the route, Nasreen started taking the bus, which then helped her save quite a bit.

Initially technical training would mean theory lessons, on car parts and car mechanics. This would then be followed by practical lessons on driving a car, informs Lalita.

Trying to recollect the first day of actually driving a car, Nasreen says: *I thought driving would be something extremely difficult. I thought I will not be able to manage. But then madam gave me very clear directions and when the car really moved, I was feeling so happy. I could almost not believe it myself. (Interview, Delhi, March 2022)*

Each trainee would be given half an hour time slots to practice, under the personal supervision of a trainer. *We had both male and female trainers, tells Nasreen. (Interview, Delhi, March 2022).* While it was easier to get comfortable with female trainers, she recollects how it took time for her to ease up to the male trainers.

Initially I would be scared of sirs. But then slowly with time, I realised there is nothing to be scared of them. We would talk to each other and it did not seem scary anymore. (Interview, Delhi, March 2022)

With time, Nasreen could feel her confidence boosting. From being a shy, introvert girl Nasreen could see herself gaining courage to talk to outsiders and travel alone.

I even spoke back at Ranjan sir once, because he would always pick on me. I told him that your criticisms are not helping. Tell me where I am exactly going wrong, instead of berating me constantly. (Interview, Delhi, March 2022)

Moving out of home, travelling in public transport and gaining outside exposure slowly started transforming Nasreen.

In this journey of her change, the classes on empowerment and self-development that Azad offered besides its technical training, seemed to have played a very important role. Nasreen particularly enjoyed the lessons taught in the self-defence and first-aid classes.

She even recollects how on the very day of her self-defence class; she could use her sense of mind and stand up against



Image: Azad Foundation

being cat-called on the road. Her training in Azad not only helped her gain skill as a four-wheeler driver, but also gave her the courage to raise her voice against what is wrong.

It feels good to learn something and then also be able to implement it. Earlier, I would not even have the courage to say anything. I would not know what good manners is and what is bad manners. But now I know, she says. (Interview, Delhi, March 2022)

With the fear of Covid still looming large, Nasreen informs that quite a few classes, especially around self-development would be conducted online while the offline classes would take place in small batches of 2 to 4 students together.

Conducting online classes were however quite difficult. There would be many who would not be able to join due to network issues or for some other problems in their phone. We would then ask them to go and attend classes in some other trainee's home staying in the neighbourhood, informs Lalita. (Interview, Delhi, March 2022)

This was also when a lot of trainees belonging to migrant families, decided to return to their home-lands, making it even more difficult for them to continue with their training. This in fact led to many trainees dropping out of the course or having to stretch their course duration.

The duration of the course usually ranges from 6 to 8 months, informs Snehlata. However, it also depends on a case-to-case basis, she adds.

For Nasreen as well, the course stretched a little longer than 8 months.

I could not initially pass the test for Driving License (DL) and then the next test date came in much later. This delayed the entire process, she says. (Interview, Delhi, March 2022),

After a trainee gets her DL, Azad helps them get a feel of on-road driving, informs Lalita. This is to make the trainees be ready for any kind of job that they might land up with. This training phase includes trainees gaining perfection in skills like parking a car, learning how to navigate their way with the help of the GPS map etc. Once this phase is complete, Azad organises another round of in-house examination of its trainees through external examiners. Only after passing this, does the trainees get their names enrolled with the Sakha, Lalita explains. It however seemed Nasreen was not too eager to appear for this test. She had started applying for work on her own elsewhere without telling her parents. However, none of her attempts really matured and she realised that getting enrolled with the Sakha might help.

Nasreen however seems not an exception, since many trainees opt out of this test, as Lalita narrates.

Many of these girls most often feel the need to get a job very fast. Hence, they drop out after getting the DL and then come back after a year or two when they again need our help. (Interview, Delhi, March 2022)

Nasreen however realised the need to go ahead with the Sakha enrolment. Even though the centre was far away and the process needed another 2 weeks of in-job training, Nasreen says, she persuaded her parents and managed to get their permission. This was because she thought *it would help her gain some experience. (Interview, Delhi, March 2022)*

She also at first thought that travelling to the Sakha centre would not be too big a problem since there would be around 2 or 3 more trainees who would be travelling with her from the same locality. She was also under the impression that the car that she would be driving would be with her and hence she would be able to drive to her work-place from home, saving her from all the hassle of travelling in public transport which would also reduce her commuting expenses.

Nasreen was however a little disheartened when she realised that this would not be the case. The problem seemed even more significant when she got a job as a cab driver in the airport.

I was expected to be at duty early in the morning. It was so difficult to get any transport that early, and they would not arrange for my pick-up! (Interview, Delhi, March 2022)

Nevertheless, Nasreen did take up the job offer. And while her mother was not happy with this arrangement, the news of her job was not disclosed to her brothers

Nasreen's father was however very supportive.

It was because of him that I took up the job offer. He said, it would be a good experience even if I continue with the work for only a few months. At least I would get to interact with people, see others drive, get to know the world of driving first hand. (Interview, Delhi, March 2022)

Nasreen's days in the airport as a cab driver were however numbered.

While travelling to the airport early in the morning was a challenge, she was not satisfied with the wage that she was receiving. The long hours of work also meant very few hours at home, leading to stark time-poverty.

In Nasreen's words: *I would come back home at 10.30 in the night and leave by 7.30 am the next morning. When would I clean and wash my clothes? Who would look after my house? And shouldn't I have some time for myself too? (Interview, Delhi, March 2022)*

Often while trying to manage her paid work with her unpaid care responsibilities, Nasreen would get late in joining her morning duties which would earn her warnings from the management.

Nasreen however tried her best to negotiate all this. She had even borrowed a pair of black shoes from her friend that was needed as a part of the uniform. Her friends also supported her by helping her with her studies, while she was busy with her job.

However, she could not continue with the work for long.

It was getting too difficult for me. The distance and the work hours were not something that I could manage. My brother did not know of the job, but my nephew somehow got the information. He would come and warn me. He would say, father (Nasreen's brother) would get very angry if he gets to know that you are traveling this far. (Interview, Delhi, March 2022)

Today Nasreen is trying hard to find some work closer home. She is also thinking of enrolling into the two-wheeler programme that Azad has started providing, because that might give her greater chances of landing up with some work of her choice.

Sitting back at home, with no work at hand even after gaining the skill of driving a four-wheeler, Nasreen seems a little disheartened. She has heard of Azad's collaboration with the Delhi Municipal body, which might help her get a job as a driver of the community garbage collection van. She has submitted her documents to the relevant body, but has heard nothing as of yet. Nasreen's senior in Azad, Rinky has however been selected for this job and hence Nasreen seems hopeful.

4. Reflection: What Worked, What Did Not

From being a nervous and restrained girl to being feisty and ambitious, Nasreen's journey throws light on how Azad's initiative in skilling women in non-traditional livelihood can help in multifarious ways.

While Nasreen sits at home without a job, as of date one can definitely see her personality change through the pedagogy of the curriculum in which she got trained by the Azad. She has also been able to build her own identity within her family and community through her training.

Earlier people in my neighbourhood would not really listen to me. They would talk behind my back. But now that they see me driving, earning for my family, they have started praising me. (Interview, Delhi, March 2022).

While Nasreen's mother and brothers seem to be still against her idea of earning through non-traditional means of livelihood, her father and sister seem to have started supporting Nasreen's aspiration.

Nasreen's sister in fact has played an instrumental role throughout and today as she feels much more confident about the world outside, Nasreen proudly proclaims how she could take her sister and brother-in-law for a sight-seeing trip in Delhi when they had come to the city. She even dreams of taking her parents for a trip someday, when she earns. They have never gone for a vacation ever; she says with a sense of regret. (Interview, Delhi, March 2022)

Azad's training has therefore given Nasreen an aspiration to live with dignity and the skill-set to work towards it. Nasreen's life has had a spill-over effect amongst her friends and community. She talks about her friend Rina, who has now taken interest in getting trained in driving after seeing Nasreen and her journey with the Azad.

Azad too seems to have played an important role in supporting Nasreen. Apart from their already extremely mindfully created curriculum, the hand-holding that Azad has continued providing Nasreen seems to have made her journey smoother. From meeting her parents as a part of parent-teacher interaction, to calling her to practice sessions in the centre long after her course has officially come to an end, the organisation's role in supporting Nasreen has been quite visible.

Nevertheless, the predominant gender norms guiding Nasreen's life has been one of her biggest challenges in getting her placed and continuing with work. The unequal distribution of care responsibilities at home makes it very difficult for her to commit to paid work for longer hours outside her home. This makes her always seek work near her immediate neighbourhood making her job-search even tougher.

Gendered understanding of labour also colours the demand side of the job market as driving continues to be considered largely as 'men's work'. Hence employers even today feel hesitant hiring woman drivers, says Nasreen from her own experience. In her words: *people are apprehensive to hire women driver. They would prefer male driver thinking what if there is an emergency and the driver needs to replace the tire. How can a woman do all that. (Interview, Delhi, March, 2022)*

This obviously reduces the chances of girls like Nasreen to get a good job that matches their aspirations.

Nasreen has however not been alone in experiencing such gender discrimination from employees.

Nasreen's trainer Lalita, who had herself been a trainee with Azad about a decade ago had also experienced similar gender discriminatory attitude when she had been professionally driving a cab before joining the Azad as a trainer.

I have also heard men taxi drivers telling how these women are taking away our job, says Lalita. (Interview, Delhi, March 2022)

Rinky, who had joined the course about a year before Nasreen however faced a different kind of discrimination when she was driving uber for a while after finishing her course. She found most of her female passengers behaving in a patronising manner with her. *As if I did not know what I am doing, she says. (Interview, Delhi, March 2022)*

The state and the market has also been slow at warming up to the idea of women driving vehicles, suggests Snehalata. Hence, there are not many jobs for such women. *In fact this was why Sakha was created in the first place, so that while Azad provides with the skill-training, Sakha can help with finding them the job, informs Snehalata. (KI interview, Delhi, January 2022)*

In fact, the state and the market has mostly been very gender-blind in making and shaping its policies, she suggests. This has now started changing with the organisation's continued advocacy with DTC. Clean and hygienic washrooms need to be built on roads by the State, many private companies take no cognizance of the special needs that a woman might require such as a washroom or a crèche, she says.

This possibly highlights how the community at large, still considers ‘driving’ to be primarily a ‘male-job’. The need therefore seems to be a conscious attempt towards planning and implementing policies that are conscious of the need to facilitate women into the world of non-traditional livelihood.

5. Positing the Case Narrative in the Small Wins Framework

The table below provides a glimpse of how the four-wheel driving training programme impacted Nasreen (Azaad, Delhi) life with the help of a set of indicators drawn from the small wins framework.

Characteristic	Indicators	Findings in case study – Nasreen
Concrete outcome	Visible Results	A change in personality- from being shy and nervous to ambitious and feisty
		Gaining confidence to access the world outside the domestic sphere
		Strong aspiration to earn through driving garbage vans of Delhi Municipality
In-depth changes	Second and third order changes	Change in mindset amongst the local community those who experienced Manorama's journey
	Radical new practices	The emergence of a ‘Can-do’ attitude in life
Moderate Importance	Micro or local level	Being able to convince certain members of the family to support her aspiration
		Spill-over effect among friends
	Intermediate	Learnt skills like self-defense which can help her negotiate with the world outside in the longer run
		Learnt using mobile enabling access to technology
Positive judgement	Improvement	Improvement in attitude and aspirations but with minimal economic gains
	Step forward	Feeling of confidence, negotiating the life on the road and everyday challenges within family
	Related to shared ambitions	Spillover effect amongst similar age girls

CASE CATEGORY II: ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY AND TOOLS

CASE NARRATIVE 3: ONE STEP TOWARDS DIGITALITY

Organization and Skilling Profile: Archana Women Centre, Ettumanoor, Kerala

Archana Women Center (AWC), a part of JEEWOMS (Jeevapoorna Women Mason's Society), the first association ever formed for and by women masons, works to empower women by attempting to dismantle gender discrimination in livelihood spaces.

This is done by extending training programmes to women in the non-traditional livelihood sector and by assisting them to find employment in the market. Besides technical training, the centre also believes in providing women with psychological assessments and social training which comprises topics on gender inequality, self-reflection, leadership, and women's rights to make them work ready.

AWC is the first organisation in the state of Kerala to provide skill training in non-traditional livelihoods (NTL) for women. Under the Total Sanitation Program, funded by Dutch-Danish embassy, the first group of women who received masonry training were given a contract to build latrines in several panchayats. During the training time women were paid stipends to offset their workdays. Presently, AWC provides a variety of NTL skilling: driving, mobile mechanism, grass cutting, cement block production, Ferro cement technology, LED bulb production, bamboo work, tailoring, etc. Under its Enterprise Development Training, women at AWC are offered training programmes for PPE kit and mask making, food processing, umbrella making, mushroom cultivation, poultry farming, etc. This enabled many women individually or in groups to begin their own enterprises.

In 2017, the centre played an active role in collectivising and organising women into Community Action Groups (CAGs) which are similar to Women's Self-Help Groups (SHGs). At present, there are 6000 women in various CAGs. AWC supports CAG members with seed investment, procurement of raw material, linkages to market, etc.

In 2021, groups of women after having received various kinds of skill trainings from AWC came together to form the Labour bank – the first women labour contract cooperative society in Kerala registered under the Kerala Cooperative Societies Act 1969 (Act 21 of 1961).



Name: Diksha

Age: 29 years

Religious and/Caste/Tribe Identity: Hindu, General Caste

Marital Status: Married

Educational Status: Higher Secondary

Family Unit: Husband and three children

Non-traditional Skill Acquired: Mobile Mechanism

Organisation: Archana Women's Centre

1. Identity and Social Location

Dikshamol was born and brought up in an orthodox rural neighbourhood of Palakkad, a district in South-eastern part of Kerala. Her father used to work as a supervisor at a private company while her mother worked as a domestic worker to neighbourhood families. Diksha's father's health however deteriorated fast as she was growing up, as a result of which the family started facing acute financial distress. Diksha's mother's income was not enough to meet the household expenses and soon after finishing her 12th class in the local school, Diksha and her brother realised the need to start earning to make both ends meet. Even though Diksha aspired to continue her higher education, her family's economic condition forced her to take up a job at a company making cable wires in Ernakulam.

In Ernakulam, she met several colleagues who while working in the same factory were also enrolled in several coaching classes for other competitive examinations. This inspired her as she re-started her education by joining a bachelor's programme in commerce through distance learning which required attending classes only on Sundays.

Unfortunately, Diksha's family started facing a lot of societal pressure in her natal village for allowing their daughter to live alone in a city. Diksha remembers her parents were pressured to get her married, as girls would usually get married at a young age in her village. That was when the family heard of Shivkumar- a coworker who used to also work in the same factory as Diksha. Shivkumar seemed to have taken a liking for her and had informed Diksha's brother about his interest to marry her. The proposal was hurriedly accepted by the family and Diksha got married when she was just 19.

Post marriage, Diksha moved to her in-law's home, which was at a distance of three hours from her work place at Ernakulam. This made the travel to her work place quite arduous as bus service was infrequent in the route which meant leaving early for work from home and returning late. Initially Shivkumar and Diksha would travel together but soon Shivkumar moved to a new job while Diksha continued working in her old work-place.

Shivkumar still continued dropping Diksha at the town from where she would take the bus to work and in the evening her father-in-law would wait at the bus stop to take her back home. Diksha mentions how her in-laws were initially very supportive and did not have any qualms about her working or studying. She never felt the pressure of doing household chores as her mother-in-law and sister-in-law would manage most of it. However, things soon started changing as she became pregnant which was when her husband started insisting she stop working or going for her weekend classes.

Diksha was upset with this sudden change for this meant not only quitting the job but also leaving her B.Com classes which could have eventually helped her gain a promotion and helped her in career progression. Unfortunately, she had to finally succumb to her husband's demand and within three months of marriage had to quit working.

Shivkumar seems to be aware of the fact that Diksha was not content with this. In his words:

Now she says, it was not the right decision to leave the job for there was supposedly a provision of taking leave. Diksha is sad for if she stayed on, she would have been permanent by now and would be earning nearly 20000 rupees. (Interview, Kottayam, January 2022)

Diksha gave birth to her first child within a year of her marriage and conceived twice subsequently. This hindered her from building a career as her in-laws did not approve of her leaving her children behind at home when she went out for work. This was, however, negotiated by Diksha to an extent as she made arrangements with her grandmother in law, who agreed to look after the children for some time in the day. Nonetheless, this could not continue for a long time since she passed away within a few years leaving Diksha with almost no further opportunity to go out and pursue her ambition. Things became even more complicated when Diksha and Shivkumar along with their children moved out of the joint family and started living separately in their own home. Moreover, Shivkumar was travelling most of the time for work so this meant Diksha had no sharing hands left for her everyday domestic duties in addition to her child care responsibilities.

Shivkumar, Diksha suggests, is apparently quite sensitive towards her predicaments. However, he seems to know

of no ways in which his wife's burdens can be shared, for he mentions how his family is not well off enough to afford a care provider or a domestic worker who could help shoulder some of Diksha's unpaid domestic duties.

2. Aspiration: Motivation towards NTL

Diksha has always been ambitious and wished to have a career of her own. As a child, she would dream of being a teacher or a police officer because of the respect that these professions have in the society.

They are free to move, they are respected and can also help others, she says while talking about her dream careers. (Interview, Kottayam, January 2022)

Unfortunately, Diksha could not end up being what she wanted. Her socio-economic location made it difficult for her to even pursue higher education. She even had planned not to marry before establishing her own career, something that people from her community could hardly imagine. However, that too could not see the light of reality since societal pressure forced her to get married even before she could complete her graduation.

All this could hardly deter Diksha whose penchant to have a career of her own was so strong that she would not let any relevant opportunity go to waste. From enrolling herself to the B.Com programme while she was already working in a factory, to continuously trying to upskill herself while domestic and child care duties primarily kept her home-bound; Diksha's zeal was quite visible. She attempted a host of things including attending various classes and trainings for preparation of PSC (Public Service Commission) examination, learning English through YouTube videos and taking up computer lessons. She chose all of it while balancing her unpaid care responsibilities at home.

In 2019, Diksha got introduced to AWC and became a member of its Community Action Group (CAG). As a member of the CAG, she got opportunities to attend a variety of skilling programmes including in mushroom cultivation, in making umbrellas and cloth paper bags, and also masks and PPE kits. She had also attended several non-technical classes which then helped her build her own understanding on gender, importance of women's work participation and empowerment.

From all the trainings and classes that she attended Diksha realised that women can do everything (Interview, Kottayam, January 2022).

In her words:

My experiences from work and training taught me that if we women do not come out of our homes then we will not learn anything new. Then we will be left to believe what our parents and elders have always said, that we can only do certain kinds of work. But we should not just stop with certain kinds. There are many things that we can do. And if we are getting a supportive husband, like mine it's like a cherry on the cake. (Interview, Kottayam, January 2022)

Unlike other members of the CAG, who preferred home-based income generation activities like poultry and stitching, Diksha thus, itched to get some opportunity that will require her to move out of her home and work. And so joined the course with anticipation.

3. Opportunities and Skilling

Diksha was the only one from her CAG to attend the course. It was the 'newness' of the training that attracted her. She enrolled in the third batch of the mobile repair mechanism which had 17 trainees. Shamnaz, who was already teaching mobile technology in Government PolyTechnic college, was approached for the training sessions. He shares:

Unlike the classes in the college, here the course was of a really short duration which was a challenge. It was just 22 days. I have also observed how age can be a challenge in learning this

course. Older women, more than 45 years found it very difficult to follow. (Interview, Kottayam, January 2022)

Talking about what made AWC introduce such a course, Thresiamma Mathew, the founder and director of the center says:

These days women who join for carpentry and masonry are few. When I met some of our young CAG members they suggested mobile mechanism and computer classes. These are new generation courses in which women are interested. (Interview, Kottayam, January 2022)

Before beginning the course, the candidates were required to complete an application form which included their basic information, employment history, and credentials. The course had both theory and practical components included in the pedagogy. The practical sessions required tools which were supplied by the center. Initially, the classes were designed for 10 days but were then extended to a period of 22 days on request of the women trainees.

One of the main challenges that the trainees faced was the problem of balancing time, says Diksha. Most of the women who had enrolled for the training were married and had children. AWC did not have creche or provision to bring children to the classes, making it very difficult for most of them. There was also not much flexibility when it came to the timings of the course. Classes would start at noon around 1.30 pm and in Diksha's words: *Sir was very strict about time. (Interview, Kottayam, January 2022)*



Image: Archana Women's Centre

Trainees who continued with the programme thus had to either finish all their domestic work at home before coming for the sessions or had to delegate their work to either parents or parent-in-laws. Diksha herself managed because of Shivkumar's grandmother who agreed to look after her grandchildren during this span. This resulted in frequent absenteeism of trainees in the class, informs Shamnaz. In fact, a large number of candidates who had enrolled initially dropped out after the very first class and only 11 trainees (out of 17) completed their training.

Pandemic was yet another challenge for Diksha's batch as the training was being conducted at a time when the impact of COVID 19 was still looming in their area. Diksha herself had to remain in quarantine as a result of which she had to remain absent from the classes for a stretch of about 7 days. I thought I will not be able to complete the course. But sir helped me and I could catch up with the rest of the class soon, she says (Interview, January 2022).

Shamnaz remembers Diksha as a hardworking and diligent student:

Diksha could easily learn things. Even though she was absent for some days in between, she worked really hard and studied to keep pace with the class. For example, she really learned soldering well. She seemed really interested in it. (Interview, Kottayam, January 2022)

Shivkumar too seems to vouch for his wife's diligence and intelligence.

There was this one time when her teacher gave her three mobiles [phones] for learning, that is because she was one of the good students in his class. (Interview, January 2022).

After completing the course Diksha was however unable to take up any advance in-shop training which could have helped her gain employability. Shamnaz had offered Diksha to join a mobile repairing shop to get trained and work, which she had to refuse.

In her words: *Sir offered me to continue advance training and work in a shop in Kaduthuruthy. It wasn't near. And it was difficult because I had to look after two children. Also, I was pregnant*

with my third child during that time. My husband told me to go, but it was not possible anymore. (Interview, Kottayam, January 2022)

Lack of gaining hands-on practice seems to be one of the most important challenges that women are facing in their journey towards starting their full-fledged career in mobile mechanism, confirms Shamnaz. Finding shop owners who are open to the idea of employing women which could then help them get advanced training is also a challenge, he adds (Interview, March 2022).

Actually people consider it (employing a women worker) risky for they doubt their skill. This happens not only in this field but also elsewhere. For example, earlier women drivers were not encouraged. People were afraid to travel with them, he says. (Interview, Kottayam, January 2022)

Women too often feel insecure joining a shop, Shamnaz further explains. Hence, there is unreceptiveness at both ends, he adds (Interview, March 2022)

Diksha however continued attending the monthly online expert lectures organised by AWC even after her 22-day course in mobile mechanism ended. These courses helped them gain awareness about a variety of issues around gender and livelihood. Diksha found these useful as she could be at home while attending them. The webinars would be conducted through various online meeting platforms like Zoom and Google Meet and while many women including Diksha were accustomed with zoom since her children would be attending their classes through this platform, Google Meet was new for Diksha. However, being a fast learner, and having gained technological skills during her training, Diksha soon mastered it. The training had in fact given her the confidence of handing digital technologies, she confirms.

Earlier I was scared to even use Whatsapp and Facebook, but now I feel I am more confident.

Diksha continues to remain in touch with her mobile mechanism training batch-mates through a Whatsapp group and uses her husband's Facebook account to talk and connect with some of her friends.

Even though she has still not managed to get a chance to finish her hands-on training in mobile mechanism, her neighbours often call upon her to take her help when they face some mobile related technical problems.

Diksha also wishes to learn driving, a course that she has heard AWC is offering at some centers, but distance from home and household work remains two big challenges for any plan she makes.



Overcoming Obstacles: What Worked, What did not

It has been some time since Diksha has finished her mobile mechanism training and she is yet to get a regular income through the new skill set that she acquired. However, through her continuous engagement with hosts of programmes anchored by the AWC, Diksha seems to have gained a confidence to nurture her aspiration.

In her own words, *I have become more courageous ever since I started attending AWC's classes. Earlier I would be scared to talk but now I feel much more confident (Interview, January 2022) Diksha's husband also vouches for this, "she did the whole process of [acquiring] ration card and Aadhar card on her own", he proudly proclaims. (Interview, Kottayam, January 2022)*

Attending CAG meetings also helped Diksha in improving her communication skills. In the CAG meetings, women were encouraged to speak in the group and were asked to prepare agendas and carry out meetings as planned. This helped most of the women to carry out activities systematically in a time bound manner.

Besides, members like Diksha also benefited out of the grocery store, that is run by AWC where items, supplied by other CAG members running their mills, were sold at a subsidised rate. This financially helped Diksha and people like her by reducing their monthly expenses.

AWC also has a system in place to get its members loan with lower rates of interest. The new house that Diksha has moved into, was partly built through a financial loan that AWC helped her in getting. The building process of the house was also taken care of by the centre.

Everything was done according to the directions from Archana. We gave them 5 lakhs rupees and AWC people did all the building work for us, says Diksha. (Interview, Kottayam, January 2022)

All this helped AWC to create a long-term relation with Diksha which did not just end with the 22 days mobile mechanism course. In fact, apart from mobile mechanisms, Diksha was also a part of several other AWC training programmes, some of which were also economically empowering. For instance, during COVID pandemic, around 350 women from different CAGs, including Diksha were engaged in making masks which were supplied to local hospitals for a remuneration. Women were initially given training to stitch and then were supplied with raw materials weekly for the making of masks. The finished products would then be collected by AWC and would be supplied to local hospitals. As Diksha gained a new skill, she felt encouraged to buy a sewing machine of her own, with financial assistance from the AWC. Since then, she has been trying to learn how to sew various kinds of things with the help of Youtube videos.

She has in fact tried up-skilling herself in spoken English as well through videos available online, for she feels she is weak at it.

Thus, while mobile mechanism training has not given Diksha any opportunity to earn yet, it has facilitated in helping her get the skill-set which can then lead to various other kinds of work opportunities. This however is not what Diksha truly aspires to. She still nurtures her wish to get advanced training in mobile mechanism, but the burden of unpaid domestic work has been a constant challenge. While AWC has had various ways to support people like Diksha, a child care mechanism would possibly be of great help. Also, Diksha suffers from not having access to the right kinds of tools which could have otherwise helped her get some amount of hands-on practice in mobile repairing within her very neighbourhood. Unfortunately, there is no mechanism at place right now which can help her with such matters.

Also, a more supportive ecosystem would have helped Diksha as Shamnaz suggests, for the market seems to be rather non-receptive. The state too can possibly play an important role, in journeys like that of Diksha's as a better public transportation system, connecting the semi-urban and rural areas seem to be one of the key requirements emerging out of Diksha's narratives.



Image: Archana Women's Centre

5. Positing the case study in the small wins framework

The table below provides a glimpse of how the training in mobile mechanism impacted Diksha's life with a set of indicators drawn from the small wins framework.

Characteristic	Indicators	Findings in case study – Diksha (AWC– Mobile Mechanism)
Concrete outcome	Visible Results	First exposure of handling machines.
		Increased confidence in using mobile phones which has facilitated learning newer skills, some of which has helped her earn
		Strong aspiration to earn by working in an 'office' which would give her opportunity to apply her technical expertise around mobile mechanism
In-depth changes	Second and third order changes	Confidence in communicating and participating in group meetings
	Radical new practices	Better access in the world of social media platforms, helping her in keep in touch with her friends and family
		Belief that women can do all kinds of work
Moderate Importance	Micro or local level	Being able to convince certain members of the family to support her aspiration
	Intermediate	A woman getting skilled in some sort of a technology puts the dominant gender stereotype in question
		AWC training duration in mobile mechanism extended as a result of the trainees demand
Positive judgement	Improvement	A new possible avenue of earning and bettering her family's economic status. Better access to digital space.
	Step forward	Feeling of confidence while accessing digital platforms and a zeal to get advance training in mobile mechanism
	Related to shared ambitions	Increase in community level support as she is getting acceptance to a level of having skills in mobile mechanism in the neighbourhood

CASE NARRATIVE 4: CUTTING THROUGH THE CLUTTER

Organization and Skilling Profile: Archana Women Centre, Ettumanoor, Kerala

Archana Women Center (AWC), a part of JEEWOMS (Jeevapoorna Women Mason's Society), the first association ever formed for and by women masons, works to empower women by attempting to dismantle gender discrimination in livelihood spaces. dismantle gender discrimination in livelihood spaces.

This is done by extending training programmes to women in the non-traditional livelihood sector and by assisting them to find employment in the market. Besides technical training, the centre also believes in providing women with psychological assessments and social training which comprises topics on gender inequality, self-reflection, leadership, and women's rights to make them work ready.

AWC is the first organisation in the state of Kerala to provide skill training in non-traditional livelihoods (NTL) for women. Under the Total Sanitation Program, funded by Dutch-Danish embassy, the first group of women who received masonry training were given a contract to build latrines in several panchayats. During the training time women were paid stipends to offset their workdays. Presently, AWC provides a variety of NTL skilling: driving, mobile mechanism, grass cutting, cement block production, Ferro cement technology, LED bulb production, bamboo work, tailoring, etc. Under its Enterprise Development Training, women at AWC are offered training programmes for PPE kit and mask making, food processing, umbrella making, mushroom cultivation, poultry farming, etc. This enabled many women individually or in groups to begin their own enterprises.

In 2017, the centre played an active role in collectivising and organising women into Community Action Groups (CAGs) which are similar to Women's Self-Help Groups (SHGs). At present, there are 6000 women in various CAGs. AWC supports CAG members with seed investment, procurement of raw material, linkages to market, etc.

In 2021, groups of women after having received various kinds of skill trainings from AWC came together to form the Labour bank – the first women labour contract cooperative society in Kerala registered under the Kerala Cooperative Societies Act 1969 (Act 21 of 1961).



Name: Leeza M

Age: 48 years

Religion and/ Caste/Tribe Identity: Christian, OBC

Marital Status: Married

Education: Class 12th

Family: Husband and two daughters

Non-traditional Skill Acquired: Grass cutting

Organisation: Archana Women's Center

1. Identity and Social Location

Leeza lives with her husband and two daughters; the eldest girl has just joined nursing course and younger daughter is in high school. Leeza's husband is a daily wage worker mainly engaged in rubber tapping. Leeza started working as a domestic worker at a very young age. She has completed class 12th but did not continue her studies. She admitted that she never aspired for a good job but aspired for a well-paying job for herself.

From young age, we lived in poverty so I am able to adjust with the minimum earning. Even today I don't dream of anything because I know I cannot afford to do that. (Interview, Kottayam, January 2022)

Given her limited skills and education, Leeza could only take up paid domestic work. This is probably because she has been doing domestic work in her neighbourhood house since her school days and there was nobody she could look up to for guidance.

She has four sisters and 1 brother in her native family. Both her parents were manual labourers and they lived with the minimum wage they received. None of the sisters are working and she was the only one who wanted to be financially independent. Her brother had already stopped studies in 7th standard when his father fell ill. She decided to go for work because she wanted to help her parents and contribute to the family's income. She didn't think about going for higher studies as she wanted to earn and build a house. During her school days she was in the Volleyball team and she was more interested in sports than in studies. However, she was unable to participate in college sports because the team was primarily made up of boys and she was hesitant to approach them. She was hesitant to talk to her male classmates since her father was quite strict and did not encourage any relationship with boys. Leeza and her siblings typically connected with their father through their mother because they were generally hesitant to speak to him directly.

The first house, where she started working as a domestic worker was with her tuition teacher's family. She worked there for more than five years and through them she got work in another house where her duty was to take care of an autistic child. Leeza took care of the child very well and the family was extremely happy with her. She received a second offer at the same time to work as a domestic worker for an American family. She obtained a passport and a US visa. She had two goals in her mind, one was to construct a house for her family and another was to make money for her sister's marriage. But the family where she was working didn't want to leave her and instead offered her Rs.20000 which made her decide to stay back with the family. She moved with the family from Kerala to Bangalore and worked in the house for 5 years. She came back to Kerala when the family relocated to the USA. However, she only received Rs. 20,000 as payment for her five years of employment, and when queried, they claimed that her housing, clothing, and food expenses had already been covered. Today, being a member of the association for the informal worker, she realises that it was her right to get money for the work she did. She feels that these unions and associations are important as it helps in collective bargaining and ensures workers' rights. After coming back to Kerala she went to the same teacher's house and stayed there for 5 more years. She didn't think of marriage as she had debt to be repaid from her sisters' marriage. The family with whom she was working initiated her marriage after she paid off her debts and she got married at the age of 30 years.

Leeza did not work after marriage as her husband didn't want her to go for work. But she always felt the need for financial independence,

He (husband) used to give Rs300-500 for purchasing supplies for home and expected me to buy everything from that money and I found it difficult. I thought I could have bought things from my money if I had job. (Interview, Kottayam, January 2022)

Leeza's husband- however was of the opinion that it was a man's responsibility to take care of the family. Even today, he feels that Leeza is working because of his inability to contribute to household expenses and he feels ashamed to send her to work. This comes from the whole patriarchal notion where men are considered to be the breadwinner and women's role is to take care of domestic activities. But he agrees that her financial contribution to the family is a great help to meet the household expenses. Her husband always felt ashamed of Leeza being a domestic worker and he used to ask her to stop going for the job, especially since his sisters would tease him about it.

Leeza re-joined domestic work when her elder daughter turned 6 years old. Her husband's mother and elder daughter would take care of the child when she was away for work. Fortunately, her employers were also flexible with the timing so she could manage her domestic care work at home with her own paid work. But when her mother-in-law fell sick, she again stopped working to take care of her and the domestic chores. She resumed work when her mother-in-law moved to her brother-in-law's home. Women predominantly are the caregivers in every family and Leeza too had career breaks for child care and providing care to her mother-in-law. Kerala is a state where the gender index is high in terms of literacy, longevity, and other women's health indicators. However, the percentage of women who participate in the workforce is just 21% (Kerala Development Report 2021), which is low relative to the number of women who enrol in higher education. Women's choice to work mainly depends on husbands and in-laws' demand for family care which is unpaid and normalised as women's duty.

2. Aspiration: Motivations towards NTL skilling

Constructing a house was one of her dreams since childhood. She grew up in a thatched roof house which used to leak during the rainy season, since then she longed to have a safe and strong house.

While cleaning other's houses, I used to think when I will be able to clean tiled floor of my own house. In some houses they have different tiles in different rooms. If we have money we can live according to our dream. (Interview, Kottayam, January 2022)

Today, even though she has built a house, it's still unfinished and she has to repay the loan taken for its construction. But now her eldest daughter has joined a nursing course and she feels that her daughter's education should be the primary goal.

Starting from her first job, when she was just in class 5, she would always plan how to earn and save more money. She was paid Rs.2 for cleaning the neighbourhood house and she would save the money to buy a dress for herself. She mentioned that unlike her sisters, she always wanted to earn money for her needs. Even when she decided to go to the USA as a domestic worker, her aim was to construct a house for the family and save money for sister's marriage. All her needs before and after her marriage were met from the money earned from being a domestic worker, "Seeing my daughters dress so well people used to comment that I spent money lavishly but actually those clothes are from the households where I go for domestic work."

Leeza completed 12th and she feels that there is no other work she could engage in with this education. Since the age of 17 years, she has been working as a domestic worker in different households. She used to save money that she earned by depositing it in a bank or chit fund. Her husband also used to question her about her earnings and he used to comment that she is sending all the money to her native family. But she felt that at least one partner's money should be saved for emergency needs in the family. During her daughter's admission to nursing, she was able to contribute money from her savings.

She said, *I was able to give Rs.26000 for my child's admission from what I had saved. I had borrowed some money too, but I can repay it now by working.*

She belonged to another SHG group but was forced to leave because of internal conflict. She learned about CAG under AWC at that time, leading her to join the organisation. After that she joined a driving class at AWC, a project funded by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD). Even though she went for classes, she couldn't attend the driving test. Her husband was not happy with her driving, especially because he himself didn't know how to drive. She attended many awareness classes and training programs. Leeza used to do her housework early while attending all the trainings, and her spouse did not encourage her in splitting up the chores. But her decision to attend training for grass cutting was not just for money or to reach any of her goals, but for



Image: Archana Women's Centre

status. She always felt people looked down on her when she spoke of her work as a domestic worker. There were many such incidents in her life, where people, especially her relatives, ridiculed her; labelling her as a domestic worker and her work was never considered decent. Leeza therefore had a strong aspiration towards changing her identity as a 'domestic worker'. Leeza narrated one such incident when she was hurt the most, which was when she finally decided to take up another job.

Leeza narrates, *It was during a women's group meeting at church, me being the president was writing the minutes of the meeting and suddenly I missed what the parish priest was talking. In front of everyone, he passed a comment that Leeza is thinking about cleaning toilet and the whole group of 20 women laughed loudly. That was the moment when I felt insulted and my eyes were filled with tears. I was not this hurt when my parents died but the insult in front everyone was very painful. (Interview, Kottayam, January 2022)*

Leeza felt that she could get a better status by engaging in grass cutting using a machine, which requires skill training. Thressamma, Director, Archana Women Centre also mentioned that Leeza joined NTL training to work with dignity.

3. Opportunities and Skilling

Leeza was the president of AWC's one of the Community Action Group (CAG). Once AWC informed them about the grass-cutting training via mobile message, even though she was interested she couldn't join. Later, she informed AWC regarding her interest in attending the training, and luckily, the training was postponed and she could join. There were 9 women who joined the training program, who were all above the age of 45 years. The trainer for grass cutting, Rajesh was known to the organisation (through his wife who attended the tailor training at AWC) about his skill in grass cutting using machines. As the trainer was a male, women trainees already had instructions from AWC that any misconduct from the trainer was to be reported. Leeza says that the trainer was extremely good with the women trainees. The training was for three days at AWC. On the first day the trainer introduced the trainees to the grass cutting machine and issued general guidelines on taking up grass cutting as a job. On the second day, women were asked to hold the machines and work with the machines. Some of the women were afraid to work with the machine and some were even sceptical about hanging the machine on the shoulder and cutting grass. And on the third day, women were taught to cut grass with a machine in one of the AWC Centres.

The training could have been done in a day but women are generally not familiar with machines and they had lot of apprehensions. The trainer also gave instructions and guidance to each and every trainee individually. Everyone got a chance to cut grass on the last day. (Interview, Kottayam, January 2022)

Leeza was also doubtful about her ability to use the machine but when she used the machine, she realised that it was not difficult. Rajesh, the trainer shared, *Women initially were afraid to use the machine because of the loud noise it makes along with the hot air but with practice, they managed to overcome their fear. (Interview, Kottayam, January 2022)*

The main focus of the training was not just about teaching women to use the machine to cut the grass but also to do it with speed. Rajesh had said that there was a style in performing the act and he had taught that to the women. Women were also introduced to the machine parts, and were given lessons about maintaining the machine. The trainer also mentioned that all women were quick learners even then he felt that women learned differently compared to men. He further explained that men were quicker learners than women; which might have been because women generally were not used to working with machines and they required time to familiarise themselves with it before they could actually learn.

Further, Rajesh mentioned that women complained of back pain initially. As they carried the machine on their shoulders while working, all of the trainees complained of back pain. But Rajesh asserts that with practice, this pain might be managed.

The trainees obtained their certificates after six months because of the pandemic. As Leeza was very interested in taking it as her job, AWC gave her a loan to buy a machine. The cost of the machine was Rs 27300, which was paid by the agency and Leeza has to pay Rs.1500 for 18 months to repay the loan. Culturally women are expected to meet domestic needs and working women tend to adjust their work according to domestic demands. As such, not all women took this as a career as most of the women had small children to take care of and it was difficult for them to engage in economic activities outside house. However, many women came with an interest to learn, though not sure how they could take it up as a livelihood option. Apart from Leeza, one more woman went for grass cutting after training by renting a machine. Leeza started to go for grass cutting only after buying the machine. Rajesh says that Leeza was a person who was a bit slow in grass cutting compared to others but had an interest in taking it forward as a livelihood. Leeza says that she once completed grass cutting in one of the plots so fast that the owner paid her an additional Rs.100.



Image: Archana Women's Centre

Attending training and engaging in grass cutting has brought fame to Leeza, as she was interviewed by TV channels. She says that *after watching my interview, a few people called me for grass cutting. I have also posted on Facebook and even AWC gave advertisement, through which I got work.* (Interview, Kottayam, January 2022)

Now she is proud to talk about her job and it increased her status.

Thressiama points out, *Women when start to work with the skill they have acquired, will feel 'I am someone' and now Leeza has that dignity.* (Interview, Kottayam, January 2022)

After taking up grass cutting as regular work, Leeza realised that she could earn more money compared to domestic work. The payment for grass cutting is usually on an hourly basis and she used to get Rs. 300 for an hour. Leeza says she could make Rs.10000 a week, which is her

monthly earning that she gets from working as a domestic worker. As grass cutting work is seasonal (demand is higher post rains) and not regular, she continues to go for domestic work to five houses, leaving two days for grass cutting. Now Leeza doesn't identify herself as a domestic worker but instead as a woman grass cutter, and she feels very proud about her new identity as a mechanised grass cutter. She says that the major advantage she feels in her new job is that she doesn't have to tolerate abuse or insults from employers, something very common in her experience as a domestic worker.

In spite of working in almost ten places, people still compared her to men and doubted women's ability in using machines. Even when she was about to buy a machine, her relatives and neighbours were sceptical about it. Her husband also said that he was unconvinced whether women will be able to cut grass with machine-like men as he has never heard about women doing these activities. Leeza says that her husband asked whether it is possible for her to carry the machine. He was a little reluctant at first to allow her to engage in grass cutting as he felt it was men's job. To acquire his consent to attend the grass cutting, Leeza had to negotiate and convince him.

Reflection: What Worked, What Did Not

Leeza's life has been full of struggle since her childhood. She has been working as a domestic worker for many years owing to financial constraints and supports requirements of her own and extended natal family. For years, she had no other choice of work and was looking for a more dignified avenue as paid domestic work is looked down upon by her family and society in general.

Being part of the non-traditional skilling under AWC and engaging in non-traditional livelihood has been a life-changing decision for Leeza, not in terms of monetary benefit but the status and dignity it has provided for her. Initially, she enrolled in a driving course but could not pursue it further owing to her husband's disapproval which stemmed from his insecurity of not knowing how to drive. In fact, Leeza has had to negotiate at various points of time to be able to work owing to her husband's aversion to women working outside their homes. Eventually,

Leeza was able to negotiate with her husband and she took up the grass-cutting course which was of short duration.

AWC's holistic skilling process involves an in-depth social training and awareness on gender rights (AWC is immensely proud of this initiative which they have developed based on their experience of skilling women over the years) before starting technical training. This helps women to leave their insecurities behind and lower their inhibitions of using tools and machines, which are often denied to them based on prevalent traditional norms.

Leeza also went through a similar process and her overall skilling has made her confident and regained her self-esteem by participating in CAG meetings and workshops. CAG is not restricted to economic empowerment, women create social capital and attain social empowerment through participation in various meetings, workshops and trainings. While Leeza has earlier been part of SHGs and women's groups in church, being a member of the CAG has encouraged savings and livelihood enhancement in her life. Through the CAG, Leeza was also able to take a loan and buy the grass cutting equipment and with media publicity, she has become famous and gets work. It is important to note the cost of the grass cutting machine is prohibitive which most women cannot afford; the trainer elaborates on this.

A minimum Rs.25000 has to be spent on buying machine but its petrol capacity will be just 1litre, therefore it will have less mileage. So, if one goes for high-end machines, it will be more than Rs.35000, which most women cannot afford. (Interview, Kottayam, January 2022)

Despite the publicity and the talent, one sees that Leeza had to first negotiate with her husband in order to gain her skills. Thereafter, potential employers were still sceptical of her ability to cut grass based on her gender and she still continues to face ridicule from various quarters and which in turn also inhibits her potential to earn. AWC's holistic skilling process provides opportunities beyond economic empowerment; it provides tools to women to negotiate and make best use of a possible economic opportunity. The organisation's engagement with the family also helps in bringing women closer to their economic aspirations. Further, linking women with markets through loans and schemes as well as possible employers, especially the panchayats (state) help in establishing credibility of the women skilled labour. These initial opportunities help in paving the way forward for further economic and personal empowerment.



Image: Archana Women's Centre

5. Positing the case study in the small wins framework

The table below provides a glimpse of how the grass cutting training impacted Leeza's life with the help of a set of indicators drawn from the small wins framework.

Characteristic	Indicators	Findings in case study – Leeza (AWC– Grass Cutting)
Concrete outcome	Visible Results	First exposure to handle a heavy and expensive piece of machinery
		Economic Gains – ability to find wage opportunities of grass cutting
		A feeling of confidence and pride about her achievements
In-depth changes	Second and third order changes	Confidence in communicating and participating in group meetings (such as the CAG)
	Radical new practices	Able to handle and operate efficiently the grass cutting machine – traditionally thought to be a man's work as it is a heavy equipment.
		Ability to take loan from the CAG and find grass cutting assignments
Moderate Importance	Micro or local level	Being able to convince her husband who was not sure how a woman could handle a grass cutting machine to give her permission to go for the skilling program.
	Intermediate	Breaking the gender stereotype - woman being able to handle an expensive and heavy machine for grass cutting
Positive judgement	Improvement	Economic gains – is able to fund her daughter's nursing course, improve her house construction
		Negotiate with her husband who is a strict patriarch
	Step forward	Besides domestic work, she is able to find a job that is 'respectable' and she is able to find dignity is her new paid work
	Related to shared ambitions	Increase in community and market level support as she is getting acceptance and encouragement for her grass cutting ability using the machine.

CASE CATEGORY III: WOMEN IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP

CASE NARRATIVE 5: TOWARDS 'SUNSHINE'

Organization Profile

Starting its journey from the late 1990s under the leadership of Mathew Spacie, an India based British entrepreneur, Magic Bus works with children and young adults from underprivileged background of India by enabling them to complete their education, delaying their age of marriage and providing them with the skill-set that is necessary to enter the job market. Over the last 2 decades Magic Bus has scaled up its programmes impacting the lives of over 1 million people across its multiple sites of functioning in India.

Through their two parallel yet integrally connected programmes- Adolescent education Programme and Youth Skilling Programme, Magic Bus aims to facilitate sustainable living by helping a generation to move out of the vicious cycle of poverty. 'Childhood to livelihood approach', as they describe their journey to be, initially equips and assists children between the age group of 12 to 17 with secondary education and later, as they enter their adult-hood (between the age group of 18-25), the organisation tries to improve their chances of employability by helping them acquire the required skills that are deemed necessary to become job-ready for the 21st century market. These include building up skills around team-work, communication, problem solving abilities, managing self and being work ready.

Besides, the organisation has also recently initiated two more short-term programmes for the youth, with the aim of directly connecting them to the market, based on their own personalised interest and aspiration. These are the micro-entrepreneurial skilling programme, specifically meant for aspiring entrepreneurs and the digital employment exchange programme, a platform which seeks to connect job seekers and the employers following the National Career Scheme (NCS) model of the Ministry of Labour and Employment.

The organisation being deeply invested in the pedagogy of experiential learning and mentoring attempts to anchor its programme in low-income communities where Magic Bus already has had a presence through a network of community mobilisers and volunteers who often happen to be former trainees associated with the adolescent and youth programmes of the organisation.



Name: Naina

Age: 22 years

Religion and Caste Identity: Scheduled Caste

Marital Status: Single

Education: Pursuing graduation

Family Unit: Father, Mother, three sisters and two brother

Primary skilling opportunity for the case study: Entrepreneurial Development Programme (EDP)

Organization: Magic Bus, Delhi-NCR

1. Identity and Social Location

Naina lives with her parents and siblings in Bhajanpura in North Delhi. She is currently pursuing her graduation degree and is in final year of college. Her father works as a tailor in a local showroom in the vicinity while her mother is a homemaker. Having studied till class 8th, and her husband not having been to school ever, Naina's mother has much control over her children's life decisions, including her career.

Naina's mother was especially not keen on her daughter doing any job. This was due to the fact that her eldest daughter was working at an office where she got into a romantic relationship with a male colleague. This triggered a lot of family tension and eventually the sister had to leave her job and they were now looking for a suitable match for her. This incident also impacted Naina's career prospects negatively as her mother was completely against any of her daughters working in an office space. *Because of my eldest sister's mistake, my mother feared that the younger daughters may also follow suit [of having intimate relationships with men]. (Interview, Delhi, May 2022)*

2. Aspiration: Motivations Towards NTL Skilling

In 2018, Naina came to know about one of the Life Skill programmes by Magic Bus (under the 'Childhood to livelihood' approach) through a friend who had been part of the programme but could not complete the training:

My friend told me whether you do a job or not, you should do this training...The training focused on how to build confidence, to know oneself...I enjoyed it. (Interview, Delhi, May 2022)

She spoke to them and was delighted to know that there was a guaranteed job placement opportunity at the end of the skilling programme. However, her mother was quite clear that she would not let her daughter do any job. Owing to this, Naina couldn't take part in the Life Skill course until the third batch was announced:

I asked my mother about the job...that this training can lead to a job but my mother refused the training. Then I convinced my mother to let me do the course for now and then when the time comes for the job then I will make some excuse or if then you change your mind about letting me to work then we will see otherwise it won't matter. (Interview, Delhi, May 2022)

Naina did not pursue her studies for some time after clearing class 12, which she also pursued through open education. In the interim she also joined various skills training classes such as Spoken English, basic computer literacy classes among others provided by Magic bus near her home for free. She also did various types of Livelihood training under Magic Bus; one was a training for electrician for three months at Tata Strive Academy.

My mother does not have a problem with training...she was happy about the Tata STRIVE training on electrician as she always says we should do something different...do what boys do...after I did the course, I also enrolled my younger brother in the same course. (Interview, Delhi, May 2022)

The Life Skill and livelihood training ran for the entire day in the community as well as the Tata Strive academy. Magic Bus also provided commute costs for attending the classes for three months at Tata Strive. She also took part in a twelve-day training at the center on wall design with the Asian Paints Academy,

I was sitting idle at home so I spoke to sir whether I can join this course. Initially he was not sure since I had already been part of two training under Magic Bus but I spoke with them and they agreed to let me be part of the course. (Interview, Delhi, May 2022)

¹Tata STRIVE is an initiative of the TCIT, aimed at actively bridging the gap between vocational education and industry needs. In FY 2017-18, Tata STRIVE began working under the aegis of Tata Trusts as a result of the Tata Group's strategy of 'Simplification, synergy and scale'. The move recognises the close synergies between Tata STRIVE and the broader community interventions of the Tata Trusts. Tata STRIVE is skilling youth from underprivileged backgrounds through innovations in technology, pedagogy, and methodology.

She received a diary and a certificate at the end of twelve days. However, she did not pursue the advanced course which could have led to livelihood opportunities as this course was taking place at the Asian Paints Academy which was quite far from her place of residence and she did not have the permission from her mother to attend the same.

Magic Bus also ran a Community Youth Leaders programme (part of the Youth Skilling Programme) which was designed on a mentor-mentee model. where she was a mentor and she was assigned a mentee from another neighborhood in North Delhi. Due to the Delhi riots in 2020, followed by the pandemic and the national lockdown in March 2020, the classes were taken online for some time but eventually the programme was abandoned and closure of the Bhajanpura center.

Her own personal aspiration is to become a lawyer and has enrolled in a college which will enable the same.

This is my dream and even if my mother resists, I will fight, cry, do everything possible but make sure I achieve this. (Interview, Delhi, May 2022). Naina also joined a free-Spoken English course which her sisters couldn't complete but she made sure she gave the exam and passed. She feels English is important and gives a boost to one's career as all interviews these days take place in English.



Image: Magic Bus

3. Opportunities and Skilling

Naina had joined the third batch of the computer course which promised her a job at the end of the course. Initially her mother had agreed to let her work. However, there was some misunderstanding between her and the mother regarding the place of work which further antagonized her mother and made her even more adamant about not letting her work:

I told my mother that I had gone for the interview to Noida but my job would be in Connaught Place. My mother went and checked with the madam who had organized these interviews. I had informed Rakesh sir about my problem and he told my mother that she would be given a job at Connaught Place. But the madam said jobs would be provided in Noida itself. So, my mother thought I lied to her and she was angry. I also asked Rakesh sir why he did not correct madam but he said he couldn't have spoken over her as she knew better... (Interview, Delhi, May 2022)

Naina also informed that while many girls had been part of this course, most girls dropped out of the course and got married. Some girls joined a call center in Noida but also left it within a span of a few days, *They thought they would get hi-fi salaries after doing the course but Rakesh sir was offering them about INR 10 – 12,000 which was below their expectation. (Interview, Delhi, May 2022)*

Given her mother's strong stance on not letting her do any job in an office space, Naina joined the EDP course. The EDP course is a short course run for a few hours in the day which focuses on guiding and supporting the participants' entrepreneurial ideas. Participants are also provided with some key support and a small amount of seed money to help them begin their own business:

Magic Bus had approached some of the girls for this [EDP] from the LifeSkill programme but most of my friends were not interested and they were discouraging me. "Why do you want to get into all this...give tuitions to children at home itself...". but I was not discouraged. As you know my mother was not going to allow me to work so I thought I could possibly start a business. (Interview, Delhi, May 2022)

Naina plans to open a tuition center, *I will only rent and run the place; the actual work will be done by others...* She is currently scouting for places nearby where she can run the tuition center. She is in touch with Rakesh Sir from

Magic Bus who has been helping her get in touch with contacts through his personal connections and websites such as JustDial²:

I would like to find the place in the local area as it would be easier to get children here...I have some leads but I am not getting the time to go and visit the place. I don't even know roads, etc...I am afraid to go on my own and not find anyone to accompany me... Rakesh sir had given me JustDial number but contacts I am getting there are from Dwarka and another faraway place. It is not feasible for me as I cannot go so far and besides the commute fare would be more than what I would earn...I have spoken to several friends and I am sure I will get some room to rent. (Interview, Delhi, May 2022)

Naina has spoken to her mother about her business plan and so far, she is agreeable to the idea. However, her mother is skeptical about how Naina will be able to return the loan she takes from Magic Bus:

My sister has come up with a solution for the same. She has said that for now use the money from the tuition fees that you are earning now by teaching children at home. The money that Magic Bus provides in your bank account, do not touch it unless you absolutely need to.... Magic Bus will provide us with investment money as per the business plan we draw up. As of now I don't know how much money they will provide us. (Interview, Delhi, May 2022)

It is important to note that the seed money offered by Magic Bus for the trainees to start their business was not a loan as has been perceived by Naina here; there was no such clause that the trainees would have to repay it in the foreseeable future.

Naina recalls that the trainers for the EDP training were from Mumbai and had attended some offline courses. Thereafter, she was supported by Atul from Magic Bus to draw up her business plan, *how many children will you teach, how much fees will you ask from each child, etc.* For now, Magic Bus is coordinating with her to find a space for her Tuition center.

Naina finds support from her Life Skills trainer, Rakesh, and she often reaches out to him for advice. She enjoyed the Life Skill classes as they gave her a lot of confidence. She values the relationship that she has developed with the teachers there and even after almost four years, she is still able to speak with them, especially Rakesh, if she needs any information or help.

I needed help designing my pamphlet for the tuition classes such as logo, tag line etc. So, I spoke to Sir and he connected me to a boy who is a student of Magic Bus and lives nearby. He has been a lot of help in developing the logo. I had asked around and they were asking for a lot of money but why spend money when I can get it done for free! (Interview, Delhi, May 2022)

Naina plans to name her Tuition center, "Sunshine" and she has put a lot of thought into the same. She thought of how a name would sound in Hindi as most people would ask what it means. She put up a Whats App status inviting her contacts to suggest names. She listed all the possible names and discussed it at home and with the teachers at Magic Bus and she is very proud of her chosen name.

Naina's association and experience with Magic Bus also inspired others in her family and her friends to join the Life Skill course,

My older sister joined this course after me. I also enrolled my brother in this course and another older cousin brother and some friends have also joined the same after my experience. I have become a mentor of sorts in my home as many have joined Magic Bus after learning of my experience. (Interview, Delhi, May 2022)

²An information search app

4. Reflection: What Worked, What Did Not

Naina is an ambitious girl and wants to do something with her life and education. A smart and articulate person, Magic Bus for her has been a gateway to opportunities, albeit with conditions. Naina particularly found the 'Life-skill' program quite useful as this gave her an opportunity to know herself, feel more confident and able to negotiate with her mother, who controls her important life decisions. The programme also linked her with the skilling programme and her experience of the same also influenced others in her family (mostly brothers and their friends) to also join the programme.

While on one hand she had the opportunity to pursue various skilling courses through Magic Bus in her vicinity, however, there was no intervention at home and this limited her ability to pursue employment at an office space. At home, her mother refuses to allow her to work at an office owing to her elder daughter's relationship with her colleague at work. As such, the EDP program provided an opportunity to pursue her own business which she feels will not be opposed by her mother as this would not allow for intermingling with men.

The EDP programme hand holds the participants to draw up a business plan as well as provide seed money to start their business. However, owing to lack of clear communication, Naina and her family have assumed that they would need to return the investment and hence are not using this money to set up the business. Instead, Naina is taking private tuitions at home in order to put together the initial requirement to start a tuition centre named 'Sunshine'.

There has also been a large time gap in the EDP programme owing to the Covid-19 pandemic and as a result nothing much has progressed. Moreover, while Naina is eager to start her business, she still lacks confidence of moving about or being on her own to negotiate and needs constant help and support from the EDP course and her older teachers at Magic Bus.

While Naina is eager and ambitious, the community around her is non-supportive of her success. Most girls of her age have been married off and there is skepticism towards a girl going into paid work or setting up shop. The gender norms around mobility in the community also impedes the possibility of a girl going to work outside of her home. She has thus shared about her plans to begin business with very few people in her life. In her family, her elder sister is supportive of her and her mother has not restricted her so far, but the latter is completely against the idea of Magic Bus. The mother feels that the organization has filled her daughter's head with "useless information and idea and does not trust the organization anymore." (Interview, Delhi, May 2022)

As such while the EDP course concentrates on building young women's entrepreneurial dreams, it tends to do so at a very technical level. While it has developed a good alumni network through its youth intervention programmes in the low-income communities, there have been negligible effort to influence the families or communities in these locations, which makes it difficult for them to gain support for their dreams and aspirations. In cases such as Naina, it is particularly important to gain the trust of her parents for her to realise her dreams.



Image: Magic Bus

5. Positing the case study in the small wins framework

The table below provides a glimpse of how the EDP programme impacted Naina's life with the help of a set of indicators drawn from the small wins framework.

Characteristic	Indicators	Findings in case study – Naina (Magic Bus, EDP skilling)
Concrete outcome	Visible Results	Aspiration to begin her own business of setting up her tuition center
In-depth changes	Second and third order changes	Confidence in building her business and connecting with concerned persons and resources to establish her business
	Radical new practices	Despite her mother's resistance towards her working, she continues to aspire and change her career plans in order to achieve her dreams.
Moderate Importance	Micro or local level	Increase in interest in her family regarding her business idea
	Intermediate	She has taken part in various forms of skilling such as Spoken English, computer skills and other skilling opportunities by Magic Bus which she feels gives her confidence
Positive judgement	Improvement	Improvement in attitude and aspirations but with minimal economic gains
	Step forward	Ability to negotiate with her mother regarding starting a business since her mother is against her working in an 'office' space
	Related to shared ambitions	The family is invested in her idea of business and is supportive

CASE NARRATIVE 6: MINDING MY BUSINESS

Organization Profile: Magic Bus

Starting its journey from the late 1990s under the leadership of Mathew Spacie, an India based British entrepreneur, Magic Bus works with children and young adults from underprivileged background of India by enabling them to complete their education, delaying their age of marriage and providing them with the skill-set that is necessary to enter the job market. Over the last 2 decades Magic Bus has scaled up its programmes impacting the lives of over 1 million people across its multiple sites of functioning in India.

Through their two parallel yet integrally connected programmes- Adolescent education Programme and Youth Skilling Programme, Magic Bus aims to facilitate sustainable living by helping a generation to move out of the vicious cycle of poverty. 'Childhood to livelihood approach', as they describe their journey to be, initially equips and assists children between the age group of 12 to 17 with secondary education and later, as they enter their adult-hood (between the age group of 18-25), the organisation tries to improve their chances of employability by helping them acquire the required skills that are deemed necessary to become job-ready for the 21st century market. These include building up skills around team-work, communication, problem solving abilities, managing self and being work ready.

Besides, the organisation has also recently initiated two more short-term programmes for the youth, with the aim of directly connecting them to the market, based on their own personalised interest and aspiration. These are the micro-entrepreneurial skilling programme, specifically meant for aspiring entrepreneurs and the digital employment exchange programme, a platform which seeks to connect job seekers and the employers following the National Career Scheme (NCS) model of the Ministry of Labour and Employment.

The organisation being deeply invested in the pedagogy of experiential learning and mentoring attempts to anchor its programme in low-income communities where Magic Bus already has had a presence through a network of community mobilisers and volunteers who often happen to be former trainees associated with the adolescent and youth programmes of the organisation.



Name: Shaheen

Age: 24 years

Religious and/ Caste /Tribe Identity: Muslim

Marital Status: Unmarried

Educational Status: Post graduation

Family Unit: Parents and siblings

Non-traditional Skill Acquired: Entrepreneurship Development Programme

Organisation: Magic Bus, New Delhi

1. Identity and Social Location

Born in the village of Khanpur in Kannauj district of Central UP, Shaheen, was only about 6-7 months old, when her parents decided to migrate to Delhi in search of a better livelihood. Ever since, the family has been a resident of Bhajanpura, in the Trans Yamuna area of North Eastern parts of New Delhi. Shaheen is the eldest child of her parents and her younger siblings- a sister and two brothers were born after the family had moved to Delhi.

In the initial 5-6 years after their arrival in the capital city, Shaheen's father would earn his livelihood by driving his thela (cart-puller) while her mother remained a home maker carrying out her domestic duties. Later, in the days to come, Shaheen's father managed to save up some money and start his own business of selling vegetables in the neighbourhood market. This business has been the main source of income for the family ever since. Shaheen's father was keen to have his children educated and hence all the children in the family received higher education.

Shaheen has finished her university education and her sister- Sheena is now in 3rd year of college. Shaheen's brothers are younger and while one has just been enrolled in college the other is still pursuing his plus-two education in school.

2. Aspiration: Motivations towards NTL Skilling

Being the eldest, Shaheen does enjoy some amount of autonomy in her family and with her inherently dynamic nature, she leaves no opportunity unturned to upskill herself. Shaheen is keen on becoming economically independent and feels the urge to enrol herself in all kinds of training programmes that could help her stand a better chance in getting a good work opportunity. Sheena, the younger sister, has always been a close follower of Shaheen and would also try to follow the elder sister's foot-steps in all such endeavours. The two sisters had already taken a short course on learning English when they heard about the life-skilling course being offered by Magic Bus as a part of their youth skilling programme through a common friend.

When we heard that the Magic Bus centre is close to our home and that they would teach us not only English but also computer and other life-skills and that too free of cost, we thought we should try for it, says Shaheen. (Interview, Delhi, April 2022)

Shaheen and her sister went to meet the course instructor and while everything else sounded interesting, the long duration of classes each day from morning 10 am to evening 4 pm made Shaheen and Sheena a bit wary. This was because by then both the sisters had already started earning, by offering private tuitions to some children in the neighbourhood to meet their own personal expenditure, and such long classes spanning almost the entire day meant almost no time for neither these classes nor in helping their mother out in her daily domestic chores.

However, since the girls were really eager to take up this opportunity, they decided to share their concern with the course instructor, who allowed the sisters some amount of flexibility in the routine. They joined the programme in December 2019. The classes would take place in the Magic Bus centre right next to their home.

The sisters would wake up early in the morning and finish their share of household duties before leaving for the classes.

The rest would be taken care of by our mother. But we would try and do our share of cleaning up in the morning before leaving. If for some reason we had to leave earlier, mother would cover for us and do everything. Our brothers would also often help our mother out, Shaheen says. (Interview, Delhi, April 2022)

Shaheen seemed exceptionally interested in the computer classes being offered as a part of this course, for she was aware that such training would increase her chances of getting employed. She also felt progressively confident after being coached in decision-making skills; something that she was not very adept at earlier.

I used to be very nervous, especially when deciding for myself. I would hesitate talking with outsiders. This was why I thought the life-skill course would really help me in future, Shaheen says. (Interview, Delhi, April 2022)

Such training helps young people get an overall exposure, transferable skills, without boxing their interests into specific trade-based skills, says Anuj Alphonson, the former lead of the Livelihood Programme of the Magic Bus India (Interview, Delhi-NCR, September 2021)

Much like Alphonson's claim, this 48 days long intensive programme empowered Shaheen and Sheena with the required skill-set to engage with a variety of income earning activities.

The computer lessons helped me get the Civil Defense work that I joined during the COVID time, says Shaheen. (Interview, Delhi, April 2022)

This was when Shaheen's father's business was running at a loss and the sisters felt the need to contribute to the family income.

We heard about civil defense volunteering work from a friend and we applied for it. Within 5-6 months we were called in. I got the job to register the COVID vaccination data online, while Sheena got the task of calling up people to create awareness around the COVID vaccination programme. Both of us could do our work because of what we learned from Magic Bus, says Shaheen. (Interview, Delhi, April 2022)

While the employment did help the sisters get financially independent to an extent, the engagement was short term and lasted for only about 10 months.



Image: Magic Bus

Shaheen however itched to learn and engage herself in more ways and following the successful completion of the Life-skill training programme with the Magic Bus, Shaheen was chosen as one of the Community Youth Leaders from Bhajanpura and was made a mentor to a mentee. This initiative, also a part of Magic Bus's Youth Skilling Programme, was based on its pedagogy of shared learning, and was aimed at finding leadership from within the community who could help spread Magic Bus's curriculum to others who have not been directly in touch with the organisation's skilling programmes. Shaheen was trained for this particular role for around 15-20 days and just when her work as a mentor would begin, Bhajanpura became the centre of an incident of communal tension and violence in February 2020.

This led the initiative to come to a sudden stop and before things could pick up, the country was locked-down to prevent the spread of the COVID 19 pandemic from late March 2020. As a result of all these disruptions, Shaheen could never assume her role as a mentor to her mentee.

The programme stopped in between and we were not told anything about it anymore. I asked Madam about it quite a few times but all we heard was that the programme had possibly been discontinued. (Interview, Delhi, April 2022)

Over the next few months Shaheen and Sheena's family had to struggle quite a lot, initially with the communal tensions destabilising the everyday activity in the area and then with the lockdown acting as a double disaster.

Initially during the communal tension, we were asked by our Hindu landlord to vacate our home. Our father had to be sent back to the village since he could not manage the emotional shock of all this and when he came back his business could not pick up. This was the time when everyone was scared of COVID. They would be reluctant to come out of their home to buy vegetables. Hence our father's business also started running at a loss. Shaheen recalls. (Interview, Delhi, April 2022)

It was during this phase, when Shaheen was contacted by one of her earlier Magic Bus course instructors and was informed about the Entrepreneurship Development Programme (EDP) course.

We do not know how, but a few of us, some 12-13 candidates who had earlier been in the life skill course were called by a madam for a meeting. This was when the lockdown was just lifting up. We met for 3-4 days with a group of madams and then we were asked if we had some ideas that we would like to develop into our own business initiative, Shaheen says. (Interview, Delhi, April 2022)

This was when Shaheen and Sheena proposed a plan of developing an online application which would serve as a platform to sell vegetables to the neighbourhood, an initiative that could in fact help their father's business as well.

We are educated people. We wanted to do something that reflects our education but also something that can help our father. This was when we thought why not develop his business into something innovative, she says. (Interview, Delhi, April 2022)

They discussed their proposal with their trainer on the basis of which their idea was selected for the EDP course.

3. Opportunities and Skilling

Shaheen and Sheena joined the EDP course in December 2020.

We were amongst the 4-5 candidates whose ideas were finally selected, says Shaheen with visible pride.

The core training period for the EDP course is short since the role that Magic Bus primarily plays here is that of guiding and supporting the candidates to develop their own ideas, says Atul, the Entrepreneurial Development Officer, (EDO) in charge of Magic Bus' EDP programme in Western India.

Trying to explain the process through which candidates are initially chosen for the EDP course, Atul says: *We try to select people with an acumen for business. We ask them to develop their own ideas and in case the idea seems plausible, we select him or her. The minimum eligibility criteria is class 8 pass. (Interview, Delhi, May 2022)*

Talking about how the process took shape in Delhi, Atul who is based in Jaipur presently recalls thus: *There were 5 or 6 girls from Delhi who were finally selected. The initial training was conducted by the Mumbai team for 3-4 days and then each of them was asked to develop their own ideas. This was when I intervened to help them make their ideas more workable. I traveled to Delhi to train them for a couple of days. (Interview, Delhi, May 2022)*

Talking about their memories around the EDP training, Shaheen and Sheena seemed a little muddled. They could not very well remember who and where did their trainers come from

There were two or three madams who would speak to us initially. We do not remember all their names. Possibly they were from Mumbai, Shaheen says as she tries to recollect. (Interview, Delhi, April 2022)

They helped us understand what our budget should be, how we should save, and how we should invest in our business expenditure. This happened for 3-4 days. Following this Atul sir came to visit us in February 2021 to help us develop our ideas further, says Shaheen. (Interview, Delhi, April 2022)

This was possibly because by then the Bhajanpura centre of the Magic Bus had shut down causing an obvious disconnect with the candidates in the neighbourhood.

The EDO's assistance was however of a help to Shaheen and Sheena as they modified their business idea realising that an app-based vegetable selling business might not be cost effective in their locality, and decided to transform it into a ready to cook vegetable supplying business. training was mostly conducted offline in a school nearby.

Sharing his experience with Shaheen and Sheena, Atul recollects how the sisters had a strong presence of mind when it came to developing their own business proposition. He also talks about Shaheen and Sheena's family support.

Shaheen and Sheena's family seemed very supportive and each one had decided on their own role in the business, recollects Atul. (Interview, Delhi, May 2022)

The same was confirmed by Shaheen and Sheena's mother, Nusraat.

When Shaheen told us about this plan, I asked if it would get us some profit. Shaheen assured us and that was when we all decided to come together for this. I said I will chop the vegetables for you, your father can get the vegetables from the market and your brothers can do the packaging and delivering. (Interview, Delhi, April 2022)

Hence when the entire family decided to help the two sisters meet their business aspirations, it seemed that the idea would develop into a full-fledged business model.

However, at this point, the journey of the sisters seemed to meet a dead end, when Shaheen and Sheena refused to take the financial help that Magic Bus was offering to its candidates to start their business.

We said we do not want any money as a loan. How would we repay it if our business does not earn a lot of profit? We simply needed some more guidance to make our plan workable, says Shaheen. (Interview, Delhi, April 2022).

Interestingly, when asked, Atul informed that this financial help that Magic Bus was offering was not seen as a loan, and that there was no understanding that the trainees would have to repay it in the foreseeable future.

This miscommunication between what Magic Bus as an organisation had been offering to its trainees and how it was being perceived by Shaheen and her family became the prime source of obstacles in the sisters' path-way to fulfilling their entrepreneurial aspiration.

However, Shaheen's entrepreneurial ambition remains intact even today. She still hopes that Magic Bus will understand their requirements and would get her connected to the right people who can help her get some more vision around planning and implementing her business idea.

All I want now is someone who can help me further my idea. I do not need money. I simply want someone who can advise me to get the business started, she says.

Shaheen is currently employed as a volunteer of Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan (NYKS), an autonomous body under the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports and earns Rs. 5000/ month for training and mentoring students in sports with a hope that it might someday help her get a job in the government sector. However, she still continues to try and remain in touch with the Magic Bus representatives hoping for some sort of help which will not be financial in nature but more in terms of ideating and networking.

4. Overcoming Obstacles: What Worked, What Did Not

Shaheen's experiences with the Magic Bus over the years provide critical insights into a girl's journey in getting trained in non-traditional livelihood.

From being immensely helped through the life-skill training course which actually influenced her to aspire for something 'non-mainstream' to meeting a stalemate when it came to actualizing her aspiration through the EDP course, Shaheen's journey with the Magic bus is a mixed story of success and failure.

Today, apart from Shaheen and Sheena, most other girls who had enrolled for the EDP course are also struggling to set up their businesses.

While one of our batch-mates has got married, two others are also trying to get some ideas around how to develop their business and another is having a lot of problem at home," says Shaheen. (Interview, Delhi, April 2022)

Talking about his experience of working as an EDO of the EDP course, Atul too reckons how setting up a business from scratch for people like Shaheen belonging to the economically marginalised sections of society can be challenging:

Business is not like a job. Initially you will have to invest a lot of time. I understand how these girls want to earn money fast, but business requires a lot more time and patience. Also, even after earning, you cannot spend all of what you have earned. You have to keep saving the money for the growth of your own business. (Interview, Delhi, March 2022)

Atul's understanding of time-crunch as a problem for girls like Shaheen when it comes to earning seems to resonate with Nusraat's lack of patience when she talks about her daughter's future plan.

I tell my girls now to no longer keep dreaming about business but to focus on work that will bring in money, says Nusraat; clearly highlighting the need the daughters must feel to earn fast to contribute to the family income. This makes it even more difficult for the likes of Shaheen to invest as much time as she possibly needs to, for successfully ideating her business proposition.

However, Shaheen's penchant towards becoming financially independent and in doing something that is not traditional has made her push her own personal boundaries to keep negotiating with the challenges that she faces. Be it by trying to stretch her work day, by waking up early, and finishing up her contribution to the household care responsibilities before she could go out for her training; to reaching out to her magic bus trainers when the routine seems too taxing, Shaheen has always been upfront in facing and solving the obstacles that have stood in her way.

Shaheen's family too have been mostly supportive and while she says that her father was always eager to see his daughters become independent, it was not so easy in the case of her mother.

My mother now is very encouraging but she was not always like this. Earlier she used to be very strict. She would make a fuss if I would come home late. But after I became a little more confident following Magic Bus' life skill training, she has now become much more accepting. (Interview, Delhi, April 2022)

It also seems that like most other entrepreneurship programmes which finds itself in a challenging position when trying to skill resource-poor women in building their own enterprises¹¹, the EDP programme of Magic Bus as seen from this case, also faces a similar problem due to the very socio-cultural context in which this girl has lived her life making her averse to taking financial risks. Thus, it seems that a key learning for designing any such entrepreneurial programmes should be its focus on creating an entrepreneurial mindset first which can then lay the path towards a successful entrepreneurial journey¹².

¹¹ For more see, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/empowering-women-entrepreneurs-in-developing-countries/>

¹² It should however be noted that the present research has not tried to explore the entrepreneurial journey of the men in this programme. Thus, this research does not attempt to come to any conclusion about how the journey may or may not be different for trainees of other gender identities.

5. Positing the case study in the small wins framework

The table below provides a glimpse of how the EDP training programme impacted Shaheen's life with the help of a set of indicators drawn from the small wins framework.

Characteristic	Indicators	Findings in case study – Shaheen (Magic Bus, EDP skilling)
Concrete outcome	Visible Results	Continued aspiration to start her own business
In-depth changes	Second and third order changes	Conviction in her business idea
	Radical new practices	
Moderate Importance	Micro or local level	Increase in interest amongst all members of the family
		The idea that women can be entrepreneurs is gaining an acceptance in the family and community
	Intermediate	Learned monetary handling, a skill that can help in effective inclusion in the financial system in the longer run
Positive judgement	Improvement	Improvement in attitude and aspirations but no economic or occupational gains
	Step forward	Feeling of confidence
	Related to shared ambitions	Local level increase in aspiration among other members in the family, especially younger sister

CASE CATEGORY IV: ENABLING ACCESS TO SKILLING

CASE NARRATIVE 7: STEERING BEYOND THE GENDER BINARY

Organization Profile and the Skilling Programme: Centre for Youth and Social Development (CYSD), Odisha

Starting its journey in Odisha more than 40 years back, CYSD has been working to empower and enable the marginalised communities in the state by extensively working in three major areas of intervention. These are in the field of helping people gain sustainable ways of livelihood, facilitating participatory governance and working towards reducing disaster vulnerability.

Under the sustainable livelihood wing, CYSD has been providing training to young people between the age of 18 and 35 from low-income communities of Bhubaneswar. While, most of these training opportunities (such as four-wheeler driving, gardening, etc.) are extended to cis and transgender women, there are certain specific programmes like training in retail jobs that are provided to interested individuals across the gender spectrum.

As a part of these training initiatives, the organisation with the sponsorship of Mahindra finance and the support of Maruti Suzuki Driving school, started training young women and girls from the slum areas of Bhubaneswar in driving four wheelers. The programme was designed and structured following the lines of Azad Foundation's Women with Wheels⁹ (WOW) programme.

Till date 109 women has been trained as drivers under CYSD's WOW programme. The WOW programme implemented by CYSD includes a comprehensive package of FGDs in communities, family counsellings and training on driving.



Name: Malti Parida

Age: 38 years

Religious and/ Caste/Tribe Identity: Hindu, OBC

Marital Status: Unmarried

Educational Status: Drop out 10+2

Family Unit: Lives with 30+ Transgender persons

Non-traditional Skill Acquired: 4-wheel driving

Organisation: Center for Youth and Social Development (CYSD)

1. Identity and Social Location

Malti Parida is a 38-year-old transgender woman trainee trained by CYSD as a driver under their WOW skilling unit. She belongs to the OBC community but has never received any benefit from the state meant for the OBC communities. Her identity to herself and the people around was that of a *kinnar* (trans) and not an *insaan* (human). When Malti moved out from her natal family, her *Guru* gave her the name Malti before which she was called Prabhat. Malti works in the Third Gender Security Trust for the transgender communities. She is the leader of thirty to forty transgender persons whom she sometimes describes as her “children” and sometimes as *saheli* (friends). They all live in a house in Bhubaneswar. Malti used to have a transgender partner earlier but now she is single.

Her natal home used to be in Balikuda village of Jagatsinghpur, Odisha. Her parents were farmers. She had one brother and two sisters. Her family however did not accept her the way she was. In her words:

Parents are the first to have a child. After that, those who are wise understand that our parents will take care of us. We have to take care of ourselves. We will try to handle ourselves and others. For people like us it has to be through organisations. Now that I have become a leader today I would like to raise 10 children¹³. (Interview, Bhubaneswar, February 2022)

Malti has not been in touch with her natal family ever since her sister’s marriage. This is because her presence was creating trouble in finding her sister an eligible groom. The people in her village would look down upon Malti’s family because her parents had given birth to a *hijra*. After her sister finally got married, her in-laws told her never to bring Malti to their house. Ashamed, Malti left her village. Malti had completed her secondary education but was forced to drop out in the higher secondary level due to being socially ostracised in school. She was tortured physically and mentally by her principal for being a transgender person. She also gave hint of being sexually assaulted by her principal who forced her against her consent. She tried to register a complaint against the principal but her words were not taken seriously by the local police authorities.

After leaving her village, Malti came to Bhubaneswar and started living with four other transgender individuals in a slum area. Even here they had to initially face harassment from the neighbours. They were asked to leave as their presence was seen to be a threat to the women and children living in the neighbourhood. Over time, the animosity slowly neutralised with Malti and her friends getting socially accepted in the community.

Malti describes her occupation as begging, which she has been doing for many years like most other trans-persons from her community. Malti says she primarily begs inside local trains or at traffic signals. She also earns money by dancing in marriage parties or in a house that has a new born child. While through all this she makes about Rs 4000-5000 a month, there is no dignity in this work, she confides.

2. Aspirations: Motivations towards NTL Skilling

Malti had always aspired to learn driving since she had often been refused rides by people. This would make her feel that if she had known driving she would have been able to teach these people a lesson. About three years ago, Malti came to know of CYSD’s driving training programme through a social worker who used to work in the slums. She showed Malti an advertisement given by CYSD. The advertisement had a phone number and an announcement for skill training in driving. They invited people to apply. The social worker motivated her and other transgender persons to go and register by paying Rs.1000 for the course. Malti says she was scared when she first heard of it and was not at all sure if she being a transgender person would be welcomed as a trainee.

She approached CYSD and came to know that there were no registration fees. She was welcomed to join the course provided she came regularly. Three transgender persons including her joined the programme. She was extremely happy that she could do the training programme even though she was a *kinnar* and not a *human*.

¹³ The phrase ‘raising children’ meant to help them to make a living

This was when she approached CYSD and came to know that there was no registration fee to be paid. She was in fact welcomed to join the course provided she came regularly. Three transgender persons including her joined the training. She was extremely happy that she could do the training programme even though she was not *insaan* but a *kinnar*.

To attend the training programme, Malti had to at first make time adjustments. Since she aspired to give up begging one day and take up driving professionally, she prioritised her training timing over her begging timing. Generally, she would go for begging in the mornings but with the training programme scheduled in the morning hours that had to be stopped. Begging slots were divided and someone else had the right to beg in the evenings, she remembers. Malti however made arrangements with this person and exchanged her begging slot with her's.

3. Opportunities and skilling

During the training period, Malti would go to the centre with two others from her community in a shared auto. Even though they were not paid any travel money, Malti enjoyed the way training was given in the Maruti Suzuki Training School. Recollecting how in the initial days of the training period, she would feel scared to interact with other co-participants, apprehending that they would make fun of her, Malti was happily surprised to see that there were no discriminatory practices adopted by CYSD. While it is true that her co-participants were hesitant to interact with her at first, over the course of the training, they became friendly and developed a bonding. This had come out in her co-participant Manasi's narrative as well, who said she learnt to understand that transpersons were human beings like her. *They are like us only, said Manasi in an interview with her. (Interview, Bhubaneshwar, February 2022)*

The trainer from Maruti also initially seemed apprehensive with the presence of transgenders. He was afraid that people would comment on seeing him training transgenders. However, with regular interaction with the CYSD woman staff, the trainers too warmed up to the idea.

During the training programme Malti had to attend both theoretical and practical sessions. She was taught different keywords like "go, stop, go back, speedy turning, back turning, left turning, right turning etc." as part of the



Image: ISST

instructions. Like all other participants, she learnt the art of self-defense in case of emergency and was also given instructions on first aid in case there was an accident. She learnt rules and signs to be followed on the road. The training also equipped Malti and her co-participants with soft skills like communications and work readiness. She also learnt how to receive money online and how to count it. She was taught about the dress code, where to put the I-card, and how to groom properly. She was hesitant at first thinking that she would have to wear pants and shirts for driving, because transgender persons were culturally restricted to wear men's clothes. She felt assured when she was told that it was not necessary and sarees could also be worn while driving.

Malti could however not complete the training programme because she had to drop out due to covid. She was in need of a certificate to prove that she was a driver and also to show it to other transgender persons so that they would also get motivated to learn driving. She had been able to get a learner's license. But did not manage to appear for the test for driver's license.

CYSD did organize a refresher course for trainees like Malti who could not complete their course owing to the Covid-19 pandemic induced lockdowns. However, Malti could not attend the course since she could no longer find a way to balance her time between her paid work schedule and the training timings. She had later approached CYSD but by then the programme had been discontinued.

Today, Malti feels that she needs about a month's practice before she can appear for her driver's license examination. However she knows of no other organisation which can help her finish her course.

4. Reflections – What Worked, What Did Not

The biggest contribution of the training programme was that it boosted her confidence, gave her a voice and the courage to feel that it was possible to have a life with dignity in the mainstream that pushed her out repeatedly. Her whole narrative was filled with the phrase "I was scared" which was an outcome of her shame and exclusion faced in life so far. The training gave her an opportunity to rise above her fears and hesitation. She said, "We did not have the courage to speak earlier. We got a chance."

The organisation's inclusive attitude helped her to feel *human* and not as a *kinnar*. Even though she could not complete her training and did not get her certificate, she was immensely grateful to CYSD. She said, "*They accepted me. They said we are also human and like a family.*" The non-discriminatory attitude of CYSD staff members, especially Mr. Jagdananda, and another lady staff member whom she referred to as "Madam" had helped her to feel included and overcome stigma. Even the handshake done by her "Madam" was valued by her and she felt that she could share her grief with her.

Driving training gave her the opportunity to aspire for different types of paid work. She had always dreamed of taking up the occupation of driving in future and earning people's respect. It generated self confidence in her. The training was able to break a social myth and establish that transgender persons can also be trained as drivers. She wanted to work as a driver in a big company like Reliance or for the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC). However, she knew that people would not like her to be around them and would require support from organisations like CYSD for placement as well as for changing people's mindset.

She felt that the programme could be improved if there was more time given for practice. Number of vehicles was less and trainees did not get enough practice. She felt that if more time was given it would have helped to complete the course in time. The same feedback came from her co-participants as well.

Her community did not believe that Malti would ever become a driver someday given their lifelong experience of exclusion. They felt that the training was a waste of time. But during the skilling programme when she showed her video of driving to her community members, they were excited. However, since Malti could not complete her training, the mistrust in her community continued. Malti understood that if one could come forward to learn driving and get a job from it, it may open a door for them to join the "mainstream" and earn money with dignity. As per her, the occupation had the capacity to resurrect them from the life of shame. She had a yearning for acceptance in the "mainstream". She remembered a day when there was a road accident and she helped to take a person to the hospital. It was one of the most memorable days of her life as she was accepted by other people and was able to help.

She felt she would have to put extra effort to take up driving as an occupation because of the society's attitude towards transgender persons. She thought it was her responsibility to work hard for changing people's behaviour

towards her. She did not have any expectation from the larger society for a socially just behaviour. Even for the small group, it required CYSD's initiative to facilitate acceptance from all sides. There were initiatives from the local government's side too. For example, Malti was not afraid of the police because they had received counseling in Bhubaneswar on how to behave with transgender persons. These small steps taken by the state and NGO were important steps towards social inclusion and justice.

CYSD's partnerships with Sakha NGO, and BMC were successful to some extent to place women drivers. Since none of the transgender persons could complete training, there was a need for CYSD to make targeted efforts to train more transpersons and place them. The small initiative by CYSD to include Malti in their training programme showed that if given opportunity and support, transgender persons can learn skills like driving. More coordinated effort in this direction can enable transgender persons to live a life with dignity and self respect.

5. Positing the case study in the small wins framework

The table below provides a glimpse of how the training in driving 4 wheelers impacted Malti's life with a set of indicators drawn from the small wins framework.

Characteristic	Indicators	Findings in case study – Malti
Concrete outcome	Visible Results	First trans person in her locality to get trained as a driver. Access to training programme
		Aspiration to complete her training and take up a job of a driver
		Able to influence other trans persons' aspirations in a positive manner
In-depth changes	Second and third order changes	Hope among trans persons with whom she stays that transpersons can get socially accepted in a training programme and get trained.
	Radical new practices	Realisation that she is also "human" like others and can lead a life with dignity
		Access to training programme by transpersons
		Social and behavioural change among trainees and trainers towards trans persons
Moderate Importance	Micro or local level	Increase in interest among trans persons staying with her to be trained as drivers
	Intermediate	Three trans persons trained breaks cultural stereotypes at a local level
		Learnt computer and mobile operating skills as enabling skill to be in touch with technology
Positive judgement	Improvement	Improvement in attitude and aspirations but no economic or occupational gains as she could not complete the training
	Step forward	Feeling of dignity and confidence
	Related to shared ambitions	Local level increase in aspiration among other trans persons who thought it was not possible to be socially and culturally accepted as a trainee

CASE NARRATIVE 8: PAINTING DREAMS FOR A BETTER TOMORROW

Organization Profile

Jabala Action Research Organization identifies itself as a Not-for-Profit Human Rights Organization committed towards ensuring a safe childhood, especially for children belonging to socially marginalised communities. The organisation had started its journey by attempting to mainstream children from the red-light areas of Kolkata, West Bengal almost three decades back. Ever since then, it has grown as its work ambit has now spread across various districts of West Bengal and in neighbouring districts of Jharkhand.

In North Bengal, where this particular case is located, Jabala's engagement is now over a decade old as the organisation initially had set its foot in this tea-gardens to prevent human trafficking of women and children. Over the years, the organisation realised the need to work with adolescents of the region to nurture and facilitate an overall socio-economic change.

Jabala's adolescence programme concentrates on helping young minds to finish their education and in helping them find income generating activities thereafter, which would financially and socially empower them. The programme also attempts to prepare young adults both mentally and physically and therefore encourages their participation in various collective sports activities like football. All such programmes of Jabala are however designed and implemented through a participatory process whereby the community becomes an important stakeholder in deciding the nature of intervention.

Jabala today also actively works towards creating social infrastructure and building synergies between various stakeholders, government and civil society to build a safety-net for vulnerable children and women, so as to prevent 'unsafe migration' and to provide institutional, care and other support to survivors of gender-based violence.

The skilling programme which is covered in the present case study is one such intervention designed in a bottom-up fashion as girls of the community wanted to learn something 'non-traditional' like house painting.



Name: Bandana Toppo

Age: 20 years

Religious and/ Caste/Tribe Identity: Adivasi/Oraon

Marital Status: Unmarried

Education: 12th class (ongoing)

Family Unit: Mother and siblings

Non-traditional Skill Acquired: Plastering and House painting

Organization: Jabala Action Research Organization



Image: ISST

1. Identity and Social Location

Bandana Topo belongs to the Adivasi (Oraon) community and lives in a small town in North Bengal, bordering Bhutan. This region is an extremely under-developed region with a high rate of unemployment and deprivation. The area is inhabited with a mostly tribal population who mainly work in the numerous tea gardens dotting the region. Abject poverty has led to the region being a high-risk area for trafficking of girls and women. Bandana's mother was also a victim of trafficking. The family was desperately poor and so her mother went along with a trafficker to Sikkim who promised her a paid domestic work job. However, the employer tortured her and she managed to escape and reach her home by covering a long distance on foot. Bandana's mother is now very weak health wise and stays at home and sometimes sells home-brewed alcohol. Her father passed away without receiving any treatment when she was much younger. At that time as well, her mother was working as a domestic help in southern India and returned home to take care of the children with almost no savings.

Once my father became unwell, the situation at home became grim...there were days where we had nothing to eat so we would boil green bananas or onion and eat the same...sometimes we ate only once in a day. (Interview, Birpara, February 2022)

The tea garden workers are one of the most impoverished communities with high levels of alcoholism or drugs. The children in the neighbourhood that Bandana lives in are known to drop out of schools early and become victims of alcohol and drug abuse. Further, there is a railway yard close to the neighbourhood and children from the neighbourhood risk their lives and limbs to steal coal from these trains to sell on the black market to support their addictions. In fact, Bandana's brother also lost his leg while trying to steal coal from the rail yards. Owing to this grim situation, Bandana knew from the very beginning that she needed to help her family financially.

We had to rush him to Patna for his accident and my father's older brother helped in whatever way possible. It was the first time I felt that I had to do something...so I went for dhalai kaam (construction work) which is very hard work. The Contractors would shout at me...say very bad words about me and I would cry a lot. Then the women there intervened and said she needs this work so she is here...somehow i managed to work there. (Interview, Birpara, February 2022)

Bandana is good in studies and is enterprising and hopes to sit for some of the state commissioned examinations. In 2021, she was the recipient of the state Virangana Samman award¹. She has developed leadership skills and people from her community as well as the local panchayat approach her for help such as filling forms or any personal trouble. Bandana is also fond of playing football, another Jabala initiative, and has played various matches in the area. She is also fond of dancing and she and her friends have performed tribal dances on stage at various local events in the area.

2. Aspirations: Motivation towards NTL Skilling

Given the acute poverty that Bandana and her family suffer from, there was no choice but to begin some form of paid work at the earliest. Being the eldest in the family, she always felt responsible for her family. The two events in her life, her mother being trafficked and her brother losing his leg in an accident, prompted her to take hard physical labour from a young age. She has been working in various odd jobs to supplement the family income since the age of 12 years.

From the beginning, Bandana was keen on taking up non-traditional tasks.

Usually, girls want to learn stitching work or parlour (beauty) work, but I want to learn driving or painting work that the boys are learning. Not what usually girls do. I am very keen to learn driving but don't know yet how to drive...I want to learn and prove that I can do this; and especially I have interest in learning the kind of work in which girls are not usually involved. (Interview, Birpara, February 2022)

Amongst the various jobs she has taken up in the course of her young life, she also worked as a helper in a local grocery store, which usually employs young men:

My mother worked in the uncle's house to fry chanas and he asked if there was anyone looking to work in his shop. She asked me if I would be interested to work there. I agreed...I did not think that this a man's job...I don't look at any work in that way. I did not think that the shop is located near the railway gate where it is busy and a lot of people come and go. Anyway, I also worked there for two months...even now uncle calls me to work at his shop if I have the time. (Interview, Birpara, February 2022)

Bandana also aspires to be a community leader. She is sought after by community members for any sort of help due to her intelligence, hard work, and recognition by government officials due to Jabala's intervention. Recently, she described how she helped a family to track their daughter and helped to find her by calling several of her friends and acquaintances.

I really like to help my community member...I feel even if I don't have anything, the least I can do is to help people. (Interview, Birpara, February 2022)

Bandana aspires to start a business with her friends who were part of the house-painting skill program:

We were thinking of starting a company of our group, print cards and circulate them around so that people can give us work and contact us for that purpose. Most of this work is on contract basis and hence a group is needed for doing this kind of job. This is what I have been thinking of doing. (Interview, Birpara, February 2022)

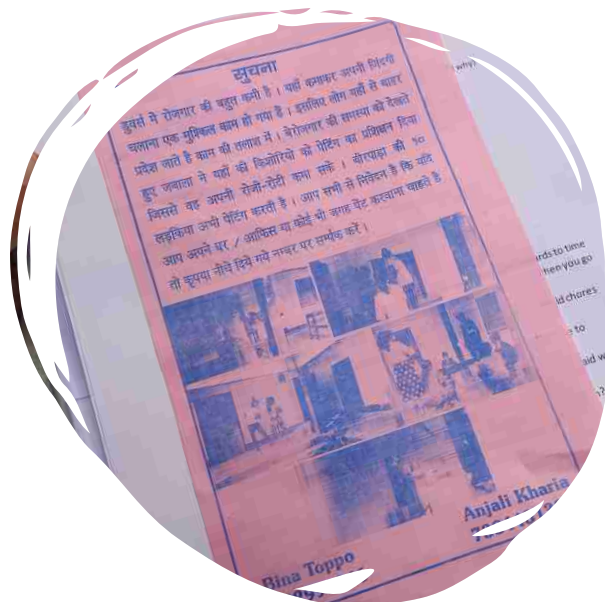


Image: ISSST

3. Opportunities and Skilling

In 2017, when Bandana was 15 years old, she came in contact with Jabala which helped her change her personality and gave her confidence to study harder and achieve more things in life. Jabala's scholarship programme is helping her in pursuing her education. While preparing for her class 12 Board examinations, she is also undergoing training in spoken English and learning computers.

Bandana has been a bright student from the beginning and her mother has been keen for her to study hard. However, in spite of her best efforts none of her brothers are interested in studying.



Image: Twisha Deb

Her association with Jabala has opened up the world for her. She has interacted with various state and non-state actors. She is able to articulate her thoughts and is a significant youth leader in the area. In a recent program on Zoom organised by UNICEF with Jabala, Bandana shared:

The mid-day meal is only until class 10th. However, there is no such scheme for children in class 11 and 12 in the schools. I study in class 12 and I am also deprived of food and while I see children getting mid-day meals, I have to stay hungry. I feel the scheme should be extended to all children until class 12. This will also ensure and motivate children to do higher studies and stay longer in schools. (Interview, Birpara, February 2022)

During the second lockdown in May 2021, the girls had a discussion with Jabala on learning an income-earning skill. Initially, custom jewellery making was tried but there was not much interest amongst girls. They wanted to learn a skill that will help them generate some substantial income. As such, Bandana and some of her friends decided that they would like to learn house-painting as construction work is done round the year.

Based on the interest shown by the group, Jabala supported the training by organising a trainer. Mamta Mittal, Former Project Coordinator, Jabala shared how parents hesitated to send their girls for this skills training:

Girls? Did you not get any other work? How will you climb so high and what will happen if you fall from such a great height? Who will take your responsibility then? These were some of the challenges from the community and family. Some families also posed challenge for this skilling. One father said that, 'I will buy you a goat and you take care of it without all this hassle. You will be able to take of the household chores and also take care of the goat. Why go for painting [of houses]?' so while our girls were trying to break the age-old tradition, it was a bit difficult for some parents to accept...other parents were hesitant and possibly wanted to see the result before allowing their girls to be part of such trainings. (Interview, Birpara, February 2022)



Image: Debalina

Some girls were not selected by the trainer because of their short height as the job requires one to climb high on

bamboo poles and reach difficult to access corners and roofs. So, in the end 9 girls became part of this house-painting skill programme. The girls also trained another girl who is based in another locality so now 10 girls are trained in this basic house painting skill.

When the girls decided that they want to learn house painting, so we found a trainer for the same. Given the girls had to continue with their school education...so the girls were provided training for house painting for 2-3 times a week for a couple of hours. First the basic training was completed, they were asked to practice in various places...the trainer also took them along so that they could practice wherever possible. The final training was provided between August – October (2021) [period of 3 months]. Thereafter, they decided to take it up as source of income. However, because of their studies, they have not been able to take up regular jobs as they have to manage their studies mainly at this point. (Mamta Mittal, Former Project Coordinator, Jabala, interview, February 2022)

As part of her practice, Bandana and her friends convinced her elder cousin to paint their house, while her elder uncle was away. Similarly, when one of her friends, Sangeeta houses was being painted, Bandana and Sangeeta (who was also a part of this training), convinced her father to let them paint. However, he was sceptical about their talent and how people in the community would react to his daughter and her friends painting the house and so only allowed them to paint (putti ka kaam) the inside of the house.

During their training, one of Jabala's staff also convinced the Garopara gram panchayat to allow the girls to whitewash their community stage:

We were paid Rs. 1500 for one day of work which we divided between the three of us., Rs. 500 for each one of us. (Interview, Birpara, February 2022)

In Garopara, the girls attracted a lot of attention when they were climbing high up on the bamboos to paint the panchayat stage. In fact, the girls also had a discussion on how they should dress as they would have many onlookers staring up at them from the ground, 'the girls decided to wear leggings under their work shorts so that they don't feel uncomfortable when others look at them'.

Some people in the community have also encouraged the girls and are keen for them to be successful using this skill. A franchisee owner of a leading paints company in India, The Asian paints, from whom the materials for girls training were purchased, has been impressed with this initiative:

After the training, they came to us that if there is any kind of work do give it to us. I also tell the contractors that if there is any kind of work anywhere do hire them. There would not be any problem. The girls have already learnt the work. (Interview, Birpara, March 2022)

He even spoke to the company's distribution centre for further skilling opportunities for these girls:

There is a Masterstrokes Certificate training under the company. This would be a good training as girls will learn new things. And I will also feel good that I have groomed these girls. This would remain as an opportunity for Asian Paints. I also thought to myself that whenever they will go for work, they would say that they work for Asian Paints. So, my business will also increase and the girls will become more confident... If this is done then we would also feel good that a women's team has been created with the help of Asian Paints. They will also say that we got trained from there; we got work from there. Wherever we are standing today, in that these brothers [persons like him] also have some contribution. Nothing else, we would be happy about these. (Interview, Birpara, March 2022)

As a further encouragement to the girls and their painting skill, the Block Development Officer (BDO) of Madarihat-Birpara has also shown interest and would like to employ them in painting some of the official buildings in the block. Jabala is currently negotiating for the same.

4. Reflections – What Worked, What Did Not

Bandana lives in a remote location with almost no opportunities. She has gone through acute hardships since her childhood – acute poverty, loss of parent, malnourishment, trafficking of her mother, accident and disability of her younger brother, child labour and the subsequent necessity to earn a livelihood for her family. In spite of these circumstances, she has continued her studies and dreams of a better life. The support of Jabala in terms of scholarship as well as providing her a platform on various occasions has given wings to her dreams and she has become more confident about herself. Winning the Birangana¹ award has been a high point in her life and has brought her immense respect to her from her community and the district:

I will give credit for this [positive] change to Jabala. Before, I was quite underconfident...today I can speak with you, if you had come before I may not have spoken much to you. I have been to Kolkata twice; once for a meeting at the Jabala office and then for receiving the Virangana award. There were many big personalities at the award function, people had come from London and other cities. Even then I was a bit scared to speak in the mike. But now I do not have any fear and no matter how big the crowd is, I can speak on the mike without any fear. This credit for this confidence goes to Jabala. (Interview, Birpara, February 2022)

The skill of plastering and house painting came into being as a response to loss of livelihoods during the Covid-19 pandemic. Jabala supported this initiative by organising a trainer, negotiating with various state and non-state actors for finding work for the girls. It continues to find skilling and market opportunities for Bandana and her friends by trying to form links with a reputed paints company such as Asian Paints. In fact, the thrust towards 'non-traditional' began by Jabala when they encouraged the girls to begin playing football. Bandana and her friends are enthused about playing football and were upset that there had been no coach or ball to play with since the pandemic began.

For Bandana, lack of time has been a crucial factor. Balancing her studies with paid work opportunities and community work, she does not have enough time and as a result often stays hungry for a long time. Further, with very limited opportunities of paid work available to her, she has had to take up numerous odd jobs to make ends meet. If the BDO keeps her promise and extends support to the girls by giving them opportunities to paint government buildings in the district, it will give an enormous boost to their confidence. Such support and help will also bring visibility and legitimacy to their skills and business, further encouraging other girls in their communities to consider this as a viable economic opportunity.

While the training was useful, it was quite basic and Bandana feels there is more scope for learning and improvement. Given that she is appearing for her 12th Board exams shortly, she does not have time to set up her business and hopes to concentrate on the same after her school leaving exams. Nonetheless, she and her like-minded friends have put up advertising flyers which were printed with help from the staff at Jabala and hope that they will get some orders in the coming days.

¹ Instituted by West Bengal Commission for Protection of Child Rights (WBPCR), Government of West Bengal.

5. Positing the case study in the small wins framework

The table below provides a glimpse of how the house painting and plastering skilling course has impacted Bandana's life with the help of a set of indicators drawn from the small wins framework.

Characteristic	Indicators	Findings in case study – Bandana (Jabala – house painting)
Concrete outcome	Visible Results	Aspiration to begin her own house painting business with others participants of the course
		Able to influence other participants in her community to be involved in the business
In-depth changes	Second and third order changes	Confidence in building her business and connecting with concerned persons and resources to establish her business
	Radical new practices	Garopara gram panchayat gave the young women job of painting the community stage
Moderate Importance	Micro or local level	
	Intermediate	A group of young women trained in house painting/white washing breaks cultural stereotypes at a local level
		Part of various platforms by Jabala where she is able to discuss and share her opinions which helps boost her confidence
Positive judgement	Improvement	A new possible avenue of earning and bettering her family's economic status
	Step forward	An overall confidence, emerging as a community leader and a zeal to make it big through her business and/or further studies
	Related to shared ambitions	The family is invested in her idea of business and is supportive

SECTION IV.

ASPIRATIONS, AGENCY AND RESOURCES

The present research attempts to throw light upon the journey that women and girls take up when they decide to get trained for livelihoods that are usually considered 'non-traditional'. This journey, which commences at a point when a woman starts nurturing a yearning towards doing something that is not considered to be where she would end up by default, continues through their everyday active and passive negotiations with the self and society, as they work towards a better future. This study, through the stories of the eight individual women and girls and their ecosystem, tries to explore and dive deep into these journeys and seeks to understand if, how and under what conditions such journeys lead to women's economic empowerment.

1. Aspirations

Even with a small set of the case studies, there is a fair amount of diversity which emerges from the unique contexts in which they occur. In this section the effort is to explore the aspirations of these women and identify the key factors that might have played a role in shaping them.

While socio-economic location is often assumed to be the key element shaping aspirations, the present study fails to come up with any simple unidimensional understanding between the two components. This seems to be, to an extent, due to the rise of the 'middle-class culture' in the present day neo-liberal India (Vijaykumar, 2013). As Saavala points out, the middle-class today is no more simply an economic category in the country. Rather, it is more a cultural construct which is defined by the ability to follow certain valued practices (Saavala, 2010). To become 'one of them' has therefore become the new aspiration of the lower-middle class section of the country, the gendered nature of which can hardly be ignored either (Kaur, Bhall, Agarwal and Ramkrishna, 2016). This can be understood best, when seen from the lens of the U-shaped curve in female labour force participation, where women of the 'middle-class' are found withdrawing themselves from the workforce in the greatest numbers. This therefore, in many ways means that confinement to the private sphere is seen as aspirational by many lower-class women, who work out of necessity (Dhawan, 2020). This is possibly why Bourdieu would articulate aspiration as an element of classed and gendered habitus (Bourdieu, 1984) while, feminist scholars like McNay would argue that aspirations are never unconstrained, passive reflections of elite lifestyles but rather can be seen as a complex interplay of desire and objective possibilities (Mc Nay 2013, Vijaykumar, 2013)

Thus, most women in the present study are found to feel the 'urge' to work and earn, not entirely for their own economic empowerment but often from the eagerness to economically 'support' either the father or the husband in running the household, reiterating the 'male breadwinner' model.

The study also highlights how geographical locations play a significant role in defining the aspirational habits of women, as has also been argued by Dhawan (2020). For instance, the study notes how women and girls in urban centres in the present study are found to have a variety of career related aspirations including joining the army and civil defence or becoming a bureaucrat or a government official vis-a-vis those belonging to semi-urban and rural neighbourhoods, with limited choices to even aspire from.

Having role models who have been able to achieve something in their lives in the vicinity also play an important role in shaping aspirations, the present research highlights. Such an impact, for instance, was noticed among the women from waste collecting communities in Bhubaneswar, who are now aspiring to gain an upward social mobility as they see individuals like Manasi driving the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation's garbage collection vans. A similar vying for upward mobility is seen among young girls in the rural belts of the tea gardens in north Bengal as they have witnessed some women from their community join the armed-force. Having such role models therefore helps in shaping aspirations, the research findings assert.

Age and marriage also play an important role in shaping aspirations as have also been highlighted by studies like those conducted by Chaturvedi and Sahai (2019). Younger unmarried women, like Bandana, Nasreen and

Shaheen in the age cohort of 20-25 in the present research, typically wanted to complete their higher education and get a well-paying job which would enable them gain their own social standing in the society. Married, older women, on the other hand, in the age cohort of 25 and 50 like Mansi, Diksha and Leeza were found mostly aspiring to build their own houses or to financially help their husbands and give their children a good education.

There was however one thread of commonality across all the cases who were included in the study, because of the purposive manner in which the sample was drawn. This was the penchant to earn by doing something different, “to stand out in the crowd”, which could help them either in improving their social standing or enhance their chances of bettering their financial positioning. For instance, girls like Nasreen and Bandana aspired to do something that would give them a chance to improve their family’s financial gains vis-a-vis other stereotypically feminine jobs like tailoring and nursing, while women like Leeza and Malti aspired to ‘do something’ which would help them gain a respectable position in the society. However, all the cases covered in this study asserted their aspiration to move out from the typically gender stereotyped roles which pay less, have little scope of growth and are often not considered to be ‘respectable enough’. NTL skilling was considered to be a tool for each one of them to fulfil their aspiration towards having a better life and decent work opportunities.



Image: Archana Women’s Centre

Having the presence of an active NGO or CSO also facilitates in making and shaping of such aspiration, the research maintains. This gets highlighted through the ways in which women belonging to specific neighbourhoods, where the community has been in long term touch with CSOs, were found having higher and more non- traditional aspirations than others. Such has been the case in certain neighbourhoods of Bhubaneswar where CYSD’s decades of work has increased the aspiration of women and girls, with the community at large slowly warming up to a shift in the gender norms when it comes to imagination of work. The impact of such a process of continued engagement, often goes beyond a generation as we see in the case of Manasi, who was once a ‘sponsored child’ of CYSD and is now not only one of the first woman driver driving a garbage van, but is aspiring to be the first woman bus driver in Bhubaneswar.

2. Resources: Enabling women’s Journey into Non-Traditional Livelihood Skilling

Just by having an aspiration to earn by engaging in a non-traditional form of livelihood, in most cases, however, proves to be insufficient for women and girls. Many find their aspirations die a premature death, due to the lack of proper resources that can facilitate their access to the right kind of skilling programmes. The present research attempted to map some of the key resources that help women access NTL skilling. Resource, as this research understands, can be considered to be the pre-conditions on the basis of which decisions and choices are made (Kabeer,1999) Of course, this necessarily means “having alternatives” to choose from, as also highlighted by Kabeer for not all choices are equally relevant to the definition of power (Kabeer, 1999: 437) Such resources might be acquired from social relationships conducted in various institutional domains which facilitates the ability to choose.

Following Kabeer’s framework, the study tried to explore how and under what conditions does certain skill training programme seem more attractive to participants vis-a –vis others and how network-members can extend their support in each stage of the skill development process, making non-traditional livelihood skilling more accessible for its potential women candidates.

The following sections will try to delineate some of these key resources that the research could identify, across the domain of the family, the community, the training programme and the organisation, the state and the market.

2.1 Resources: Family

The present research highlights that having a mechanism which could share at least some of the domestic responsibilities at home is considered to be a key resource by women and girls, which thereby facilitates their decision around enrolling themselves to a particular skilling programme. For women with children, this seems even more crucial since child care responsibilities become an additional burden which has to be then taken care of before a woman decides to join a skilling course. This is noted across almost all the narratives of the cases covered in the study. Be it married women with children like Diksha, Manasi and Leeza or unmarried girls like Nasreen, Bandana, Shaheen or Naina, considerations around how to tackle domestic and care responsibilities at home, has played a significant role in deciding and choosing a particular skilling programme.

Domestic responsibilities often make women choose centres which are closer to home and programmes that allow flexible hours of training. This gets specifically highlighted through the narrative of Diksha who talks about how many of her fellow trainees had to drop out of the mobile mechanism training of AWC due to its long hours and relatively less flexibility in the training schedule. Nasreen of Azad Delhi also talks of how she would get late reaching the centre after finishing her share of domestic duties since the centre was far from her home. While most organisations, the study finds, allow a limited amount of flexibility in choosing their preferred time slots, a lot of leeway is usually discouraged, since this can deter girls from becoming work ready for the real world, suggests Lalita, trainer in the four-wheel driving course with Azad Foundation (Delhi).

Redistribution and reorganisation of care and unpaid work with the household is necessary for women's journey of skilling and employability. Amongst the case narratives of Diksha, Manasi, Bandana and Shaheen, we found examples of older women in the family (mostly mothers of the participants) who provided crucial child care and unpaid care support which allowed them to fulfil their aspirations. On the other hand, in spite of having a supportive father at home, Nasreen struggled completing her household domestic duties as her mother and sister could not extend a supportive hand due to their feeble health. This therefore highlights the fundamentally gendered nature of work when it comes to household domestic chores, the narrative of which hardly seems to have shifted even when the women of the households aspire and try to take up 'non-traditional' roles in the workplace.

While the support of the entire family mattered, the research findings highlight how the support of male members of the family was considered to be of utmost importance when it came to women deciding to go for NTL skilling. Brothers and husbands for unmarried and married women were found to be the most significant actors within the family. These actors have significant influence on women's access to resources and ability to participate in skilling and labour markets. In the case narratives, Nasreen's restrictive brother played a deterrent role in her skilling journey, in spite of having her father's support; Similarly, in Leeza's case, her husband's patriarchal ideas around women's work, restricted her participation in driving skilling class which led to her dropping out. This reiterates how most women covered in this study sought male validation and depended on their verbal support especially while taking any decision. This seems to be a deep-seated tendency stemming out of patriarchal gendered norms, something that will take time to change.

Interestingly, even the most supportive male figures were found to have a really limited role when it came to sharing domestic and care responsibilities. Diksha for instance talks of how supportive her husband is, so does Manasi. The research documents that None, however, tried sharing their wives' care responsibilities to facilitate their journey into skilling for non-traditional livelihood.

Male members were however often seen dropping and picking up their daughters/ wives from the centres or the nearest bus stand. This while on one hand reinforces the gendered restriction on mobility, can also be seen as a required act of support as one sees in case of Diksha where there was dearth of reliable and affordable public transport facilities.

2.2 Resources: Community Level

While a supportive family can be considered to be the biggest resource that women could have to be able to access non-traditional livelihood skills, a supportive community also assumes a role of being an important facilitator into these skilling journeys, the research opines. This seems especially important, since participants are frequently found facing stiff resistance from local communities, since such skill training programs almost always

end up challenging the dominant gendered understanding of labour, thereby questioning the societal status-quo. Manasi for instance faced reluctance from her in-laws and her village community, which she could tackle because of her supportive husband and mother. On the other hand, a tribal community more accustomed in seeing women toil and work seemed a little more accepting when they saw Bandana and her co-trainees learn how to paint homes in the tea-gardens of North Bengal. Further, there is a sense of competitiveness for resources within communities and women often do not share about their experiences of skilling in the beginning to avoid speculation around their lives. In case of Naina, only her immediate family knows about her business training and feels her neighbours will be discouraging or disapproving her possibility of setting up a business.

The research showed that communities often become supportive through a ripple and role model effect when perceived successful stories emerge from within the community. Signs of such transformation could be seen through the experience of Malti, who by getting trained in driving four wheelers not only made her own transgender community start believing that this is a skill that they too can access by standing out as a role-model but also made the larger community start accepting people like Malti in the mainstream, which would make other's like Malti's journey easier in the future.

It is important to note that the 'idea of success' requires time, resources and support from all domains. A strong presence of NGOs and CSOs in the community makes this easier, as regular interactions with the community through peer educators and community mobilisers make societies more accepting towards social changes.

2.3 Resources: Skilling programmes and Organisations

The role that NGOs and CSOs can play in the non-traditional livelihood skill journey of women is the key takeaway of the present research. And when it comes to making such skilling accessible to everyone, the resources they offer are of utmost importance.

Taking cue from the previous section, the research highlights how a continuous engagement with the trainee's family and community can prove to be immensely important, for it can then facilitate the pathway for two other very essential resources - a supportive family and a supportive community, for prospective women trainees. This process is also intricately connected to a continuous hand holding process with the candidate herself, which as the research points out, begins right from the stage when a potential candidate starts aspiring to learn a skill which would lead to a better life and then continues throughout the entire skill training journey. Moreover, many organisations play a vital role in connecting the newly trained women to potential employers.

Consequently, this ends up being a time-consuming and resource-intensive process owing to the fact that hand holding might have different meanings for different candidates on a case-by-case basis. The inherently gendered nature of socialisation often makes candidates themselves doubt their own abilities to do something non-traditional. It then becomes the task of the training programme to boost the confidence of such women as is seen explicitly in cases where women had to learn to use a new machine or a technology. Cases like that of Diksha or Leeza or even Manasi or Nasreen show how women feel inherently unconfident when accessing machineries, however big or small. This seems to be the experience even in ISST's community centre as well, where girls and boys come for computer lesson training. "Girls feel hesitant to even in touch the mouse or key board of a computer while the boys are found way more confident and comfortable in using the computer sets, says Ivanka Vaish, peer educator Sathi centre, ISST (Interview from Pilot Study, Delhi, January, 2022).

Similar narratives come out from Kerala where AWC has a long history of skilling women from low-income households in non-traditional livelihoods. In their experience, they too have found women who come to the skilling centres usually lacking confidence and self-esteem. This is why they have developed a 'Social Training' programme, which is a mandatory course that women have to take before they begin the actual technical training. This social training consists of socio-psychological games which help women to open up and share their experience. Thresiamma, Founder and Director of AWC shares

They will remember their happy moments sad moments, their flaws and failures. They will go through it most of the time women will cry a lot...they will share their feelings; their problems related to their parents, husband etc. It is like a ventilation, and these women will feel free after this exercise. Now they are ready to hear [and learn] new things. (Interview, Kottayam, January 2022)

She further explained that this is an important aspect in women's journey of skilling, but most often government sponsored programmes would not consider this crucial enough.

My trainings are 3-day program including all these games, but in Kudumbasree¹⁴ meeting they will ask to cut down it. They don't need everything. But we will always insist to have 3-day training. (Interview, Kottayam, January 2022)

This therefore highlights how being acutely gender sensitive in its approach while designing its training programmes and curriculum seems to be a key resource which can ease the journey of women in non-traditional livelihood skilling. This also means shaping the curriculum by not only focussing on a purely technical training but designing a curriculum that will enable women to become work ready for the real world in the truest sense.

It is possibly due to the absence of such an understanding during the course designing, that led to the failure of Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation's women driving training course suggests Niladri Sahoo, Programme Manager, CYSD:

Ours is a comprehensive package, which not only includes technical training focuses more on a holistic development, we try to create rapport with the family through family counselling, try to impart life skills education like spoken English, self-defence and everything that is required to be really prepared for the real job market (Interview, February, 2022)

This pedagogy of holistic learning therefore seems to be an important resource for women candidates wishing to get skilled in non-traditional livelihood. This however seems to work the best when complemented with the continuous and close hand-holding process discussed before.

The research further finds that having the training centre closer to the candidate's home often helps, as was witnessed in case of the trainees getting trained in the EDP course of Magic Bus in New Delhi. It was found that these trainees who had been accustomed to having their training centre close to their homes, felt distanced from the organisation as soon as the centre moved away to a location far away from their neighbourhood.

Traveling to the new centre is difficult it is so far, says Shaheen while talking about her present engagement with the Magic Bus (Interview, Delhi, April 2022).

The challenge around travelling to a centre far away was also highlighted through the experiences of Mansi and Nasreen, both of whom felt that they would have fared better if they had better access to resources which could have supported their travel to the training centres.

Providing for travel allowance, or some sort of assistance with commuting to the centres therefore seems to be important forms of resources that organisations in general can start considering for its candidates, the research findings highlight.

Besides, support in terms of creating scope for continuous practice, even after the skilling programme is officially over seems to be an important requirement for candidates if they are to make a living out of their newly acquired skills. Lack of practice post training due to either the inaccessibility of tools or lack of market opportunities which then means no hands-on practice, has made many women start losing their interest in furthering their careers in non-traditional livelihood. While some organisations like Azad and CYSD seem to be mindful of this, as one sees



Image: Archana Women's Centre

¹⁴ Kudumbasree is poverty eradication mission of the government of the Kerala, launched in 1998, with support from government of India and NABARD. Kudumbasree empowers women to strengthen the economic backward people in village areas.

refresher courses being rolled out or alumni being called in to the centres to practice, other organisations, while remaining cognizant of the need for such a scope, often lack the resource. This is possibly why the research finds people like Diksha and Bandana almost lose touch of their newly learned skill, which did not convert to economic advantage without any further linkages development post-skilling.

2.4 Resources: State and the Market

While many a times organisations fail to provide for all the resources to the candidates as described above due to the lack of their own financial and other infrastructure, the state and the market is expected to intervene here by becoming more responsive to the idea of skilling and giving women and girls the opportunity to earn through non-traditional ways of livelihood. Such an intervention, it appears, could have helped people like Diksha and Bandana to a large extent. While the present research did witness some very small steps of intervention from both the state and the market in case of Bandana, its presence can be considered quite insignificant in the case of Diksha, who is slowly losing touch with her skill.

The positive role that the state can however play, gets highlighted through the case of Manasi who has now been able to put her skill to practice by driving the garbage collecting van of the local municipal body, due to a gender aware policy adopted by the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation, coupled with the media covering her success story. This has not only then helped Manasi to gain economic empowerment but has also helped her community to start aspiring for a better possibility. Thus, the need for the state and market to warm up to the idea of women in non-traditional livelihoods is absolutely essential for any skill training programme to succeed in the long run. In fact, the state and market can also play crucial roles in 'scaling-up' projects as pointed out by Baitali Ganguly, Director, Jabala Action Research Organization:

Organisations can only create niche or pilot programmes. It is the state and the market who should be scaling them up (Interview, Kolkata, December 2021)

Such 'scaling up' however needs to also be based on a solid understanding of the ground level reality which the NGOs and the CSOs can provide. It is only when the three works in unison can any effective scaling up take place. The state can in fact also support women's skilling journeys by providing them with the most basic facilities and infrastructure like free and safe transportation, maintaining a safe public space and creating child care infrastructures.

3. Agency: Translating Resources into Actions

While resources can be considered as the precondition on the basis of which a choice is made, agency according to Kabeer is more about the actual actions that go into translating these resources into observable decision making (Kabeer, 1999). Thus, while having the above-mentioned resources can facilitate women's journey into non-traditional livelihood skilling, the actual *bargaining and negotiations, deception and manipulation, subversion and resistance* that goes in while making the decisions around opting for a particular skill training programme is what Kabeer terms as 'agency' (1999).

This research following Kabeer's understanding of agency seeks to identify these acts of arbitrations and mediations through which candidates navigate their way across the multi-staged training process that constitutes non-traditional livelihood skilling. These acts can either get reflected through every day, individual negotiations that the candidates make while accessing the resources discussed before, or can take the form of collective bargaining which are more palpable and can cause a disruption or change in the everydayness of the routine. Kabeer however classifies agency into two kinds, one which is positive- which according to her is the *power* to define one's own life choices and thereby pursue goals in spite of resistance, the other is more in a negative sense which signifies the capacity of an actor to have *power over*, and override the agency of others (Kabeer, 1999).

The next sections, following this framework, will locate some of the various kinds of acts of agency that candidates have shown while traversing through their own journeys into NTL skilling. This would be done by mapping acts of

agency of the candidates across the domains of the family and community, the training programme and the organisation and the state and the market spaces.

3.1 Agency showed in level of the household and community

While having a supportive family and community can prove to be important resources facilitating women's access to skill training programmes, the present research espouses that the manner in which this support is often garnered – through everyday negotiations, persuasions and bargaining– can be considered to be the very first acts of exercising agency for the candidate in the skill training journey within the sphere of the family, household and the community.

Such initiatives can be noticed across almost all the respondents covered under the present research. While no such act can be compared to another, due to their unique forms and locations, all respondents seem to have been able to show agency of some order, while deciding and finally getting themselves enrolled into a specific training course.

Diksha and Manasi, for instance, had to negotiate and come to an arrangement with the female members of the family to look after their children while they were out for training. For Leeza, accessing the resource of non-traditional livelihood skilling, meant showing agency by persuading her husband and thereby gaining his permission to get enrolled into the grass cutting training. Nasreen and Naina, on the other hand had to make use of a myriad of ways including bargaining, concealing and seeking external help to be able to enrol and continue with their skill training programme.

For Bandana and Shaheen however the act of agency took a different shape. The decision to join the training course meant consciously prioritising skilling over other multiple roles and tasks that they perform for their family which can also be considered to be an act of agency in itself.

For Malti too, the very decision to take some time out from her income generating traditional trade practice and learn something new is an act exerting agency within her community, the research highlights. Malti also talks about how many times her own acts of agency often meant disregarding the wishes of others in the community, many of whom had dissuaded Malti to join the driving training meant for the 'mainstream'.

The research further highlights how an act of active avoidance, especially to the harsh resistance that many of the respondents have had to face from the community can also be considered as an act of exercising agency. This can be seen through the way respondents like Lalita- Nasreen's trainer, had navigated her way through a community hostile towards witnessing any change, "I would ignore all the comments made at me, because I knew someday, I will be able to prove my point", says Lalita, Nasreen's trainer who herself used to be a candidate enrolled with the Azad to learn driving a few years back (Interview, March 2022).

Similar acts of avoidance were shown by Manasi, as she faced criticism for her village community and her in-laws when she decided to get enrolled into the driving programme when her child was only a few months old.

These conscious acts of deciding for oneself therefore seem to be some of the most important and significant acts of agency that the research could identify in the domain of the family and the community.

3.2. Agency showed before and during the skilling process

While a lot of negotiation goes on in the domain of the family and the community, when a candidate initially tries to access non-traditional skill training, the present research also identifies how the NTL training in itself helps candidates gain agency to voice their opinion around how to shape the training programmes which can then go on to smoothen their own skilling journey further. Such acts, based on resources like a gender sensitive curriculum, a comprehensive pedagogy and a continuous handholding process often therefore shapes the very spirit of the training courses, the present research opines.



Image: ISST

This gets reflected through the way one sees AWC as an organisation responding to the changed ambition of young women and girls it works with, as it starts rolling out trainings in more contemporary kinds of livelihood like mobile mechanism in the first place. This indicates a collective bargaining that must have gone into the process. Similar acts of bargaining seem to have occurred in the case of Jabala's skill training programme in north Bengal too, where it is the prospective candidates who had expressed their wish to learn something non-traditional vis-a-vis the more traditional training courses that gets usually offered to women. Being able to voice their opinion and choose their own skilling programme that matches their aspiration is an act of agency in itself. This gets further manifested with Diksha's narrative around how the mobile mechanism trainees as a group negotiated with the organisation and sought to extend the duration of their course.

Along with such explicit portrayal of acts of agency, the research could further locate several smaller everyday forms of negotiations at an individual level when it comes to the candidate's interaction with the trainers or the training programme in general. Nasreen for instance narrates how the confidence that she had gathered while getting trained in four-wheel driving helped her 'gain a voice' to in fact talk back to her own trainer. Trainees enrolled with Jabala also recollects how they could manage to negotiate the timings of the training schedule according to their own convenience, through their continued relation with members of the organisation and the trainer. Such small acts of conciliation and dialogue often helped candidates ease their training journeys, highlighting the everyday forms of agency that they showed even as they proceeded with their journey of non-traditional livelihood skilling.

Besides such observable acts of agency that the research could locate, the study remains cognizant of the fact that there might be several other smaller, everyday forms of agentic acts, that might have not been recorded, due to the normalisation of these processes which often gets passed off without any active recognition. Acknowledging these otherwise small acts is what Azad Foundation tries to do through its *Badlav ka safarnama* process¹⁵ which helps candidates start recognising how they are exerting their agency in their everyday lives.

Such a process then often snow-balls, helping trainees and co-trainees garner more confidence to be able to exercise greater agency in future.

¹⁵ The process tries to bring out from the candidates how they see they have changed badlav ever since they joined the course. The following description from Dhawan, 2020 can help readers understand it further:

The session began with moving their own personal ID card to the next milestone, which was the number of months in program; and then they all had the opportunity to discuss and share their achievements. This process of sharing enabled the trainees to recognise their sense of agency. By making this a collective and self-reflective process the women in the program can not only share their stories of change, but can also be inspired by others; and in some cases they may gain a recognition of their growing agency about a particular topic, when they hear other women speaking about it.

3.3 Agency exercised at the level of state and the market

Following the successful completion of the skill training, a lot depends on how the state and market engages with the candidate and how much agency the candidate gets to exercise while choosing a preferred kind of livelihood. The present research through its case studies and the FGDs had tried to identify these various acts of agency that the candidates manage to exert while they engage with the market and the state.

The result of this was however quite limited, for only a few respondents covered by the present study, were found to be in a position to directly engage with the state or market. This is because, in most of the cases, such engagements; between the candidates and the state or the market, were found to be happening through the active interventions of the associated NGOs.

This is what the research witnesses in case of trainees associated with Azad Foundation or CYSO where Sakha Consulting Wings Pvt. Ltd. (which runs the Sakha Cabs for Women), a sister enterprise of Azad Foundation, is seen to be mediating between the candidate and the market post skilling. Advocacy with the state to bring in gender aware policies also happen mostly through interventions of the NGOs, without really an active participation of the women who benefit out of NTL skilling. This therefore makes women hardly get a chance to directly interact, or negotiate with the state or the market bodies.

The experience of Bandana in north Bengal however seems to be a little different, perhaps due to the difference in the way the training programmes have been designed. Bandana is encouraged by the organisation to directly negotiate with the state and market apparatus. This is why Bandana and her batchmates were found deciding for themselves and making their own plans to get work opportunities post skilling. Jabala also encourages its trainees to directly engage with the state apparatus as Bandana was found to be quite confident in communicating her problems to the local panchayat level representative.

In the case of Shaheen and Naina however, their engagement was much more direct with the market. Magic Bus encouraged both the girls to actually have an idea of the market that their business would cater to, since they were being trained for an entrepreneurial role. Unfortunately, the research could not find any palpable agentive behaviour on their part while dealing with their prospective clients, perhaps due to a lack of hand-holding that is required even if the candidates are directly encouraged to negotiate with the market or the state.

The research could also not manage to locate any major collectivisation process where the scope of exerting agency becomes much more explicit. While formation of cooperatives is noticed in the case of AWC, it seems to be more an initiative taken by the organisation, and cannot be posited as a spontaneous show of agency on the part of the women workers post skilling.

The research however does remain cognizant of how the skilling space enables a kind of sisterhood amongst the participants. The collective feeling that they are in it together often gets enhanced by certain conscious strategies adopted by the organisations like Azad Foundation's *Badlav ka Safarnama*, social training of AWC or through making football teams by skill-training girls in case of Jabala. Such implicit ways of collectivisation can in the future form the building blocks towards a more organised collectivisation process, the research observes.

This seems to be yet another important take-away of the present research whereby candidates are found slowly becoming capable of exerting their agency within the sphere of the family and the community and even within the domain of the associated CSO or the NGO which is anchoring their skilling journey, but not much of agency can be seen when it comes to their engagement with the state and the market, as they continue to primarily depend on these organisations to fight their battles.



Image: ISST

SECTION V. TRANSLATING SKILLING INTO ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT - OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

The non-traditional skilling programmes attempted to enable women to enter the world of “men’s jobs” thereby increasing their chances of getting economically empowered. From the feminist viewpoint however, economic empowerment is not only about participating in the economy but to actively participate with an agency. As per the framework provided by Kabeer, empowerment is a dynamic process in which women acquire resources that enable them to develop voice – the capacity to articulate preferences – and agency – the capacity to make decisions – to fulfil their own aspirations. (Kabeer, 1999). It calls for an approach which emphasises on creating agency through economic gains so that women do not remain passive recipients of welfare programmes, but are enabled to make informed choices for her and her family’s economic well being. It is about recognizing the women’s personhood as economic agents in the labour market and also within their families (Sen, 2000). It is from this understanding of empowerment, that the following section attempts to explore if, how and to what extent did the NTL skilling programmes covered in the present study facilitate the journey of the eight individual cases narratives that form the core of this research.

In terms of explicit outcomes, the present study, based on the restricted sample that it had selected, seems to come to the conclusion that for the majority of the individual cases, the NTL training programmes did not get translated into sustained income generation through non-traditional livelihoods. Nonetheless, the trainings did lead to varied outcomes for each individual case. To understand these variety of outcomes, the research has made use of the small wins framework to locate the smaller achievements (which does not mean trivial) (Vermack, 2013) that seems to have the potential to amplify and cumulate into large scale, in-depth transformations (Weick and Quinn, 1999).

It should also be kept in mind that from a theoretical point of view, a woman’s ability to become empowered at the individual level depends to quite some extent, on the environment in which she lives (Yount, 2017). This means the way empowerment is conceptualised is also bound to be extremely context specific and is based on the diversity of circumstances in which one is able to access certain resources on the basis of which agency gets exercised (Kabeer, 1999).

Acknowledging this the research attempts to compare no two outcomes should since each has its own context and hence each journey towards empowerment is different.

Thus, while one gets to witness candidates like Manasi and Leeza gaining meaningful employment by using their skills that they had acquired through the NTL skilling, which possibly did improve their chances of exerting financial autonomy, in case of Nasreen, however, who did manage to get a job as a cab driver after her skill-training, but could not retain it for a long time, the ‘win’ is in the transformation that she herself can recognise within her own personality and the way she witnesses a slow shift in her own community as they encounter a changed Nasreen. The training journey for Malti and Diksha on the other hand remains incomplete to an extent, since they could not complete certain critical components of their skilling process. However, both their journeys resulted into positive outcomes, each significant from its own context. Diksha for instance is now being able to access mobile technology, which has facilitated her journey into newer ‘more rewardable’¹⁶ skill-training which can lead to financial autonomy; while for Malti the gain is being able to become a ‘role-model’ in her community by being the first trans-gender woman to have been able to access a four-wheeler driving skill programme which is usually considered to be meant for the ‘main-stream’ communities. Her presence in the training programme also facilitated a general spirit of acceptance within her cis-gender women batch-mates, an achievement that possibly tilts more towards ‘collective empowerment’ (Yount, 2017). Training for Naina, Bandana and Shaheen however saw a different outcome. By being able to access skill training, these girls found a way to articulate their aspiration to start their own enterprises, something that seems significant especially when seen from the perspective of the ‘mindset

¹⁶ Since access to digitality has today become the key to access newer skilling programmes today in India

constraint' (Siba, 2019) that women from marginalised sections of the society are found to portray. Such aspiration building however needs the support from all quarters of the society for otherwise it can further the process of informalisation of labour by creating the 'gendered entrepreneurial subjects'¹⁷.

Each of the cases thus have had its own share of positive outcomes stemming from the training programmes and while it is difficult to come to concrete conclusions on which outcomes will finally be able to bring in systemic transformation, it is possible to investigate the roles played by different institutions in enhancing the possibility of the candidates' entry into the labour market. The following section therefore tries identifying the determinants that influenced positive and negative outcomes in each of the cases.

Role of State

In this research, the local level state in the form of panchayats and municipalities are observed to be playing the most proactive roles. In Odisha, Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) has come out with a policy to hire women drivers under its "Mu Safaiwala" programme. However, a very few women trainees have been offered a full-time job with social security provision like ESI. The job has also led to opening of first bank accounts. BMC intends to make gender parity a component of the "Mu Safaiwala" campaign.

In Kerala, the panchayat has various welfare programmes in place for women's economic development. Women are trained in different skills to generate self-employment and then hired to construct toilets under a total sanitation campaign, provided raw materials and wages. Self Help Groups are formed and micro credits are provided to women to start their own businesses. Similar interest was observed in West Bengal, where women trained by Jabala were hired to paint the community stage. The Block Development Officer (BDO) showed interest in employing women for painting government run schools in the district in North Bengal.

At the state level, Azad Foundation has successfully been able to make use of their continued partnership with Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC), a state-owned Transport Company under the Delhi government, to employ women as bus drivers. This also entailed a shift in policy for recruitment criteria (physical attributes such as height), which were based on a typical 'male' physical attribute which hindered hiring women to drive buses.

Unlike Kerala and Odisha, the local government in West Bengal was found to be at the stage of exploring options. While Kerala and Odisha have programmes in place backed by financial investments, West Bengal is yet to come out with any model. Small steps taken by the local governments can be termed as "small wins" that demonstrate what is required to achieve social change (Termeer & Dewulf, 2018). These efforts are able to activate propelling mechanisms that are required for systemic changes, have the potentiality to feedback into policy processes and influence by creating wellbeing in individual lives. However, to convert those small wins into systemic changes will require larger vision and political will.

Availability of public infrastructures in the form of public toilets, street lights, safe public transport, safe public spaces, cooperation from police (especially mentioned by women drivers) etc. are critical to sustain non-traditional opportunities. They enable women to exercise "choices" in taking up occupations located outside home or at a distance from home. Absence of safe public transport early in the morning had led to Nasreen's withdrawing from her job of airport cab driver. She also mentioned that she felt unsafe in Gurgaon (Haryana) because of inadequate streetlights. Many spoke on the need of crèches as a support system to sustain paid work. Investments for



Image: ISST

¹⁷ See the discussion on the creation on 'gendered entrepreneurial subject', by Boeri (2018) detailed in the literature review section

creating infrastructure are not restricted to the local state alone and require macro level backing of policies and financial resources. To take the first step towards gender parity, women should be made to feel safe to come out of homes. Without the availability of public infrastructure NTL opportunities will remain outside the reach of women. Martha Nussbaum warns that the approach adopted by the state is important to break gender stereotypes (Nussbaum, 2001). In order to achieve substantive gender equality, state programmes should emphasise on creating agency along its effort to create employment opportunities. She advises that the state should refrain from adopting a paternalistic approach of 'doing good' and instead focus on creating a levelled playing field for all its citizens. In our study the approach of the state seems to be of a paternalist one and the initiatives only emphasise on creating more job opportunities without really paying any conscious effort on creating agency which is critical to exercise choice. Such an absence of an integrated vision seems to only create fragmented programmes, which would then only lead to the creation of a handful "success stories" without really pushing for any systemic transformation.

Role of Market

Among all the institutions, the role of market was observed to be most limited in terms of generating non-traditional employment. The partnerships between NGOs with companies like Maruti, Asian Paint franchisee, malls, mobile repairing shops, etc. are restricted to skill training only. Interestingly, the owner of the Asian Paint franchise in the case of Bandana in Birpara in West Bengal, spoke about approaching contractors to place women as house painters in ongoing construction activities. Examples of women driving for platforms such as Ola or Uber are also few owing to the nature of the tasks, working conditions offered by the platforms, limited access to assets and loans, among others (Ghosh et. al 2021). The scope of decent employment is even narrower for transgender persons (as in case of Malti). The limited role played by the market has resulted in limited job options for women. Organisations such as Azad Foundation, whose main focus area is skilling women and placing them in non-traditional livelihoods, are trying to tie-up with app-based platforms such as BigBasket, Amazon, etc. However, it is difficult for smaller organisations to do this. As such, while the programmes need to focus on how to engage with the market to expand the opportunities and to enable this; the market also needs to be forthcoming in its policies of diversity hiring, making workplaces safe, provide social security benefits, etc. for women to enter in the 'skilled' non-traditional domains.

The research findings also indicate the informal and unorganised nature of the market has impaired direct hiring and one sees labour being hired mainly through the 'middle men', 'contractor' or agencies (as seen in the case narrative of Bandana for house painting). Such structures that mediate labour hiring in the neo liberal world thus have a direct bearing on who the civil society organisation engages with. Such a phenomena of 'fragmentation of market', therefore creates a kind of obliqueness about who is really accountable, reducing the chances of NGOs and CSOs and more so for the women to directly negotiate and gain an entry into the labour market.

Role of civil society organisation (CSO)

In the CSO led processes, the facilitating organisations played the most important role in triggering change. The roles played by the organisations were not uniform and different organisations took up different strategies for empowerment. And while this made it difficult to do any comparative analysis of the programmes, the lessons learnt from the functioning of each of the organisations can be used to contribute towards formulating a composite understanding of what CSOs can/should do.

AWC in Kerala created Community Action Groups (CAG) as Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and provided micro credit support to its 6000 members. AWC 's approach was a sustainable approach. It enabled Leeza to buy a grass cutting machine by providing access to micro credit. Presently, the machine helps her to earn Rs. 10000 a week. It has also helped her to move out of paid domestic work which she describes as an occupation with low dignity. Access to resources has enabled Leeza to negotiate with her husband (who is a person with a patriarchal mindset) to take up the occupation of a grass cutter outside home. She earned her mobility through her financial autonomy.

Magic Bus provided seed money to trainees of their EDP programme to start their own business. While access to

credits under AWC programmes have enabled women to shift from occupations with drudgery, the seed money provided by Magic Bus was not successful in creating financial autonomy. For example, Shaheen refused to take the money thinking that it was given to her as a loan. On the other hand, it provided an agency to Naina to negotiate with her mother, who is dead against her working in an office. With that money, Naina plans to open her own tuition center “Sunshine” where she will hire teachers for teaching and she herself would manage the center. Naina continues to teach children at home to start her tuition center as she and her family assume the seed money is a loan that would need to be repaid. She only plans to use the money in case she is not able to save up enough on her own. While there seems to be a miscommunication with regards to returning of the seed money from Magic Bus and needs to be looked into, it also indicates women’s hesitancy in using the money owing to the fear of failure (risk aversion). A failure in business may lead to further pressure and ridicule from family and community.



Image: Archana Women’s Centre

Even though economic outcomes are different, it is true that access to financial resources have been successful in creating agency. For Bandana, the agency of making a choice towards setting up a house painting business with like-minded friends (who are also associated with Jabala Action Research Organization) is an outcome of her exposure to the world through the organisation. The facilitating roles of CSOs were more successful in creating a sense of “power to choose”.

Additionally, the study found that the soft skills provided by CSOs are critical for making the trainees aware of their rights. The programmes helped to understand the inequality practiced by the labour market and gave them confidence to face and overcome them.



Image: Azad Foundation

The partnership of CYSD and Azad Foundation with Sakha Consulting Wings Pvt. Ltd. (Sakha cabs for women) as partners in the NTL Network, was a strategic innovation towards placement of trainees. However, this study also found NTL skilling is time and resource intensive. While many members of the Network such as Azad Foundation, AWC, Samman, and others have managed to scale up and sustain the skilling programmes, other and smaller organisations may fail to do so owing to lack of funds, project time and achievements when measured in terms of numbers. There are still other partners such as Jabala Action Research Organization, whose primary work is not “non-traditional” skilling per se but who believe that a CSO can create an example which then can be adopted and upscaled by the government since they have the resources to do so. Nevertheless, the research clearly finds that NTL skilling is a space where in the CSOs, state and the market can interact and can lead to successful economic and social gains for the women participating in such programmes.

Role of the community

The community is often an extension of the family on one hand the market on the other hand – it has the capacity to influence aspirations and access resources for women; at the same time, stereotypes of what work women can or cannot do also gets modelled based on community sanctions. In the study, there were various instances of how the community influenced the individuals’ aspirations and skilling journey. For Naina, we find her

neighbourhood to be discouraging and she perceives them to be 'jealous of her success' and 'disbelief of her success based on her gender'. As such, she prefers not to disclose her business idea with her neighbours. In case of Malti, she found resistance from her transgender community as they were sceptical of being ridiculed during the skilling process and availability of economic opportunities thereafter. She had a big meeting with the various 'houses' of the transgender community in Bhubaneswar but could only get two other transgender women, besides herself, who showed interest for the four-wheel driving course offered by CYSD.

Community's perceptions are motivating factors for women to take up NTL skilling. Leeza's work as a paid domestic worker is ridiculed and looked upon socially as a lowly occupation even if it has helped her economically. Her new found livelihood through mechanised grass cutting skilling has been a personal win as she is now able to earn through a dignified livelihood. At the same time, most women who take up non-traditional livelihood skilling defy community expectations of them and overtime as more success stories emerge, one finds there is a new found respect for these women and a ripple effect in their communities for NTL skilling.

The study found that interventions at the level of the community is important for upscaling of programmes – an intergenerational dialogue can help in creating allies in the family and shift power struggles within the family. Role modelling was also found effective especially in areas where the organisation had established itself. As such, the community works as a support system and network for women and hence a shift in perception of the community helps break stereotypes and gender norms thereby providing a pathway for the process of change for women and help develop agency to choose possibilities leading to social and economic gains.

Role of families

The families were largely heteronormative ones with the exception of Malti. Given the patriarchal norms within families, support from fathers, father in laws, brothers and husbands gave women strength and confidence to break gender barriers. The support received from the more powerful male members in families helped to counter patriarchal resistance faced in public spaces. One of the trainee's husbands was an Ola driver and owned a vehicle. Her husband helped her to practice after the training ended. It helped her to switch to a driver's job. Manasi's husband was proud that his wife was a driver. Nasreen could take up a job offer of a driver because of the support provided by her sister and father.

There are other versions too. Bandana gave an example of her co-trainee whose father wanted to buy her a goat so that instead of going out to work as a painter, she can earn from home itself. Many narratives have examples of trainees dropping out due to their household responsibilities and husband's disapproval. Leeza could not join driving courses because her husband did not agree. She chose not to choose driving and went for painting. Thus, her success story of economic empowerment has a disempowering component too. Fathers, brothers and husbands restricted women to work in public spaces exercising their patriarchal power. For Shaheen, the access to credit from Magic Bus did not help as she was not allowed to work in mobile repairing shops to complete her hands-on training. Exercising power in private spaces to restrict women's mobility was also backed by the fear of losing power in public spaces if women enter non-traditional occupations.

Support from mothers, mother in laws, sisters and sister in laws were mainly caregiving support that enabled women to continue with their paid work. Manasi's mother, Leeza's mother-in-law and sister in laws helped by sharing care responsibilities. The redistribution of care within families for economic gains has happened only when other women family members have agreed to take responsibility.

The theory of altruist homes has been challenged long ago and it has been established that even within family, individuals bargain from their own positions of power or powerlessness (Nussbaum, 2001; Sen, 2000). Women in families are in an adverse power position and do not have equal access to family resources. Their priority is to provide labour for household work and provide "love and care" to the family members, especially children. Their family responsibilities are in competition with their occupational choices and they end up looking for jobs within homes or near homes. It is for this uneven power structure within homes, women with support from the "more powerful" members could move forward.

It is important to note that intervention in family hierarchies is critical and can be influenced by creating equality in public spaces. The financial autonomy provided limited options to influence how their income would be spent. For example, Leeza funded her daughter's nursing course. The processes of changing mindsets and power

equations within families are complex and not uniform in nature. The reactions to the probable labour market competition are different from reactions to opportunities to enhance economic gains for families. This throws light on the complex competitive relationship that exists between “homes” and “outside” where efforts of creating employment outside homes intervene/ intersect with the bargaining power within homes.

It is thus important to note that besides technical training, the training on gender, legal, sexuality, financial autonomy, etc. (based on ideals of gender justice), equip women trainees to know themselves better and strengthen their negotiating power within homes. The Skill++ programme of Azad Foundation and Sakha Cabs, the social training adopted by AWC, life skills training by Magic Bus, and similar programmes adopted by various Network partners, are an important part of the skilling journey for women. It allows women to understand the world around them better and helps in building their agency and achievement, aiding their process of change which is transformative and empowering.

Empowerment through access to machines and technology

Access to technology and machines is a significant step forward to break gender barriers in the gender segregated labour market. Banerjee (1997) has written that modernization through advancement in technology may result in excluding women from sectors where women had gained entry. Entering the arena of jobs that require basic, contemporary digital knowledge or knowledge of handling machines (whether in the form of bus engines or mobiles or grass cutting machines) are equivalent to treading the arena of “men’s job”.

As evidenced in the study, women’s access to technology created two different responses among men. On the one hand it triggered insecurity among men that their jobs will be taken up by the women; and on the other hand, seeing women driving vehicles for a living or working as a gardener, some men were interested in getting their female family members trained in non-traditional skills. The latter reaction, in this study, was seen in case of CYSD wherein with the state support and the media attention, the community saw examples of success stories (such as Manasi Das driving the BMC garbage collection LMV) and hence women’s aspirations were further supported by their male family members.

Access to technology and machines has been looked at as a requirement for new generation jobs. It opens doors for women towards new possibilities subject to will and support from other institutions, mainly state, market and family.

SECTION VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The success stories show that for NTL skilling to be empowering, it requires a proactive coming together of all institutions especially the state, family and the civil society organisations to create resources, agency, knowledge and capabilities. They also indicate the primary roles of each institution. As mentioned earlier, that approach of state has remained more welfarist and less empowering. The absence of focus on creating agency was visible in its limited investments in terms of resources and thereby creating important success stories that fell short of creating social change. The approaches adopted by organisations are more successful in creating agency as long-term outcomes but their ability to create resources was limited and short term. Due to the limited role played by the market it is difficult to comment on what differences an integrated intervention could have made. We can safely assume that more participation by the market could have given more options to choose from and enable more bargaining power.

The case studies also point out the important fact that resources required for economic empowerment are both financial and human and are generated by all institutions involved. Financial resources came in the form of loans, seed money etc, while organisations like Sakha were created as social resources. Human resources in the form of family support led to redistribution of housework and care work. Last but not the least, public infrastructures acted as important resources for mobility.

In this research, women's participation in non-traditional livelihood outside home played an important role in changing power equations within homes to a limited extent which varied on a case-by-case basis. The individual bargaining within families exercised by women indicates seeds of larger changes both in the public and private domains if gendering around work is broken in public spaces. The changes observed in these case narratives, however, were moderate and micro level changes (small wins) restricted to a few lives belonging to a particular geographical locality.

In terms of limitations, it is important to note that proactive steps by both state and market are outcomes of facilitation by CSOs. In absence of CSOs the other two may not act in a proactive manner. We have already pointed out the limitations of project-based CSOs as these are time bound processes, often measured in terms of scale rather than impact. While, CSOs such as Azad Foundation, AWC, and other NTL Network members have demonstrated the viability of NTL skilling for women, it is imperative that these need support initiatives from state and market in order to make a transformative change which will result in women entering decent and secure jobs, moving away from insecure and vulnerable livelihoods.

As far as working conditions are concerned, the case studies show that the economic gains were mostly created through self-employment without providing an infrastructure to access the market and thereby transferring the entire risk of sustainability to women alone. As mentioned earlier they all belong to economically marginalised families. This calls for two different forms of interventions to create a non-traditional labour market. Firstly, either the jobs should be decent jobs with fair wages and social security (as demonstrated by some of the NTL Network member organisations and linkages with similar employers who provide social security), or the state should be proactive to provide the safety net to women recognizing them as individual workers.

Financial autonomy, freedom of movement, public infrastructure, bargaining power in the households, access to credit, managing loans, managerial control of credit, asset building in their own name, are all crucial steps towards achieving economic empowerment. A holistic integrated approach is required to make a difference.

Pathways to Women's economic Empowerment – Skilling in Non-Traditional Livelihoods

RECOGNITION AND REDISTRIBUTION OF WOMEN'S UNPAID CARE BURDEN

Women's traditional roles of being primary caregivers impedes their ability to seek skilling opportunities that could lead to decent jobs with economic gains. For this, redistribution of care in the household amongst male members and at the level of the market and state. These would include (but not limited to) investing in gender transformative programmes around perceived masculinities, investments in social and behavioural change information and communication at the community level, incentivizing community led demonstrative positive gender norms and role-modelling, provision of quality and subsidised creches at communities and workplaces.

PROVISION OF INFRASTRUCTURE AND OTHER PUBLIC GOODS AND SERVICES: The state needs to provide necessary infrastructure such as cheap and reliable public transport, regular and potable drinking water, provision of toilets, adequate lighting, quality creches, etc. These will also help facilitate redistribution of women's care burden, reducing time poverty and increasing access to skilling/up-skilling opportunities.

DISMANTLING GENDER NORMS

Identify actors and institutions which are primary barriers to women's access to skilling and economic opportunities. The CSOs and the community members can work in tandem to reduce normative barriers around women's access to skill opportunities and employment in NTLs. The state's roles in providing safe infrastructure (road, transport, lighting, etc.) and policies encouraging women to participate in NTLs can further help in dismantling gender norms and beliefs. This would entail suitable behavioural change communication and programmes directed towards reflection on masculinities, gender roles, power and privilege.

MITIGATING INCIDENCES OF GENDER – BASED VIOLENCE

This is critical for women to join any skilling programme or livelihood. Incidences and threat of violence in the four institutional spaces pose serious challenges for women and girls in terms of their mobility and ability to access information, skilling opportunities, ownership of assets, etc. Skilling in non-traditional livelihoods is a direct challenge to patriarchal notions and systems and hence there is constant threat of violence against the women who participate in the same. Skilling for women will not be successful unless interventions mitigating gender-based violence are put in place by various actors and across the four institutional spaces.

INCREASED ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION IN SKILLING AND EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

This would entail linkages to market, safe working places, decent work conditions, provision of social security benefits, grievance redressal mechanism. State policy directives which link women to skills and economic opportunities ensure women's participation in the labour force. Markets also play an important role in ensuring decent work conditions and diversity hiring to ensure women's economic empowerment. Reducing the gender digital divide will also help in improving women's access to information and awareness of rights, breaking of norms around use of technology and assets, etc which will help in improving access and participation in skilling and decent work

GENDER JUST AND GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE SKILLING INITIATIVES BY THE STATE

There are numerous skilling programmes run by the state and its machinery through various Ministries but these often to be gender blind or at best gender aware. In the last decade CSOs (especially members of the NTL Network) have demonstrated NTL skilling for (mostly) cis-gender women which are grounded in the principle of gender justice and aim at gender transformative society. However, these can be limited in scope and scale as skilling projects need additional investments to be effective and leading to desired outcomes of women's economic empowerment. CSR initiatives and state programmes in this domain by partnering with such CSOs which can help in terms of greater access, scale and sustenance.

REDUCING THE GAP BETWEEN SKILLING AND EMPLOYMENT

The wider the gap between the conclusion of skilling programmes and being placed in a job, the higher the probability of women dropping out of active employment. There is a need for CSOs, State and the Market to come together to avoid the long gap between skills training and employment. One way of doing this would be to have internship and/or placement opportunities in state run institutions. Internship, scholarship and placement tie-ups with large corporates can further help women from low-income communities to aspire and achieve decent work opportunities via NTL skilling.

BETTER INTEGRATION OF PROGRAMMES AND PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN CSOS, STATE AND THE MARKET

There are various skilling initiatives running in India which range from gender blind to at best gender responsive based on who is running the programme and the design of the programme. While the state and the private corporations have the resources to scale up, CSOs can provide programme designs which are gender transformative and can be adopted by the state. In recent times, CSOs are providing technical inputs and support to the government in running these programmes and introducing a rights-based feminist and gender just curriculum and methodology will help in pushing the envelope on gender transformative skilling for women, especially in non-traditional livelihoods.



Images: Archana Women's Centre

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Institute of Social Studies Trust

U.G. Floor, Core 6A, India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road, New Delhi-110003

Tel : +91-11-4768 2222 | Email : isstdel@isstindia.org

Website : www.isstindia.org