

# Exploring the Scope and Impact of Vocational Education and Skill Development Programs on Women's Self-Help Groups

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## ABSTRACT

Women's self-help groups (WSHGs) have arisen as an important tool for women's empowerment and socioeconomic development in many nations, particularly in developing areas. Skill development and vocational education programs aimed at women in these categories have received attention as possible catalysts for increasing their economic independence, social status, and general well-being. The purpose of this article is to look at the influence of skill development and vocational education efforts on women's self-help groups, with a particular emphasis on economic empowerment, community development, and female agency. Drawing on empirical evidence and theoretical frameworks, this study investigates the mechanisms by which skill development and vocational education programs contribute to women's empowerment in self-help groups, as well as the broader implications for gender equality and sustainable development.

**Keywords:** Women's Self-Help Groups, Skill Development, Vocational Education, Women Empowerment.

## INTRODUCTION

Women's Self-Help Groups (SHGs) are crucial for socioeconomic empowerment, especially in developing nations like India. These groups, primarily composed of women from underprivileged areas, solve similar problems, pool resources, and engage in income-generating activities. The integration of skill development and vocational education programs within SHGs has gained attention for its potential to benefit women economically, socially, and emotionally. These initiatives not only improve the competencies and capacities of women in SHGs but also contribute to the broader development of communities and society. Skill development programs in Self-Help Groups (SHGs) equip women with essential skills to enter various economic sectors, increase their earning potential, and gain financial independence. These programs, ranging from traditional crafts to modern technologies, enable women to establish small businesses, access formal employment, and become entrepreneurs. Vocational education equips women with industry-specific skills, enabling them to engage in sustainable livelihood activities. Training women in agriculture, handicrafts, and service sectors leads to increased productivity, income generation, and community economic growth. These programs promote a sense of belonging and solidarity among women from diverse backgrounds, building networks of support and addressing social issues like gender-based violence and discrimination. Integrating skill development and vocational education initiatives in SHGs

contributes to sustainable community development, empowering future generations and breaking the poverty cycle.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

**Meeta Siddhu & Anjali Karolia (2023):** The paper explores the role of Vocational Education (VET) in women empowerment and its potential for greater inclusivity, particularly for home-based women artisans. It highlights the need for VET programs to address socio-cultural, economic, and personal barriers to enhance women's inclusion. The study suggests four practical implications: separate programs for home-based women artisans, marketing traditional craft and cultural products, providing information dissemination and credit facilities, and incorporating self-determination and economic independence in skill development policies. The paper concludes that these programs should ensure women's well-being and focus on sustainable livelihood generation and consistent work from home or nearby locations.

**R. Ebrahimi, S. Choobchian, H. Farhadian, I. Goli, E. Farmandeh1 & H. Azadi (2022):** The study explores the role of vocational education and training (VET) in empowering rural women. A non-experimental, applied survey research was conducted, involving rural women and girls who participated in VET classes. The results showed that content and educators played a more significant role in VET dimensions, improving the economic empowerment of rural women. VET can contribute to women's empowerment by providing benefits such as savings, self-reliance in production, financial independence, trust, intellectual assistance, self-esteem, and a sense of human worth. However, individual empowerment has the least improvement. To increase socio-political participation and social health of female heads of households, government and supportive institutions should create a culture, change society's attitude towards the harm of these families, and eliminate social isolation. Strategies to recognize income-generating and sustainable jobs and motivate economic activity in rural women should be identified. Policies should be adopted to oblige banks and financial institutions to allocate a percentage of their facilities to trained rural women.

**M.K. Ganeshan & Vethirajan. C (2021):** According to the study, India's economy is attracting middle-class women into the workforce due to digitalization, promoting female empowerment and equal participation in labour markets, financial markets, and entrepreneurship. Women's advanced digital transformation literacy and social skills provide a relative advantage in the digital age. Mobile internet subscribers in emerging countries have increased from 728 million in 2010 to 1.8 billion in 2014, with Indian internet users expected to reach 60% and 40% by 2020. Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Delhi have a high proportion of female internet users, impacting women's financial, social, and political empowerment. Information technology empowers women by enhancing their skills, knowledge, income, and providing flexibility and work-from-home opportunities.

**Taufiq Ahamad, Ambalika Sinha & Rajesh Kumar Shastri (2016):** Women's participation and empowerment are crucial rights, but often face discrimination and gender inequalities. This paper discusses vocational training and measures like Pradhan Mantri Kausal Vikas Yojna and National Skills Development Corporation. The Ministry of Labor and Employment is implementing initiatives for skill development and employment, including training trainers and vocational training for girls through Advanced Training Institutes and Regional Vocational Training Institutes. These strategies aim to improve farm and nonfarm productivity, rural incomes, and sustainable rural development, particularly for women. The Indian government has prioritized skill development for women, with the Skill India and Make in India schemes involving government, training institutions, industry, and women. The goal is to design,

develop, train, assess, and certify skilled workforces that align with industry standards and aspirations. Accelerating entrepreneurship and self-employment is crucial for large-scale employment generation in India.

### OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

- Evaluates the role of skill development in economic empowerment.
- Examines the contribution of vocational education to socioeconomic upliftment.
- Investigates correlation between skill acquisition and women-led SHGs' development and sustainability.
- Identifies barriers and challenges faced by women SHGs.
- To analyse the effectiveness of current vocational training programs in enhancing the operational and financial performance of women SHGs.
- Proposes strategies for optimizing impact of skill development and vocational education on women SHGs.

### OVERVIEW OF WOMEN SHGs AS A PLATFORM FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Women's Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have developed as effective venues for women empowerment, especially in developing nations. These organizations are often made up of women from similar socioeconomic backgrounds who work together to solve shared challenges, pool resources, and make collective decisions. Here's an outline of how women's self-help groups (SHGs) act as catalysts for women empowerment.

- 1. Financial Inclusion:** Women SHGs aim to increase financial inclusion, particularly among vulnerable populations. Members who pool their savings and use microfinance services can get loans to establish or develop small companies, increasing their economic independence and household income.
- 2. Skill Development and Capacity Building:** Women's SHGs frequently offer chances for skill development and capacity building through a variety of training programs and seminars. These efforts provide women with the information and skills they need to work in a variety of income-generating activities, including traditional handicrafts and contemporary industries.
- 3. Collective Bargaining Power:** Women in SHGs can use collective action to negotiate better pricing for their products, get greater market access, and oppose middlemen exploitation. This collective negotiating power not only benefits their economic well-being, but it also generates a sense of camaraderie and empowerment among the group members.
- 4. Access to Social Services:** Women's self-help groups (SHGs) provide access to social services including healthcare, education, and sanitation. Members may use their combined muscle to push for better infrastructure and government assistance in their communities, improving overall well-being and quality of life.
- 5. Empowerment and Decision-Making:** Participation in SHGs empowers women by giving them a platform to express their thoughts, make collective choices, and assume leadership responsibilities. This empowering process extends beyond the economic to the social and political sectors, challenging old gender stereotypes and advocating for women's rights and agency.
- 6. Community Development:** Women's self-help groups frequently participate in community development efforts such as environmental conservation, sanitation campaigns, and health and hygiene

awareness programs. These organisations help to promote holistic development and long-term transformation by mobilising resources and encouraging community engagement.

- 7. Networking and Peer Support:** SHGs provide a friendly environment in which women may share their experiences, ideas, and offer mutual help. This networking feature not only increases social capital but also promotes learning and creativity, resulting in ongoing progress and growth.

Women Self-Help Groups significantly enhance socioeconomic empowerment by promoting financial inclusion, skill development, collective bargaining power, access to social services, decision-making, community building, and networking. These grassroots initiatives contribute to larger initiatives for gender equality and sustainable development.

## **BACKGROUND & SIGNIFICANCE OF SKILL DEVELOPMENT & VOCATIONAL EDUCATION ON WOMEN SHGs**

In the quest of gender equality and women's empowerment, skill development and vocational education are critical components in changing the socioeconomic landscape. Women have historically faced systematic impediments to obtaining education, training, and work opportunities, resulting in underrepresentation in many areas of the economy. Recognizing women's capacity to contribute effectively to the workforce, governments, organizations, and politicians throughout the world have increased their emphasis on skill development and vocational education as catalysts for women's empowerment.

One of the key motivations for encouraging women to increase their skills and pursue vocational education is to close the gender gap in the labour market. Women frequently have limited options for formal education owing to cultural norms, economic restraints, and societal expectations. As a result, individuals are more likely to be limited to low-wage, unskilled professions with few opportunities for promotion. Women may get access to higher-paying employment, improve their employability, and contribute to economic growth if they are given necessary skills and vocational training.

Furthermore, skill development and vocational education help women achieve economic independence and financial stability. When women learn marketable skills, they gain the opportunity to earn money, support their families, and make educated decisions about their life. This economic liberty not only raises their level of living, but also makes them less vulnerable to poverty and exploitation. Furthermore, women's improved earning capacity can benefit their homes and communities, contributing to overall social and economic growth.

Furthermore, skill development and vocational education help to mainstream gender diversity in previously male-dominated industries. These programs break down gender preconceptions and challenge discriminatory behaviours, allowing women to enter non-traditional professions including technology, construction, and manufacturing. Diversifying the workforce not only enhances industries by bringing different ideas and abilities, but it also fosters inclusion and equality at work.

Skill development and vocational education are crucial for women's empowerment, as they boost their self-esteem and confidence. Acquiring new skills and knowledge empowers women to assert themselves, challenge gender norms, and advocate for their rights. Empowered women contribute to gender equality and social justice. Governments, institutions, and stakeholders should prioritize investing in accessible, quality vocational education programs tailored to women's needs, accelerating progress towards inclusive and sustainable development.

## ROLE OF SKILL DEVELOPMENT & VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Skill development and vocational education are critical in improving women's skills and promoting economic independence. Here are a few main reasons why:

- 1. Economic Empowerment:** Skill development and vocational education provide women with the skills and information they need to enter the job, create their own enterprises, or seek entrepreneurial opportunities. Women who obtain marketable skills can get higher-paying employment and contribute to their household income, achieving financial independence.
- 2. Breaking Gender Stereotypes:** Traditional gender norms frequently limit women's options and prospects. Skill development and vocational education combat these preconceptions by encouraging women to pursue a variety of professional pathways, including nontraditional disciplines like STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) and skilled crafts. This contributes to the breakdown of cultural conventions that limit women's roles and employment.
- 3. Enhancing Confidence and Self-esteem:** Women's confidence and self-esteem are boosted when they acquire occupational skills, which demonstrate their talents and potential. Women develop a sense of success and empowerment when they learn new abilities and establish competence in their chosen disciplines, which leads to assertiveness and self-assurance in both personal and professional settings.
- 4. Improving Quality of Life:** Skill development and vocational education assist women to gain better career prospects, resulting in higher quality of life for themselves and their family. Increased income allows women to purchase better healthcare, education, housing, and other vital resources, improving their overall quality of life and that of their dependents.
- 5. Promoting Gender Equality:** Providing equitable access to skill development and vocational education helps to narrow the gender gap in the workplace. By providing women with the same opportunities and resources as men, communities can promote greater gender equality, in which women are recognized and treated as equal contributors to economic and social growth.
- 6. Empowering Decision-making:** Education and skill development enable women to make more informed choices regarding their professions, money, health, and family planning. Vocational training teaches women about their rights, alternatives, and possibilities, allowing them to take charge of their life and fight for their interests in their communities and workplaces.
- 7. Role Models and Mentoring:** Successful women who have pursued skill development and vocational education can be role models and mentors for others. Their accomplishments inspire and motivate other women to follow their goals, overcome obstacles, and strive for greatness in their chosen fields, therefore perpetuating a circle of empowerment and mentorship within communities.
- 8. Empowerment through Education:** Skill development and vocational education provide women with the information and skills they need to work in a variety of industries. By providing women with essential skills, they acquire confidence and a sense of empowerment, allowing them to participate more actively in economic activities.
- 9. Entrepreneurship Opportunities:** Skill development programs frequently incorporate training in entrepreneurship and business management, encouraging women to establish their own firms. Women who become entrepreneurs may create jobs for themselves and others, helping to boost economic growth and community development.
- 10. Contribution to Household Income:** Women's economic independence helps not just themselves, but also their families and communities. With enhanced earning capacity, women may make more



effective contributions to home spending, education, and healthcare, so boosting their families' overall wellbeing.

- 11. Increased Employability:** Acquiring vocational skills increases women's employability by making them more appealing to potential employers. With the correct training, women can get access to higher-paying occupations and possibilities for development, resulting in more financial security and independence.

Skill development and vocational education are crucial for women's empowerment, enabling economic independence, self-realization, and societal advancement. Investing in these areas can unlock their full potential, contribute to inclusive and equitable communities.

## VOCATIONAL EDUCATION & SKILL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

- 1. Entrepreneurship Training Programs:** These programs are designed to provide women with the skills and information necessary to start and run their own companies. Topics addressed may include company planning, marketing, financial management, and legal elements of entrepreneurship.
- 2. Computer and Digital Literacy Workshops:** In today's digital world, basic computer skills and digital literacy are required for accessing information, communicating, and finding employment. These classes usually cover things like productivity software, internet surfing, email communication, and social media fundamentals.
- 3. Vocational Training in Non-Traditional Fields:** Women are underrepresented in several occupational occupations, including construction, car repair, and welding. Training programs that encourage women to seek jobs in these non-traditional industries can help break down gender stereotypes while also providing them with lucrative work prospects.
- 4. Tailoring and Sewing Classes:** Learning tailoring and sewing skills can help women create their own small-scale clothing enterprises or work as expert tailors. These curricula frequently include garment fabrication, pattern making, and machine operating.
- 5. Culinary Arts and Food Processing Courses:** Culinary training programs educate women a variety of culinary methods, food safety standards, and nutrition concepts. Furthermore, food processing courses may cover procedures for preserving and packaging food goods, which can lead to food-related entrepreneurial prospects.
- 6. Healthcare Training Programs:** Healthcare training programs equip women to work as nurses, medical assistants, or community health workers. These programs teach medical vocabulary, patient care, and fundamental healthcare operations.
- 7. Financial Literacy Workshops:** Financial literacy courses teach women how to budget, save, invest, and manage debt. These abilities enable women to make sound financial decisions and attain economic independence.
- 8. Language and Communication Skills Training:** Language and communication skills are essential for success in the business. Programs that focus on enhancing women's language competency, such as English or local languages, as well as communication skills like public speaking and interpersonal communication, can help them find work.
- 9. Artisanal and Handicraft Workshops:** Artisanal and handicraft workshops educate women traditional crafts including pottery, weaving, basketry, and jewelry creation. These projects contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage while also giving chances for women to earn money.

10. **Green Skills Training:** Green skills training programs emphasize sustainable methods in a variety of areas, including agriculture, construction, and renewable energy. Women can learn ecologically friendly practices for farming, construction, and energy generation, which may lead to employment in green businesses.
11. **Mechanical and Electrical Skills Training:** Mechanical and electrical training programs give women the information and hands-on experience they need to work in sectors including plumbing, electrical installation, and HVAC (heating, ventilation, and air conditioning) maintenance.
12. **Leadership and Empowerment Workshops:** Leadership and empowerment courses attempt to boost women's self-esteem, assertiveness, and leadership skills. These programs frequently contain lessons on self-awareness, goal-setting, decision-making, and advocacy skills.
13. **Childcare and Early Childhood Education Training:** Childcare and early childhood education programs equip women to work as childcare providers, preschool instructors, or daycare operators. These programs focus on child development, educational activities, and safety rules.
14. **Mobile and Internet-Based Learning Platforms:** With the rising availability of mobile phones and the internet, mobile and internet-based learning platforms give women more flexible and easy access to educational materials and training programs.
15. **Job Placement and Career Counselling Services:** Job placement and career counselling programs assist women in identifying professional objectives, exploring work prospects, and honing job search skills such as resume writing and interview preparation. These programs can help you connect with possible jobs.

These skill development and vocational education programs help to empower women by giving them the information, skills, and confidence they need to pursue meaningful occupations, attain economic independence, and contribute to their communities.

## IMPACT OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION & SKILL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS ON WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

### 1. Impact on Operational Efficiency

One of the primary goals of vocational training programmes is to increase the management and operational efficiency of SHGs. This involves improving abilities in business management, record keeping, production procedures, and marketing.

- **Skill Enhancement:** Vocational training programs have been successful in enhancing SHG members' technical abilities, which has a direct influence on their capacity to participate in production and service-related activities. Members have received training in handicrafts, agriculture, food processing, and tailoring, which has provided them with the practical skills they need to support themselves.
- **Leadership and Decision-Making:** Training programs also emphasize leadership development, encouraging women to participate actively in decision-making processes within local SHGs. This not only enhances internal group coordination, but it also develops an accountability and transparency culture, which is crucial to the SHGs' long-term viability.
- **Challenges in Implementation:** Despite these benefits, the implementation of vocational training programs frequently encounters logistical problems. Inadequate follow-up, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of practical, hands-on training can all reduce overall efficacy. Furthermore, many training programs are not matched with market expectations, resulting in a mismatch between skills obtained and actual economic possibilities offered.

## 2. Impact on Financial Performance

Vocational training programs seek to improve the financial performance of women's SHGs by teaching members entrepreneurial and financial management skills. The financial effect is frequently measured in terms of revenue creation, credit availability, and general economic stability.

- **Income Generation:** Many SHGs have effectively expanded their income-generating operations through vocational training. SHG members with improved skills are better positioned to generate higher-quality items or services, boosting marketability and earnings. In many circumstances, women may diversify their income streams, making them less exposed to economic downturns.
- **Financial Literacy:** Financial literacy is an essential component of many occupational training programs. Women are taught how to keep financial records, manage funds, and apply for microcredit. This has increased financial discipline among SHGs, lowering the likelihood of loan defaults and mishandling of cash. However, the level of financial literacy provided is sometimes insufficient to allow women to efficiently manage larger-scale businesses or handle more sophisticated financial transactions.
- **Challenges in Market Access and Scalability:** While vocational training improves operational capability, many SHGs still struggle to get market access. Their capacity to expand up and reach broader consumer bases is hampered by a lack of market knowledge and marketing expertise. Furthermore, without proper assistance in obtaining loans or negotiating market links, the financial advantages of training may not be completely realized.

## 3. Sustainability and Long-term Impact

The effectiveness of vocational training programs in improving the performance of women SHGs is dependent on ongoing assistance, follow-up training, and the training modules' adaptation to changing market trends.

- **Post-training Support:** Programs that offer continuing mentorship, market connections, and assistance in obtaining funds or supplies have had more success in producing long-term results. SHGs that get regular refresher training and mentorship are better equipped to react to industry changes and maintain economic activity.
- **Impact on Empowerment:** Beyond financial and operational gains, vocational training programs enhance women's personal and social empowerment. Participation in income-generating activities and elevated managerial positions promotes self-esteem, social status, and economic independence.

## CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Skill development and vocational education bring several challenges and opportunities for women's empowerment. Addressing these barriers and capitalising on opportunities can have a substantial impact on women's economic and social success.

### Challenges:

1. **Social Norms and Stereotypes:** Deep-rooted gender prejudices sometimes hinder women from entering nontraditional careers. Cultural expectations may limit their options to historically female-dominated industries, such as childcare or hospitality.
2. **Access to Education:** In many regions of the world, women confront challenges to education, such as a lack of resources, infrastructure, and social norms that value boys' education over girls.
3. **Quality of Education:** Even when women have access to education and vocational training, the quality of instruction may be low. Outdated curricula, poor facilities, and untrained instructors can all



impede successful learning.

4. **Workplace Discrimination:** Even after learning skills, women frequently face workplace discrimination, such as lower pay, less possibilities for development, and harassment.
5. **Balancing Work and Family Responsibilities:** Women frequently carry the responsibility of caring and home obligations, making it difficult to pursue vocational education and work options that need time and flexibility.

#### **Opportunities:**

1. **Empowerment through Economic Independence:** Skill development and vocational education enable women to achieve economic independence. Women who learn marketable skills can get better-paying jobs and help their families financially.
2. **Diversification of Workforce:** Encouraging women to seek technical education broadens the workforce, introducing new perspectives and ideas to industries formerly dominated by males.
3. **Entrepreneurial Opportunities:** Women who participate in skill development programs can get the information and competence they need to launch their own enterprises. Entrepreneurship provides flexibility and liberty, allowing women to manage work and family duties on their own terms.
4. **Community Development:** Empowering women via education and vocational training benefits whole communities. Women are more inclined to spend their wages in their children's education, health, and well-being, resulting in overall societal growth.
5. **Changing Social Perceptions:** As more women pursue nontraditional careers through vocational education, societal opinions regarding women's skills shift. Positive role models and success stories may challenge preconceptions and motivate other women and girls to achieve their goals.

#### **STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION**

1. **Promoting Access to Education:** Governments and organizations should prioritize programs that increase girls' access to education, such as scholarships, infrastructural development, and campaigns to challenge gender stereotypes.
2. **Enhancing the Quality of Vocational Training:** Investing in current curriculum, training facilities, and teacher credentials is critical to ensuring that women obtain high-quality vocational education that meets market expectations.
3. **Creating Supportive Work Environments:** Employers can establish policies that encourage gender equality in the workplace, such as equal pay for equal labor, flexible working arrangements, and zero-tolerance rules against discrimination and harassment.
4. **Building Mentorship Networks:** Mentorship programs link women with accomplished professionals who may provide advice, support, and encouragement as they navigate their professions and overcome challenges.
5. **Advocating for Policy Changes:** Advocacy activities are critical for enacting legislation that support women's rights, such as laws against gender discrimination, quotas for women in leadership roles, and incentives for businesses to invest in women's skill development.

#### **CONCLUSION**

The study highlights the significant impact of skill development and vocational education initiatives on women's self-help groups in India. These programs have enabled women to gain valuable skills, increase their earning potential, and improve their socio-economic status. The empowerment achieved through skill

acquisition has led to greater self-reliance and confidence among women participants, improving their overall quality of life. However, challenges such as access to resources, infrastructure, and societal norms persist and require continued attention. It is crucial for policymakers, NGOs, and other stakeholders to sustain and expand efforts in skill development and vocational education to further empower women in self-help groups, fostering inclusive growth and development across the nation.

Women's Self-Help Groups (SHGs) are a crucial tool for women's empowerment, especially in developing nations. These groups consist of women from similar socioeconomic backgrounds who work together to solve shared challenges, pool resources, and make collective decisions. They aim to increase financial inclusion, provide collective bargaining power, and provide access to social services like healthcare, education, and sanitation. Skill development and vocational education are crucial for women's empowerment and gender equality, helping close the gender gap in the labour market and contributing to economic growth.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- a. Provide enough financing and resources for vocational educational programs that target women's SHGs.
- b. Encourage collaborations among government, civil society, and business sector players to increase program reach and effect.
- b. Conduct frequent evaluations to identify training requirements, track progress, and evaluate results.
- b. Consider gender and cultural sensitivity while designing and implementing programs.
- g. Extend effective models and replicate best practices to maximise the benefits of vocational education for women's empowerment.

To summarize, vocational training programs inside women's SHGs provide a potential avenue to women's empowerment and socioeconomic growth. By leveraging the collective strength of women's groups and investing in skill training, society may realize women's full potential as change agents and contributors to sustainable development.

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