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Skill development for poor urban women

K. Prasada Rao

'Women constitute half the population and are critical to the production and social process of the economy. They have been managing and supporting the survival systems, particularly in the case of the poor households constituting about 30 per cent of the population. The programmes for alleviation of poverty should thus have a strong focus on development of women. In the Eighth Plan, women will be accorded a special role in the scheme of mobilisation of local skills and resources. With this end in view, ... measures towards training for skill formation, and increasing access to productive assets and other resources will be intensified. The first step is a recognition of the dignity of women's work and a proper understanding of its dimensions and contribution in the Indian context.'

2. Keeping in view the social responsibility of providing gainful employment to the urban poor women, several schemes have been initiated by the Central and Provincial Governments in India during the last four decades of planned development. Thus, a scheme for setting up of employment and income generating production units by women was started in 1982-83. Under the scheme, women belonging to the less privileged sections of the society are being trained to upgrade their skills and are being encouraged to set up tiny production units. In the following paragraphs, an attempt is made to analyse a skill development programme envisaged to impart short duration training in leather goods (due to higher market price leather has been substituted by rexine and canvas material) to urban poor women in the Twin cities of Hyderabad-Secunderabad, the Provincial capital city of Andhra Pradesh, India.

3. The Small Industries Service Institute of the Ministry of Industry, Government of India, Hyderabad is involved in skill upgradation of the rural and urban artisans in the State in trades like leather goods, carpentry, scientific glass equipment making, steel furniture, soaps and detergents making, screen printing, phenyle formulations, candle making, scented hair oils making and a host of other trades. To impart such skill training, the Institute has three Mobile Workshop Vans, besides other facilities, which are moved to places where the training is to be imparted along with the master trainers. Duration of the trainings range from two weeks to fourteen weeks depending on the trade and the training requirements of the beneficiaries. In most of the training programmes Non-Governmental Organisations are being

encouraged to mobilise the beneficiaries, to effectively supervise the training programmes, to coordinate with various Government Departments and Financial Institutions connected with the training programmes and setting up of small production units and also to help sale of the produced items. The women identified to receive such trainings are mostly persons with lesser educational qualifications, who otherwise have limited or no opportunities to secure wage employment in the organised or unorganised sectors, but are willing to utilise their leisure time for a productive activity. In all such programmes preference is given to those whose per capita family income is relatively lower. Usually a group of about 25 persons are selected at a time and each person is granted a monthly stipend of Rs.100 to meet incidentals. Raw materials worth Rs.6500 required for the entire group of 25 persons for the entire period of training are supplied by Government Departments at the local level, that is, the District Rural Development Agencies, District Offices of the Scheduled Caste Finance Corporation and at times the Voluntary Organisations sponsoring the programme. After completion of the training, individuals are being encouraged to set up small production units to be located either in their homes or in a central place in their respective localities.

4. The Training Programme for improving the skills of two groups of urban poor women, one located in the southern part of Hyderabad City and the other located in the northern part of the city, have been identified to elicit information about the progress made after receiving training. The group identified in the northern part of the city at Kushaiguda received about 14 weeks training and they have already established their small production units in their homes. Each individual was given assistance of Rs.5064/- for purchase of a heavy duty machine which can be used for stitching of leather, canvas and, rexine goods. The State Bank of Hyderabad and Andhra Pradesh State Scheduled Castes Cooperative Finance Corporation have totally financed the production units without any contribution from the promoters. All the beneficiaries have been working in their respective homes since August 1989 for producing various items like school bags, cash bags, school belts, bicycle seat covers, air-bags, vanity bags and a variety of other items required by the customers in the city. The second group located at Jahanuma completed their training programme in the month of February, 1990 and is in the pro-

cess of acquiring loans from the Minority Finance Corporation for margin money and one of the Public Sector Banks for the balance amount of the loan. As a follow up measure to ascertain the status of the two groups of women trained, 22 out of 47 beneficiaries have been identified. Details regarding their educational qualification, previous experience in the trade, marital status, family size, training details, family employment and income, details of loans obtained, production details, marketing of the goods produced, problems confronted by the beneficiaries in obtaining loans and their future plans have been obtained. The benefits accrued after the training and after setting up of the production units are analysed below:

Marital and Educational Status:

5. Out of the 22 respondents, 9 women were married and have varying responsibilities like attending to cooking, house keeping, child rearing and other family responsibilities. All of them reported leisure time available and were in a position to utilise their leisure time to participate in income generating activity. Although 8 out of the 22 respondents were already trained by their respective voluntary organisations for a period of one year in tailoring and embroidery, all of them stated that such training has been marginally useful and they have not been able to utilise the skill due to competition from well established units in the city. Out of the 22 beneficiaries, 2 were illiterates, 8 had primary education, 9 studied upto secondary level and 2 studied upto higher secondary level, but all of them could acquire the skill satisfactorily.

Employment and Income:

6. Family size, number of working members in the family and per capita income of all the respondent families as on the date of investigation is detailed below:

Sl. No.	Range of family members	No. of working members	No. of families	Per capita income per month (in Rs.)
1.	2-5	1.5	8	252
2.	6-7	2.0	4	189
3.	8-10	2.0	10	92

7. For the entire group of 22 families, the average per capita income was Rs.168/-per month. Thus, all of them required income generating activity in order to supplement their family income. On an average, only 1.8 persons in all the 22 responding families have been employed in the organised as well as unorganised sectors and a large potential has been found in the responding families for supplementary occupations.

8. In the bigger size families responding, the average number of working members in the organised and unorganised sectors put together, accounted for only two and their average per capita income has been the lowest, that is, Rs.92/-per month making it extremely difficult to meet their daily requirement for survival. In the group where the number of family members were between 6 and 7 there were two working members only and others were school going children and dependent relatives. Since the family size has been relatively lower the per capita in-

come of the middle group was nearly double compared to the bigger size families. Though this group do not suffer from grinding poverty, all the families expressed their desire to have additional incomes to meet expenditure on school going children and to support their dependent relatives. At serial No.1 where number of family members do not exceed five, although 1.5 persons have been employed, their per capita income has been Rs.252/-. But this group also expressed their desire to have additional incomes to have better clothing and better food.

9. After training, 15 out of 22 beneficiaries reported incremental income ranging between Rs.35 and Rs.500 per month. 10 out of the 22 beneficiaries had an income ranging between Rs.100 and Rs.500 per month and 5 of them had income below Rs.100/- per month. 7 of the beneficiaries reported Nil income during the month of investigation. Out of the 22 respondents, 10 of them have already established their production units and the others have been doing job works, mainly school uniforms on the machines supplied by their voluntary organisation. However, Nil income has been reported by those women who did not possess the machines and margin money to purchase raw-materials.

Production and Marketing

10. Those who have already obtained machines and margin money to start productive activity have all been working to produce school bags, cash bags, bicycle seat covers, travel goods et cetera. Out of 10 persons having machines, 7 have reported that they have been working for 2 to 3 hours in a day on an average. The items produced by them were also of satisfactory quality and some of them have been manufacturing items as per their customer's requirements.

11. The production units set up in the homes of beneficiaries had the initial advantage of selling various items produced in their respective urban localities. Many of their neighbours purchased those items directly from the production units as the prices were lower compared to the prices prevailing in the retail markets. However, six months after starting of their units, the local demand gradually came down and many of them reported that they have been attending to repair jobs only. But all the 10 women who started their production units have continued to utilise their skills with varying degrees of success. Seven of them reported sales during the month of investigation but all of them stated that the consumers visit the production units to buy the latter's requirements. Three out of the ten respondents reported Nil sales during the month of investigation and requested for marketing support from outside Agencies. Lack of adequate work load to the production units could be attributed to organisational deficiencies. Although the Kusahaiguda group initially planned that their group leader would be involved to act as a Commission Agent for procuring bulk orders from Institutions and Wholesalers in the city and purchase the required raw-materials in bulk at economical prices, they deviated from their initial understanding and started working in their production units purely on an individual basis. Consequently, the group could not derive the expected advantages like procuring of raw/materials at economical prices and securing bulk orders from Institutions and Wholesalers. Besides, the group leader who was expected to work on a commi-

ssion basis and initially mobilised the women for training could not participate in the group activity. As a result, the individual production units suffered due to lack of orders since none worked on their behalf to go round the city markets to book bulk orders. Further more, the women beneficiaries, due to lack of individual mobility, remained passive and were only waiting for orders. In the Jahanuma group of women whose loans are yet to be sanctioned, some have been working on the machines owned by their voluntary organisation who also have been organising the sale of goods produced. They mainly produced school uniforms since they received one year training in ready made garments making. But all the 12 respondents belonging to the group who did not start their production units have organised a cooperative and propose to set up a cooperative venture with six machines in the beginning to produce items like school bags, travel bags and other items of mass consumption. Accordingly, the 27 member group of women contributed Rs.200 each as membership fees along with a monthly contribution of Rs.10 per beneficiary. As on the date of investigation they accumulated an amount of Rs.6500 for the proposed production centre. They also have elected an Executive Committee to organise the Centres activities such as purchase of raw materials in bulk and procuring orders from bulk purchasers. Initially they propose to set up six individual production units under one roof with a project cost of Rs.8000 each which are expected to provide direct employment to 12 beneficiaries. Each beneficiary is expected to receive a monthly salary of Rs.450 besides an annual profit of Rs.10,740 per production unit.

Conclusions:----

From the experience of the two training programmes organised, the following conclusions could be arrived at:

1. The two groups of women with varying degrees of skill and educational background became skilled in a short period.
2. The skill training received by the beneficiaries has been quite useful compared to the skills they already possessed and all of them were keen to utilise their skill to realise additional income to supplement their family incomes.
3. Besides their family responsibilities, all the urban poor women had leisure time to participate in income generating activities and those who established their production units could work for 2 to 3 hours during the day.
4. Significant additional incomes could be realised when production units were set up.
5. After the skill training, women became aware of their potential and made efforts to save and contribute marginal amount of their family incomes with an expectation to realise additional income and employment.

Thus, short duration skill development programmes for urban poor women through Non-Governmental Organisations can bring about dramatic changes in the lives of the urban poor families. With a relatively smaller investment for setting up of tiny production units,

the benefits are likely to be quite significant. Women with varying degrees of family responsibilities can make use of their leisure time for productive activity to augment their family incomes. Furthermore, low income countries, facing capital scarcity, can spread economic and social benefits to a greater number of families with a relatively low investment.

REFERENCE:

1. Approach to Eighth Five Year Plan 1990-95 (Meeting of the National Development Council 18-19 June 1990) PP 27-28 : Planning Commission, Government of India (May 1990)

