

SKILL DEVELOPMENT AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT:A GENDERED ASSESSMENT OF P.M.K.V.Y.

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ABSTRACT

Although the skill gap in India is a massive contributor to its economic and social disparity, it becomes further problematic when we consider the gender gap among skilled and unskilled women and men. Most development initiatives in India struggle to effectively reach women, particularly in rural areas. '*Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojna*', with its aim of creating the largest skilled youth force in the world, has made significant efforts towards the inclusivity of women, achieving a near gender parity in its number of trainees (50.75% male and 49.2% female participants). Yet, training alone does not guarantee improved livelihoods unless skills translate into sustainable employment.

This research paper will seek to critically evaluate how far PMKVY has fulfilled its objective of women's empowerment and what are some of the gaps in its functioning. India experienced a significant challenge with a low and declining female labor force participation rate (FLFPR), which fell from 34.94% in 2005 to 26.97% in 2018. This trend can be a massive hindrance in India's realization of the UNSDGs, specifically those which focus on gender parity and decent economic growth. This paper will draw insights from PMKVY primary (Govt. of India websites) and secondary data (literature review) to assess its impact towards bridging this gap.

Keywords: Demographic, Dividend, Empowerment, Respondents, etc.

“ \$1 trillion, that is the amount of money that can be added to India's economy, simply if India is able to mimic the FLFPR growth rate of Nepal (according to McKinsey Global Institute report 2015)”¹. With most of the Indian women population being engaged in its informal economy (low-skill, low-paying jobs with little social protection or job security), the potential of women remains unrealized by a huge margin. With the aim of creating one of the largest skilled youth forces in India, PMKVY has tried desperately to bridge this gap as much as possible because up-skilling youngsters is one problem but up-skilling women who are confined by societal obligations is a much bigger contemporary issue. It must not be stated that the position of women in India has not improved over the past 5 - 7 decades since

independence, but the acknowledgement that there are still many changes that need to take place is essential to policy development.

“India’s ‘demographic dividend’ (total youth population under 25 years of age) is one of the largest in the world, with over 54% of its population under that category, making the potential of this *demographic dividend* unimaginable but only if it is properly utilized”². Women in India not only face challenges from their household but from the outside world as well. They are judged, belittled, unduly underestimated and held back from opportunities that cause them to leave their homes. Dr. Meena Nair, et al. insightfully pointed out, “These barriers (gender biased beliefs, post marital gender roles and menstruation norms) constrain women’s agency and choice, and decisions pertinent to them are instead determined by household dynamics, workplace and societal structures.”³

Hence, it becomes undeniably important to scrutinize the prevalent government initiatives aimed towards a better future, in light of the gendered gap that exists in society. ‘*Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojna*’ started on July 15th 2015 (World Youth Skill Day) is one of the most nationally relevant government initiatives that aims to increase the number of skilled workers in India and empower them to become self-reliant. The initiative not only encourages people to enroll but also actively incentivizes them by giving them monetary reward upon successful completion of their training. PMKVY is “intended to address the gaps between demand and supply by providing relevant skill development trainings. The policy aims at providing the right set of skills to the youths that can make them employable in the industry.”

Teaching marketable skills and providing placement assistance to women not only allows them to explore new avenues in today’s globalised world but also ensures that they will, in turn, encourage other women to do the same. Women are not often empowered in isolation; when one is educated, she ensures that others have access to the same privileges as her. Dr. Rohit Bansal comments on the skill development of women stating:

“The skill development projects can achieve full potential only when it enhances employability by breaking the gender stereotypes and also help them move into higher skilled tasks by focusing on improving lives of women and not just livelihoods. In order to encourage greater number of women to enrol for skill development programmes, the combined efforts with local NGOs and Panchayats on informing women and their families on the advantages of skill development and vocational education is very important.”⁵

Another challenge in India is the informal economy, where most of the women of India work without any measure of job security or prospects of growth. Globally, more men are employed in informal work rather than women but in India this disparity is perhaps too wide for their growth:

“94 percent of women workers are in the informal sectors, working as daily-wage agricultural labourers, at construction sites, as self-employed micro-entrepreneurs, or engaged in home-based work. Gender discrimination is more severe in the informal sector than in the formal sector, with women informal workers receiving less than half the male wage rate.”⁶

In lieu of these challenges, it becomes exponentially important to critically evaluate the success or pitfalls of the PMKVY since its inception in 2015. Implemented by the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) under the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE), PMVY has undeniably been a very important part of the Skill India initiative meant to provide industry relevant skills to Indian youth. “As of November 2021, approximately 4.8 million women had been trained by PMKVY”⁷.

The National Skill Development Policy, which employs PMKVY, focuses not only skill development but an inclusive skill development and increased women's participation for better economic productivity. It enables equitable access to training centers by incentivizing men and women alike to pursue formal training. While the traditional skill development models focus on providing women skills pertaining to traditional sectors like apparel, beauty, wellness, and healthcare. Such a limitation applies to PMKVY as well, “women continue to be skilled in feminized sectors - courses for women under PMKVY, for instance, have concentrated on areas like apparel, beauty, wellness, and healthcare – sectors which are low paying:

Only 37 percent of female enrolments between 2014 and 2018 were in the priority sectors identified by the MSDE—i.e., those expected to generate the maximum jobs in the future. There were hardly any women taking courses in sectors such as construction and real estate, transportation and logistics, electronics, IT hardware, the auto industry, or the pharma industry”⁸

But while there are limitations, PMKVY atleast offers an opportunity for women to enroll in non- traditional courses that can potentially help in changing their future. Apart from PMKVY, there are also other government initiatives that are aimed at bridging the gender gap in terms of skills and employment which also have a reservation for women. The Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushal Yojana (DDU-GKY) along with training institutes like ITI has a reservation for women and specific provisions to enhance their impact. “The Jan Shikshan Sansthan focuses heavily on skilling non-literate individuals and school dropouts, especially women, with 90% female trainees”⁹.

At times, it is not enough to simply provide opportunities for women; initiatives must also be adapted to ensure better accessibility for them. Women in India do not face oppression from merely one or two factors but there are countless obstacles that they must overcome in order to achieve their objectives. Hence, when any initiative is created for the betterment of the entire nation with specific emphasis on women empowerment, due diligence must be done before policy formulation so that women are properly incorporated based on their specific needs. In PMKVY:

“emphasis has been laid on creating additional infrastructure both for training and apprenticeship for women; flexible training delivery mechanisms such as mobile training units, flexible afternoon batches along with on local need-based training to accommodate women; and ensuring safe and gender sensitive training environment, employment of women trainers, equity in remuneration, and complaint redressal mechanism.”¹⁰

Policy formulation and initiative implementation is not something that the government can do in isolation without consulting other agencies that work with the people whom they wish to empower like NGOs. Hence, PMKVY also works with other institutions that can allow them to better serve the community. For instance:

“Under a PMKVY venture, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham is focusing on remote towns to foster women’s empowerment through skill development... The project has been implemented in collaboration with organizations such as HumaraBachpan Trust, Industree Crafts Foundation, and Youthnet Home Stay Project to create employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for women in economically disadvantaged communities.”¹¹

PMKVY also faces certain limitations when it comes to job placements because even after providing the requisite skills to its participants, the data for actual job placement is lower than expected. For example: “In 2020 -21; 348,000 candidates were trained under PMKVY in

2020-21 but only 16,321 of them were placed in jobs.”¹² Furthermore, survey data reveals that: “only 47% of respondents reported securing jobs directly related to their PMKVY training. However, a notable 73% still acknowledged benefiting from the program, citing gains such as enhanced skills, broader employment prospects, and, most significantly, an increase in self-esteem”.¹³

Inculcating women in India’s skilled workforce offers immense potential for its economy with studies suggesting an addition of 1 Trillion to the Indian economy, giving way to countless future developments. PMKVY, as a flagship initiative under the Skill India Mission, has been working tirelessly with the youth of India to imbibe them with industry relevant skills that can make them market ready for a stable job. The initiative not only offers training to individuals but also includes specific adjustments to make it more accessible to women who wish to change their lives.

However, PMKVY still has certain limitations that it must transcend before it can truly be called a success because many people report a problem in job placement. Skill training is an imperative part of finding a job but participants still require help with job placement, making them somewhat reliant on the systems help.

Additionally, the number of women in traditional, low-paying sectors under PMKVY reflects broader societal stereotypes that continue to limit women’s economic mobility. A strive towards encouraging women to enroll in non traditional courses that are high in demand like IT and AI is essential in order to promote their future well being because traditional jobs might become obsolete soon.

Ultimately, PMKVY’s success evaluation makes it clear that merely skill development is not sufficient to achieve the objective of overall self reliance. It requires a holistic approach, one that is adjusted to the special requirements of the youth of today and which enables individuals towards self development in due course of time. To truly unlock the potential of India’s ‘demographic dividend’ it becomes essential that the government keeps adapting its initiatives in order to make them accessible to both men and women, ensuring the full utilization of resources.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We are highly thankful to ICSSR for sanctioning & funding the Short-term Empirical Research Project entitled “**An Assessment of Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana: The Revival of Gandhian Model of Entrepreneurship: A multi-site study of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi NCR**”. The major findings of this present paper are based on the above said project.

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