



Monthly newsletter on issues of sustainable development

DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVES



Graduation ceremony at our Skill Development Centre in Jaipur, Rajasthan

Growth and Beyond through Capacity Building

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The views expressed in the articles in this newsletter are those of the authors and not necessarily those of Development Alternatives.

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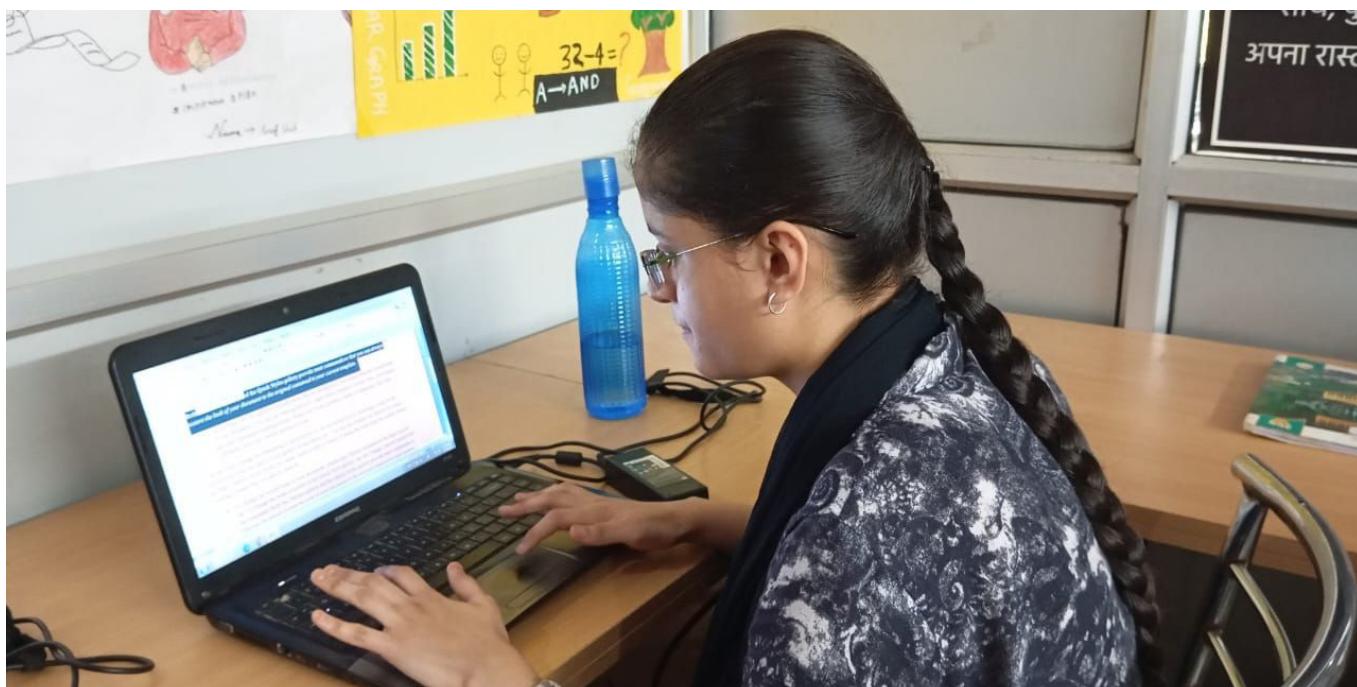
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Youth Skills Development: Pathway to Peaceful Co-existence



Promoting economic empowerment through Skills to Livelihood programme

In today's rapidly evolving world, the role of youth in shaping the future cannot be understated. With their energy, creativity and passion, the youth hold immense potential to drive and foster sustainable development. However, harnessing this potential requires equipping them with the necessary skills to navigate the issues of their family background, peer competition and market access. As we strive to build inclusive and resilient societies, investing in youth skills development emerges as essential.

The global landscape is witnessing profound transformations driven by technological advancements, economic shifts and social changes. In this dynamic environment, traditional education systems often fall short in adequately preparing young people for the demands of the 21st-century workforce. Many youths find themselves lacking the skills required to thrive in a competitive job market or to pursue entrepreneurial ventures. Moreover, marginalised communities often face additional barriers to accessing quality education and skill-building opportunities.

Recognising these challenges, the Society for Development Alternatives is committed to promoting economic empowerment through our Skills to Livelihood Programme. By equipping young people with technical, vocational and soft skills, we have been unlocking their potential for personal growth

and empowering them to contribute meaningfully to their communities and society at large.

In our programme at one of our centres in Sonapat, Haryana, we have enrolled 1,080 students. Out of these, 968 have completed their training and 264 have been placed in jobs so far.

Skill development is not just about technical proficiency; it also encompasses critical thinking, problem-solving, communication and interpersonal skills. Through experiential learning opportunities and mentorship programmes, we empower youth to become agents of change in their spheres of influence.

As we look towards the future, the imperative of investing in youth skills development becomes even more pronounced. The challenges of climate change, rapid urbanisation and the digital revolution require innovative solutions and visionary leadership. By equipping young people with the skills, knowledge and confidence to tackle these challenges, we secure their future prosperity and pave the way for a more just, inclusive and a world where humans and nature can co-exist. □

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Empowering Women: From Skills to Enterprise



Tailoring classes at Mukimpur, Haryana

The twenty-first century presents a significant transformation opportunity for India. With the goal of becoming a net-zero carbon economy by 2070 and energy independent by 2047, the hundredth year of Indian independence [1], India has identified energy transition and climate action as key priority areas. A holistic green growth model, powered by innovation and entrepreneurship, will be the pathway for India to truly succeed in this transformation.

Empowering women through skill development is essential for fostering economic growth and promoting gender equality. However, women often face significant challenges that hinder their participation in such programmes. These challenges include safety concerns while traveling to distant training centres, restrictions on working with men and societal and transport barriers. Addressing these obstacles by bringing training facilities to local villages can have a transformative impact. It enables women to acquire skills, start businesses and achieve economic independence.

At Development Alternatives, the Skills to Livelihoods project in Sonipat demonstrates the effectiveness of establishing satellite training centres within villages. These centres enable women to acquire skills

and knowledge without having to travel long distances. They are designed to be safe and culturally sensitive environments, offering courses in various skills such as tailoring, beautician, computer literacy and entrepreneurship. It is crucial to engage community leaders and families in order to gain support for women's participation as community awareness campaigns help shift societal attitudes towards women's education and employment. Additionally, offering training sessions at different times of the day accommodates women's responsibilities at home, with evening or weekend classes being particularly beneficial.



Graduation ceremony at Sonipat centre, Haryana

Collaborating with local businesses creates internship and employment opportunities for women who complete their training. With places having access to internet, online courses can compliment in-person training. For example, in Lalitpur, the *Fayedde Ki Ghanti* programme provided solutions for functional literacy, women empowerment and digital and financial literacy. To ensure women have access to digital literacy, training can open numerous opportunities for remote work and expand their employment options. Regularly assessing the impact of training programmes and seeking feedback from participants helps refine and improve these initiatives. ***Sapna, a 30-year-old resident of Nanaura village, exemplifies the success of these programmes. Initially uncomfortable with technology, she joined the Fayedde Ki Ghanti classes and gained confidence with these gadgets. She then enrolled in a grassroots***



Bill collection by our vidhyut sakhis

journalism course, which further boosted her confidence. Her story has been picked up by the Observer Research Foundation (ORF) to demonstrate how bridging the technology gender divide has helped the entire society to leap forward. After completing their training, women like Sapna are equipped with the skills to start their own enterprises or secure employment, providing them with a source of income and contributing to the local economy.

Over the last decade, we at Development Alternatives have empowered approximately 22,000 women through our Skills to Livelihood programme. Some of these

women have started small businesses such as tailoring shops, handicraft stores and food stalls, catering to local needs and inspiring other women in the community to pursue similar paths. Others have found employment in local industries, companies, schools and health centres, diversifying the local job market and increasing economic activity in the village. This demonstrates that financial independence empowers women, giving them greater control over their lives and contributing to their families' well-being, which is a crucial step towards broader gender equality.

Numerous success stories demonstrate the positive impact of localised skill development programmes. For instance, ***Nisha, a 29-year-old housewife from Jajjal village in Sonipat, faced mobility issues that prevented her from pursuing her passion for tailoring. When a livelihood centre opened in her village, she enrolled in a three-month tailoring course. After completing the course, she started her own tailoring business and earns INR 5,000 per month. Nisha's journey illustrates how the Livelihood Centre helped her overcome mobility challenges and achieve financial independence.***

Despite successes, challenges such as sustained funding, societal resistance and expanding training centres remain. Continuous funding is essential for trainers, equipment and facilities, and programmes must stay culturally sensitive and adaptable. Engaging with community leaders and forming partnerships with non-governmental organisations, government agencies and private sponsors are crucial for reaching more people. Localised skill development programmes can transform lives by overcoming societal barriers, enabling economic independence and contributing to broader economic growth and gender equality.

Investing in these initiatives supports a more inclusive and prosperous future. We look forward to collaborating and creating synergies with like-minded partners to empower more women to turn their dreams into reality.

Let us walk the talk together with her!

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Empowering CLFs as Local Change Agents for Women-led Entrepreneurship



Meeting in session at Kajal Mahila Swayam Sahayata Samuh, Sonbhadra district, Uttar Pradesh

The Importance of Skill Development

The Government of India introduced self-help groups (SHGs) to address various socio-economic challenges faced by rural populations, particularly women. SHGs are small, informal groups of people who come together for mutual assistance, savings and credit activities. They also contribute to poverty alleviation, women's empowerment, financial inclusion, capacity building, skill development, social capital and community development. Skill development, thus, plays a significant role and is pivotal for several reasons:

- 1. Economic growth:** A skilled workforce enhances productivity and innovation, thereby driving economic growth.
- 2. Employment opportunities:** Skill development programmes can bridge the gap between education and employment, thereby reducing unemployment rates.
- 3. Empowerment:** Skill development is a pathway to financial independence and empowerment, especially for women.
- 4. Poverty alleviation:** Skill development can lift families out of poverty by providing the skills needed for better-paying jobs.

Government Initiatives

The Government of India has launched several initiatives to address these challenges:

- 1. Skill India Mission:** Launched in 2015, this mission aims to train over 40 crore people in various skills by 2022. So far the Skill India Mission has trained 1.4 crore youth, upskilled and reskilled 54 lakh youth. It has also established 3000 new ITIs (industrial training institutes) It includes programmes such as the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), which offers short-term training and certification.
- 2. National Skill Development Corporation:** This public-private partnership works to promote skill development by funding and fostering large-scale, quality training institutions.

Some of the models/approaches in skill development:

- Various skill-building initiatives under public-private partnerships in India are in place for rural and urban populations, both men and women. They include soft and technical skills specific to the industry/employment opportunity.
- Introducing non-traditional enterprises, e.g., the establishment of women who lead and run mechanised laundry units, individual/group enterprises and hand pump mechanics in rural areas.
- In collaboration with companies and the private sector, a comprehensive skills development programme is being promoted under facilities management (airports, hospitals, five-star hotels, etc.). This programme includes soft skills, ensuring everyone feels valued and included in employment opportunities in their respective industries.

Challenges and Gaps of Existing Skill Development

Despite its importance, several challenges and gaps in policies impede effective skill development in India:

- 1. Educational gaps:** Many youth and women lack access to quality education, making advanced skill training difficult.
- 2. Infrastructure:** Rural and underdeveloped areas often lack the infrastructure needed for skill training programmes.

- 3. Cultural barriers:** Gender biases and societal norms can restrict women's participation in skill development initiatives.

- 4. Awareness:** There is often a lack of awareness about available training programmes and their benefits.

Gaps in Policies

- Training programmes often emphasise technical skills but overlook the importance of soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving.
- One-size-fits-all training programmes may not address the specific needs of different regions and communities.
- Limited collaboration between training institutes and industry leads to a mismatch between the skills imparted and industry requirements.
- Existing policies focus more on employment rather than entrepreneurship.
- Programmes often do not adequately reach or address the needs of marginalised groups, including women, differently-abled individuals and rural populations.
- Lack of robust mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of skill development programmes.
- Current policies are primarily focused on initial training and do not emphasise on continuous learning and skill upgradation.
- Digital literacy and access to online training resources remain limited, particularly in rural areas.

Success Stories

Several success stories highlight the impact of the skill development initiatives:

- 1. Women in Technology:** Programmes such as Tech Mahindra's SMART (Skills-for-Market Training) have enabled women from underprivileged backgrounds to pursue careers in IT.
- 2. Youth in agriculture:** The Agricultural Skills Council of India (ASCI) has trained

numerous youth in modern farming techniques, enhancing productivity and sustainability.

3. **Women in skill building and employment:** IOM and Taj group/Sinar Jernih company rendered skills in housekeeping, facilities management, nursing etc., and appropriate employment opportunities were provided.

Future Directions

For India to fully realise the potential of its youth and women through skill development, several steps are essential:



Skilling of women leads to their economic empowerment

1. **Enhanced infrastructure:** Investing in infrastructure, especially in rural areas, to facilitate access to training.
2. **Public-private partnerships:** Encouraging more collaborations between the government, private sector, and non-governmental organisations.
3. **Customised training programmes:** Developing programmes tailored to the specific needs of different regions and communities.
4. **Continuous assessment:** Regularly assessing and updating training programmes to align with market demands.

Conclusion

To significantly improve the effectiveness of skill development policies and better meet the changing needs of the workforce, it is important to make adjustments. By integrating emerging technologies, focusing on soft skills, fostering industry collaboration, supporting entrepreneurship and ensuring inclusivity, India can build a robust skill development ecosystem that empowers youth and women to drive economic growth and social development. Continuous monitoring, promotion of lifelong learning and an emphasis on sustainability will further strengthen these initiatives. Skill development for youth and women in India is not just a strategy for economic growth but a crucial element for societal progress and empowerment. Through concerted efforts from the government, private sector and civil society, India can transform its demographic potential into a powerhouse of skilled professionals driving the nation forward. □

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Aspiration to Inspiration

Minakshi hails from a middle-class family in a suburban area of Jaipur, Rajasthan, India. The family's financial constraints made it difficult for them to afford higher education and secure stable employment. Despite this, Minakshi's dream of a brighter future and financial independence drove her to seek opportunities for skill development.

In early 2023, Minakshi discovered the office assistant programme offered by Development Alternatives. Realising the potential of this programme to improve her employability, she eagerly applied and was accepted into the training programme.

Minakshi completed an intensive training programme at Development Alternatives that focused on digital design skills and employment readiness. The programme covered various aspects of digital design, including graphic design principles, software proficiency and multimedia production. In addition to technical skills, Minakshi also underwent training in communication skills, customer relations and professionalism.

After completing the Domestic Data Entry Operator (DDEO) programme, Minakshi is now working as a telecaller in a reputed company in Jaipur. In her role, she uses her strong communication skills to interact with clients over the phone, promote products or services and address customer queries and concerns.

Minakshi's job as a telecaller has not only improved her family's financial situation and helped pay for her siblings' education, but it also made her financially independent. It has given her the chance to explore new opportunities in graphic design or digital marketing and has made her an inspiration for other young people like her.



Minakshi: A beacon of inspiration

The training programme not only equipped Minakshi with technical skills but also instilled a sense of confidence and self-belief. Her improved communication skills and professional demeanour enabled her to engage effectively with clients and colleagues. Minakshi's growth has extended beyond her professional life to her personal life. □

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Skilling through Radio Bundelkhand: A Knowledge-Sharing Ecosystem



Community listening session in Sonbhadra district, Uttar Pradesh

Development Alternatives has been creating a knowledge-sharing ecosystem in the Bundelkhand region through its community radio initiative, Radio Bundelkhand. Launched in 2008, Radio Bundelkhand bridges the information gap by providing updates on schemes, scientific advancements and opportunities that are essential for the people in the region. This platform has been instrumental in helping individuals develop relevant skills and improve their livelihoods.

Advancing Organic and Natural Farming Techniques

Radio Bundelkhand has played a key role in addressing agricultural challenges and promoting sustainable agriculture within communities. For example, women from the Karas Dev Baba Self-Help Group in Namapura, Niwari Block, Niwari District, Madhya Pradesh, learned organic farming methods through Radio Bundelkhand. The women expressed their desire to stop using chemical fertilisers and pesticides which led to Radio Bundelkhand organising a discussion with an agricultural expert from Bundelkhand University. Additionally,

training sessions were facilitated with a grassroots organisation to teach these women organic farming techniques. As a result of their new knowledge, the women cultivated wheat on 1 acre of land and sold four quintals at INR 3,700 per quintal, compared to the INR 2,300 rate for inorganically grown wheat. Despite a slightly lower yield, the higher prices demonstrated the positive impact of the training on their livelihoods.

Similarly, Dev Singh Rajput, a farmer with an interest in innovative farming methods, reached out to Radio Bundelkhand after listening to the Khet Khaliyan programme. He was keen to learn about the Kashmiri apple berry. The community radio reporters informed him about the training and seed supplies available at Bundelkhand University. Dev Singh attended the training and started practicing natural farming. He began cultivating Kashmiri apple berries alongside other crops such as broccoli, beans, sugarcane and Thai apple berries. This diversification led to a significant increase in his income, amounting to INR 2 lakh, thereby showcasing the significant impact of the programme.

Irrigation Assured by Practicing Water Conservation Methods

Radio Bundelkhand has also been pivotal in educating farmers about water conservation, especially in dealing with the impacts of climate change. One successful example is Sultan Singh Ghosh from Ujyanpatha, Badagaon Block of the Jhansi District. After listening to radio programmes such as Khet Khaliyan and Shubhkal, he implemented water conservation techniques by constructing bunds in his 2 acre field. This approach, based on the principle that village water should remain in the village and field water should remain in the field, helped provide crucial irrigation during periods of low rainfall shortages, greatly benefitting his crops.

Becoming Entrepreneurs

Radio Bundelkhand's youth-focused programme 'Hum Honge Kamyab' has made a notable impact by providing weekly information on skills and livelihood enhancement. As a result, 20 young individuals have improved their skills, with some even starting their own businesses. Notable success stories include those of Satish and Rajendra.

Satish Sahu from Jugyai village, Niwari Block, Niwari District in Madhya Pradesh, lacked the funds and experience to run a shop. With assistance from Manish at Radio Bundelkhand, he secured a loan and received training from IMEDF to acquire essential business skills. Initially, Satish borrowed INR 50,000 from IMEDF and underwent training on running a business and managing accounts. He has successfully repaid the loan with interest and made a profit of INR 30,000. Today, Satish has expanded his shop with the help of his wife.

Rajendra Sahu, another youth from the same village, was inspired by Radio Bundelkhand. He dreamt of starting his own business but did not have enough capital. The radio team helped him secure a loan through IMEDF, which enabled him to start a business selling clothes using his bike to travel to different villages. With the loan, he earned a profit of INR 20,000, achieving financial independence and personal satisfaction.

Women empowerment in action is fundamentally about capacity building,

enabling women to broaden their perspectives and feel independent. For 40 years, Development Alternatives (DA) has been dedicated to this mission, particularly focusing on the Bundelkhand region. By enhancing the capabilities of Cluster Level Federations and their sub-entities, such as Self-Help Groups and Village Organisations, DA empowers rural women. This empowerment translates to financial independence, a crucial step towards overall empowerment.

DA's work in Bundelkhand involves comprehensive training and support, facilitating women develop essential skills and access resources. By strengthening these collectives, women gain confidence,



Conversation with locals by Manish from Radio Bundelkhand

improve their livelihoods and participate in decision-making actively in their families and communities. The impact of DA's efforts is evident in the increased economic stability and enhanced social status of these women. Through sustained capacity building, DA ensures that women in Bundelkhand can envision and realise a more empowered future.

Conclusion

Through its diverse programmes, Radio Bundelkhand has effectively established a robust ecosystem of knowledge sharing in the Bundelkhand region, significantly enhancing livelihoods by empowering individuals with information and skills. □

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In India, 43% of STEM

graduates are
women, yet only
14% hold STEM
jobs.

STEMming the
Technology
Gender Divide
in India

The transition from graduation to employment reveals a troubling trend: only 29% of women STEM graduates enter the workforce. The situation is even more grave for underprivileged communities. To address this, we are launching new vocational courses to empower women and bridge the technology gap.

Creating awareness
to bridge the gender
divide by promoting
women's
involvement in
STEM fields

Provide women
with the
knowledge and
skills to pursue
careers in STEM

Connect with
peers and
professionals to
build a strong
support network

**Join us in making a difference. Partner with us,
collaborate or support us for our initiative.**

Together, we can create a more inclusive and
equitable future for women in society.

Reach at us

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