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Creating a skilling ecosystem for young women

Inspiring families to believe that their daughters can contribute is imperative, writes **Zarina Screwvala**

There is a huge need to build a skilling ecosystem for girls especially in rural India. A study by UNICEF in 2018 shows that while there is progress in girls' education across the country, increasing the number of girls entering the workforce is a challenge. A paper by the World Bank highlights that targeted inclusion of women in the workforce would increase economic growth by 26% of global GDP by 2025. There is a need to redesign our approach with a special emphasis on an important yet neglected section: young rural women.

Constraints

Young rural women face four key constraints: Financial, social, physical and aspirational. While the financial and geographical distances are evident, the social and aspirational constraints are not fully understood and addressed. Limited knowledge of income opportunities and/or career direction early in formative years of both parents and girls, limits aspirations. Socially, the mindset and expectations from girls to focus on family first, also stops girls from pursuing their dreams and to choose professions. Lack of role models also creates a problem.

Gender-specific skilling

Building a can-do attitude: Our field learnings show that a holistic approach works well. It is best to start in high school by providing exposure to possible opportunities and interests and work on developing soft skills. Finding role models and inspiring families to believe that their daughters can make a valuable contribution to the family's prosperity and well-being. Building a



can-do attitude in both boys and girls and showing them the pathways to achieve their dreams is very important.

Contextualise skilling courses: Since majority of skilling courses open opportunities for youth in urban areas, more courses are needed to enhance earning opportunities for those who want to stay back in their village.

Training young girls who wish to join their families in farm activities or in the processing of agriculture produce, through Ag-Tech and AI can ensure the successful transition of adolescent girls to a skilled workforce. A non-profit trained 76 women from 13 SHGs in Raigad for processing of dairy products. These women now link the dairy entrepreneurs and are expanding business for both dairy entrepreneurs and themselves.

Digital Skilling: To overcome the physical barriers in remote geographical locations, digital skilling needs to be widely pursued. The pandemic has shown the importance and increased the adoption of digital and automation which can effectively help in skilling and upskilling of young girls.

(The author is co-founder of Swades Foundation)

