

NON-TRADITIONAL SKILLS AND LIVELIHOODS



Emerging Models and
Best Practices



Girls Count is an independent national level coalition of civil society organisations and individuals across the country converging efforts to draw attention to the problem of declining child sex ratio. The coalition aims to influence policy, amplify advocacy and establish accountability through dialogues, capacity development, supporting community action and evidence generation to end the decline in the child sex ratio and enhance the value of women and girls.

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**Emerging Models and
Best Practices**

FOREWORD

Covid-19 pandemic is proving to be far more than a health crisis. It is being seen as an equally severe economic crisis. The pandemic is throwing away decades of hard-won battles both in terms of gender equality and women's economic rights. Further in the context of Covid-19, structural challenges such as lack of access to opportunities of skilling and gainful employment faced by women have increased manifolds.

However, significantly enough over the past few years in view of the gender division of labour, gender pay gap and gender discrimination we have seen that women's livelihood has been in the centre of all government and civil society programmes. Moreover, in this context

of gender disparity in economic opportunities, the need for moving from traditional livelihoods to non-traditional livelihoods has also been recognized by the civil society groups. And at a time like this when work opportunities have decimated for hundreds of thousands of women overnight the need to focus on livelihood opportunities for women especially from resource-poor segments assumes central importance.

Acknowledging and recognizing the need of the hour, the Coalition has leveraged the approach of non-traditional skills and Livelihood programme; and has made efforts to ensure that the women it is working with across various districts are somewhat less affected by the pandemic.

The non-traditional skills and livelihoods programme especially aimed at women of marginalized communities seeks to challenge the gendered notions of skilling, work and occupation. Through this approach, we are also challenging the patriarchal mindset that perceives girls are an economic liability in turn leading to various gender-based discriminations.

The intervention is being implemented by on-ground partners in Ahmedabad, Bilaspur, Howrah, Indore, Pune and Ranchi districts. The programme aims to train women and girls from marginalized urban and semi-urban communities in fifteen different trades. The trainees are mostly home-makers, daily wage earners, part-time vendors and

domestic workers in the age group 18 to 35, with some exceptions.

Before the nationwide lockdown was announced in March 2020, women and girls had set up their micro-enterprise in different non-traditional occupations, while many others were employed in various institutions locally. The emerging non-traditional livelihood models are two-wheeler garage in Indore, e-rickshaw driving in Bilaspur and Howrah, petrol pump attendants in Ahmedabad, security guards in Ranchi and LED light manufacturing in Pune.

We need to further capacitate women and

girls in the existing livelihoods models to enable them to scale up their entrepreneurship and employability. Secondly, we also need to support the existing models to turn into a training hub for more women and girls from the resource-poor and /or marginal communities to join.

This booklet attempts to showcase some of the non-traditional livelihood models and best practices that have emerged across the districts and are showing promise of being, replicable, scalable and most importantly economically viable for the women.

While the women-led models have gained momentum in their endeavour to establish economic independence and identity of their own, the Coalition and its partners are working with a varied range of stakeholders from government, local markets to larger private entities to create an enabling environment for these women-led non-traditional livelihood models to flourish. With the gradual unlocking process, we hope to reconnect them with non-traditional livelihoods in the districts and provide adequate support thereafter.

– Team Girls Count

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WOMEN PETROL PUMP ATTENDANTS

Gaining Acceptance and Accolades

AHMEDABAD, GUJARAT

They said it's a man's job. They were doubtful, asked, "Will you be able to stand for long hours?", "Will you be able to handle rude customers?" Taking all such discouragement head-on 25 women of Ahmedabad trained and took up full-time jobs as petrol pump attendants across seven filling stations of the city run by leading companies, Shell, HP and BCCL.

Facilitated by Coalition partner Saath Charitable Trust, over close to four months between December 2019 till about mid-March 2020, 67 women enrolled, of which 59 completed the training, 8 dropped out for various reasons and 25 have been gainfully employed.

EVOLUTION OF THE MODEL

It has been a difficult process for both the trainees and our implementing partner Saath. The trainees have had to overcome personal and social barriers to become petrol pump attendants.

Saath, on its part, faced challenges of not only mobilizing and encouraging the women to envision themselves in such a non-traditional job role, but they also had to persistently sensitize the employers to accept women as petrol pump attendants.

A primary concern that was repeatedly raised by the women and their families was the safety of women working at the filling stations. On the other hand, the employers were reluctant to offer these jobs to women. The pump owners believed that women may not be able to cope with the daily physical and mental stress of the job. They were sceptical of

their ability to stand for long hours, deal with rude customers at the pumps, operate different types of nozzles or even handle digital payments.

To address these concerns the organization took several steps. For instance, to allay the fear of safety the organization spoke of various safety measures such as the presence of CCTV cameras at the filling stations, organized exposure visits to these pumps, facilitated interactions between family members and pump owners. All these interactive exercises helped to build an environment of trust.

TRAINING PROCESS

Along with building a conducive environment, it was equally important to develop an all-encompassing training

module for the trainees that balanced technical and life skills.

Bearing this in mind, a module was developed that included life skill components such as understanding of gender identity, gender equality, gender rights, gender laws among others. The women also underwent self-defence training, instilling confidence in them that they could handle a difficult situation. These set of trainings were imparted over a period of two weeks.

For technical skills, they were taken on an exposure visit to petrol pumps and given a month's on the job training to make the women understand all nuances of how a petrol pump functions- from the process of filling, cleaning of vehicles, managing cash to dealing with customers.

Petrol Pump Attendants: A Viable Career Option

With a fixed income, timing and a formal uniform, today working at a petrol pump is seen as a respectable job by many. Resultantly, more and more women are choosing to become filling station attendants and they perceive it as a viable career option.

An additional effort made by Saath is that they try and place a woman at a petrol pump that is somewhat closer to her residence. This ensures less travel time and a sense of safety and security for the women employed.

With filling stations falling under the category of essential services, these women have been working even during the nationwide lockdown. In fact, in some cases where the men in the family have lost their job owing to the Covid-19 pandemic these women have become the sole bread earners in their families.



WHAT ARE THE WOMEN SAYING?

Drawing attention to the importance of being financially independent, Renuka Vasva working as a filling attendant in Bharat Petroleum says, *“The fact that I am financially independent enables me to be part of any decision making in my house. Others now value what I have to say. It has given me a lot of confidence too”*.

Like many other professions, this job role too comes with its occupational hazard, as is articulated by Radhika Vasva, *“We get all kinds of customer response. Some are appreciative, supportive, show respect or are even amazed. Some try to act smart. None of this affects us. We are trained and can tackle any difficult situation. Our employers are supportive too”*.

Prachi Vishwanath, yet another petrol pump attendant says, *“The fact that we are working at filling stations has only reinforced the point that women are at par with men. There is nothing that women cannot do”*.



SUSTAINABILITY

The only thing that these women further need to hone is their skill with digital payments. And for this Saath has decided to increase the duration of on the job training to enable them to learn all the nuances of how a petrol pump functions.

The petrol pump attendants are paid in two ways. One set of attendants are paid a fixed monthly salary, another set of attendants are paid commissions based on the volume of litres of petrol sold by an attendant. They are given a daily target and are paid at the rate of 35 paise per litre.

Today, the women have become so confident that some are now even seeking to move onto the commission-based model of work, which can fetch them more money in comparison to their monthly salary of Rs. 7,000 to Rs. 10,000. Some of them also want to be further trained and take up newer job roles as cashiers or even supervisors at the petrol pumps.

Testimonies



Parmal Jayshree, 37 years, mother of two children aged 12 and 14 years speaks about her journey from being a daily wage labourer to a petrol pump attendant. She says, *“My husband is a mechanic, so when I told him about the training and said I wanted to be a petrol pump attendant he supported my decision. Since I have not studied much, I was not sure if I could do this”*.

“However with everyone’s support I completed my training and began working at a petrol pump. I was a labourer earlier but today I feel proud to say that I am a skilled professional, in an area where many women do not venture to work. Everyone who was sarcastic earlier, today respect me for what I am. I am proud of who I am today”.

Triguna Bhatvi, 23 years is a mother of two daughters aged 5 and one and half years old. Setting an example for others Triguna has been successfully balancing her personal and professional life. She shares, *“I had studied till only class VIII, so for me getting a formal job is like a dream come true. Initially though my family was skeptical as how will I manage with my two children, when I began my training, my mother-in-law supported me. She looked after my children while I trained”*.



“With my family and the trainer’s support and encouragement I successfully completed my training. Today I earn at par with my husband. So I have an equal say in all the decisions taken at home. The fact that I am financially independent and also contribute to the family income gives me a sense of immense pride”.



SAKHI E-RICKSHAW SERVICES

Making Public Transport Safer

BILASPUR, CHHATTISGARH

Bilaspur's *Sakhi* e-rickshaw drivers are proving that the idea of a male domain of work is a myth as the distinctly pink coloured e-rickshaws zip across the city ferrying passengers to their desired destination. From narrow lanes to busy intersections, whenever the e-rickshaws zoom past they make heads turn. Demonstrating utmost grit and determination these 15 women e-rickshaw and petrol auto-rickshaw drivers are shattering gender stereotypes and gradually blurring gender lines.

Prior to the pandemic, the women drove around the city with passengers for 6 to 7 hours every day and earned anything between Rs. 400–Rs.600 per day. Unfortunately, the pandemic and the following lockdown has had an adverse effect on their earnings. Today their earnings are limited to Rs.150 to Rs.200 a day.

Collectivizing as Group: *Sakhi* Federation



This group of women has federated under a banner named '*Sakhi* Federation'. It essentially comprises of all women who have undergone e-rickshaw and auto-rickshaw driving training.

The Federation functions as a single window for those women who seek information on a range of issues. From those related to training, driving, financing of the vehicles, getting a license for driving to more personal issues of domestic violence, health, hygiene and nutrition. The Federation has an integrated approach to ensure the well-being of its women members. It also acts as a support network for those involved.

EVOLUTION OF THE MODEL

Girls Count coalition partner CARM-DAKSH sought to establish a model under its non-traditional skills and livelihoods programme; that is when they realized that with the increase in the population of the city and its narrow roads, e-rickshaws can be the most viable mode of transport. These vehicles are not only easily manageable but are also environmentally friendly and can contribute to improving the quality of life in the city. The partner introduced e-rickshaw training for women.

Overcoming Challenges

While the women were being trained, the essential goal was to ensure that the women get gainful employment on completion of the training. But this was easier said than done. From financing to purchase of the e-rickshaws to getting a driving license was a long drawn process. Further to handhold, every woman individually through the entire process meant a long waiting period.



The initial lukewarm response from the stakeholders- banks, labour department officials, RTO officials acted as a deterrent. Discouraged, many women even dropped out.

It is at this juncture that the need for facilitating the women to federate became evident. This was not an easy task either. With most of the women being daily wage earners, calling them for a meeting meant sacrificing a day's remuneration. So, it was decided to have one to one interactions, followed by large group interactions when the women came for their training.

Following six long months of several rounds of deliberations with the women about the pros and cons of setting up a Federation, it was formed. Initially, it had 30 members. Over a period of time the number of members grew up to 66.

The next set of challenges was to get the officials to respond. From negotiating with financial institutions to e-rickshaw sellers to the labour department to RTO officials, it was an arduous journey.

Thanks to the relentless efforts of the partner and the women, in April 2019 the first set of 4 women e-rickshaw drivers set out on the road. These e-rickshaws were obtained through the Rotary Club.

WHAT ARE THE WOMEN SAYING?

The journey of these women from homemakers to e-rickshaw drivers can inspire many who share a similar history



of struggle. The women unanimously say that when they first drove the e-rickshaw they rode into a completely new life of confidence, of self-reliance of being financially independent. For each one of them, it was about finding a new identity that was derived from their profession.

Recalling initial reactions from the passengers, Chitralekha Rajak shares, “*We were confident, but people are not used to women riding e-rickshaws, so initially they would get into the rickshaw but when they saw a woman would be driving, they immediately got down*”.

Being a woman e-rickshaw driver they had to fight gender discriminations at many levels. They faced resistance from the male e-rickshaw drivers who would often ridicule them saying, “Your job is to cook and raise children at home not drive a

rickshaw”. There were moments of handling drunken passengers to men who sought to take liberties with them. Today, when they look back, the women brush these aside as occupational hazards.

Undeterred, these 15 women have marched on slowly and steadily chiselling away at the gender stereotypes and finding their own identity. The women have come to be known as drivers with compassion, as they make it a point to help elderly passengers, children, pregnant women boarding their rickshaws to get on and get off it. They are a class apart.

Reflecting the sense of pride 32-year-old Ganga Sahu says, “*For the first time in my life, I gifted someone something with my own money. I bought silver jewellery for my daughter-in-law. She could not hold back her tears. I feel immensely proud*”.

Individually as well as a Federation, the women share they want more and more women to take up such opportunities and challenge the gendered roles in every possible way they can. For the women, by stepping out of their homes they have not only broken stereotypes but also have found a new meaning to their lives. They now have

aspirations and dreams that they seek to chase and realize.

As Tara Kori puts it across aptly, *“Earlier I was identified as someone’s daughter, sister, wife and mother, but now I have my own identity that is derived from my work”*.

SUSTAINABILITY

The e-rickshaws in recent times have gained popularity in smaller cities such as Bilaspur as an economic and environment-friendly mode of transport. And the Coalition and its partner CARM-DAKSH seeks to facilitate the women to leverage this opportunity to its optimum. With their calculations of monthly earnings (8 hours per day) of each driver to be around Rs. 12,000 to Rs.15,000 a month, this is an economically viable livelihood model.

However, the most critical area that needs to be addressed is getting the e-rickshaw financed. If there is financial aid or support provided by the government or even private entities for the women to buy e-rickshaw, the model is likely to flourish further. Bearing this in mind, the Coalition and CARM-DAKSH have initiated a dialogue with a private entity which can finance these e-rickshaws for the women at bare minimum cost.

The related areas where the Coalition and its partner organization seeks to further intensify its work includes supporting the women e-rickshaw drivers for having dedicated parking spaces that will also double up as charging stations and provide roadside assistance. Such spaces will be well equipped with other facilities such as toilets, resting space for the women. For this CARM-DAKSH after lifting of the lockdown has initiated advocating with the City Municipal Corporation and hopes to see results soon.

Meanwhile, post the conditional lifting of the lockdown the pink e-rickshaws are back on roads wherever vehicular movement is being allowed. Though business is not brisk, the women are making efforts to earn their living and bring their lives back on track.

Testimonies



Lakshmi Suryavanshi, 34 years old is a domestic violence survivor with two children. From being a helpless young widow to a financially independent woman heading her family, her journey can inspire many. As she shares, “I got married at a very young age, could not even complete my studies. I lost my husband to alcoholism. When he died I was devastated. I earned doing odd jobs so that my children do not starve”.

“That is when I heard of non-traditional skill and livelihood training. But I was not sure if I could do something so different.

Following several rounds of counseling, I got the courage to attend these classes. Today when I look back, I surprise myself that I have come such a long way. From feeling helpless and lost, today I am a confident e-rickshaw driver, a mother who can fulfill all her family’s needs. As an e-rickshaw driver I have created my own identity in a profession that is thought to be only for men. There is dignity in the work I do. Most importantly, I have been able to change the society’s perception towards widows like me; that we are not helpless if we want we can do anything”.

Neeta Diwakar, 30 year old was forcefully married at a young age. From being an abandoned woman to a financially independent person, she has come a long way. Speaking about her journey she says, “When I was very young I was married off, unfortunately my husband and in-laws abandoned me for a male child. I was traumatized and came to live with my parents. At this point, I heard of the e-rickshaw training. I decided to give my life one last chance and started attending the training sessions. At these sessions I not only learnt the technical skills but met other women like me who sought to start their life afresh. These sessions were in a way therapeutic too for me. I drive the e-rickshaw all across Bilaspur”.



“Today I am not seen as an abandoned woman, but a woman who has made a mark, that too in a profession where men are the norm. I was pressurized for a male child, but I have proved it that it does not make a difference whether you are a boy or girl. I am challenging the mindset that men and women are not equal. We can do whatever men do”.



YANTRIKA GARAGES

Women Owned and Operated Two-Wheeler Garages

INDORE, MADHYA PRADESH

In Indore, a few exemplary women are dismantling patriarchy with a toolkit. Literally. Women, in groups of three, have started operating two-wheeler repairing and servicing workshops, calling these *Yantrika* Garages.

Owned and operated by only women, there were three such *Yantrika* Garages in Indore before the pandemic struck. They have been trailblazers in breaking all stereotypes of gender roles and set an example for millions of other women in the country. With partial lifting up of the lockdown, one of these garages has managed to open with all precautions in place. It operates between 10am and 5pm. Since the garage reopened (post the lockdown) in early June, this *Yantrika* Garage received a steady response from the customers. The three women who

run it have fixed around 20 two-wheelers in the last four weeks.

These *Yantrika* Garages in Indore are located strategically in main market areas of the city. These are emerging as livelihood models that challenge patriarchy and break into hitherto seen as completely male bastions of work. At the same time, these can also be seen as women responding to the call of 'atmanirbharta' or self-reliance by the Prime Minister of the country in these unprecedented times.

In a fully functional *Yantrika* Garage, each woman earns about Rs.6,000 per month. More often than not, women are employed as part of the unorganized sector. Models such as *Yantrika* Garages ensure that women are part of the formal workforce, earn better and are at par with men.

These garages function not merely as service centres offering repair services but also seek to evolve as a support group. Towards this endeavour, the women have been networking with all the garages in their vicinity. They have also created a platform called ‘Women Bike Riders Club’, connecting all women riders of the city. The women envisage *Yantrika Garage* to emerge as a brand that will encourage more women to venture into this predominantly male profession of motor vehicles mechanics.

EVOLUTION OF THE MODEL

The model of women owned *Yantrika Garage* has been a product of close to one and half years of persistent facilitation by the partner organisation Samaan Social Development Society as part of Coalition’s non-traditional skills and livelihoods programme.

Initially, when the women and girls were being trained as mechanics, most of them were being placed at authorized service centres. Surprisingly, a number of women and girls discontinued their jobs. When probed, the women spoke of a number of challenges that they were facing; from

distance of the authorized service centres from their homes to timings not being suitable. However each one of them wanted to work.

It is at this juncture, to ensure women who sought to continue to work the concept of a garage completely owned and operated by women was introduced. The *Yantrika Garage* was born.

Collectivization and Training: Building Blocks

This model was established in Indore by facilitating collectivization of women who were part of the non-traditional skills and livelihoods programme and had undergone two-wheeler training. The training module spans over three months, where trainees have to devote 3 to 4 hours every day. The module consists of components of communications and skills, understanding gender inequality, women and law, health, nutrition, market strategy and work readiness. It also includes an exposure visit to bike service centres and internship in garages ensuring that the trainees gain hands on exposure.



Exploring Viability and Setting up the Garage

In the beginning, the women were doubtful if it would have any takers in the market. To get first hand market response, Samaan Society decided to hold a bike servicing camp in January, 2019. They spread the information of the camp, where anyone could get their bikes checked and repaired for just Rs.100. To their surprise there was a huge turnout of customers. This gave the women trainees confidence that if they do open a garage of their own, there will be customers. This camp became the turning point.

The concept was ready so were the women, but next came the biggest challenge of getting investment capital for setting up the garage. Setting up a garage required at least Rs.3 lakhs. Initially, the women mulled over the idea of taking a loan; but then realized if

the collective takes a loan they will have to pay EMI which may not be feasible for them. For the garage to be up and running takes a minimum of four to five months. So it was decided that the partner organisation will reach out to organisations and corporates to sponsor and support these women in setting up of the garage.

While the Coalition partner itself supported setting up of one garage, remaining were sponsored by Bridgestone and EMpower.

WHAT ARE THE WOMEN SAYING?

It has not been an easy journey for the women and girls from being a homemaker to being a professional and most importantly an entrepreneur. It has been a journey of overcoming social and personal barriers, of challenging gender roles and breaking gender stereotypes.

Building an Enabling Environment for *Yantrika* Garages

Once the *Yantrika* garages were set up it was critical to ensure that these women have support from their immediate market community to sustain themselves. Keeping this mind, Samaan Society and the women have been constantly networking with local gatekeepers and community influencers of the market to ensure that there is healthy competition with their peers.

Further to make these garages more women-worker friendly it was seen that the women are brought as a group as per their locality. This meant they did not have to travel long distances to reach their workplace. The women themselves have worked out their timings as per their convenience. Each of the garages has hydraulic lifts making it technically competent with other two-wheeler garages in the market. All these measures have ensured that women are able to balance their work and home and continue their work. Most importantly it is heartening to see a trained set of women technicians in their uniform working on the two-wheelers at their garage.



Citing the social barrier and sarcasm they have had to overcome, Aasha Roy Chowdhury, one of the women running the garage says, *“We have had to work twice as hard to establish our credibility as professional mechanics. In the beginning when men came for servicing they would be sarcastic, they would say things like, ‘hope my bike does not break down in middle of the road after this servicing’. Today we have proved them wrong. A number of them today are our repeat customers who have stopped going to any other garage”.*

Manju Sharma another woman mechanic says for many women it has also been a journey of self-exploration, self-realization and of finding their own identify. In not so many words she says, *“We have been brought up in an atmosphere where women were to stick to certain roles. To accept that as women we*

could do something different, something that men do, in itself has been a journey of self-realization, acceptance for many of us”.

Overcoming their moments of uncertainty, self-doubt, even fear these women today are an empowered group ready to face all challenges head on. The confident collective of women have evolved as technically trained professionals, rightfully claiming their place in the male dominant profession of two-wheeler mechanics.

Encouraging other women and girls to take up such non-traditional occupations, Shivani Raghuvanshi, all of 20 years, says *“We are living example that women can do anything that men can. All we need is right opportunity and an enabling environment”.*

SUSTAINABILITY

With a significant population of Indore dependent on two wheelers we feel this is an economically viable model for the women where they will be able to earn not only money but respect too. More than anything else *Yantrika* Garages are evolving as a model of non-traditional livelihood for women and girls in every sense of the term. They can be seen as breaking the male bastion of two-wheeler repair garages.

The key support that any collective needs from its partner in setting up the garage is primarily the seed money. To ensure this, local partner organisation Samaan Society has been exploring all possible options of sponsorship.

In order to create an enabling environment for the garages to flourish, Samaan Society is facilitating networking amongst the *Yantrika* Garages and reaching out to wider population through mass campaigns.

With the lifting of lockdown in Indore, enrollment for new batches is on. As a Coalition partner, Samaan Society visualizes establishing 10 such *Yantrika* Garages across the city so that a sustainable non-traditional livelihood model of challenging gender stereotypes is established.

Testimonies



Pushpa Goliya: Pushpa Goliya 34 year old has studied till class V. She is a mother of two sons aged 10 and 11 years. She is a successful homemaker and an entrepreneur. Talking about her journey she shares, *“After my children were born, though I wanted to do something I hardly had any time for myself. But then in 2019 when I got to know about the non-traditional livelihood skill training I was intrigued. I decided to join the training but my husband was not supportive of my decision. But I refused to give up. Despite all my restrictions I trained and completed the course”*.

“Today I am a budding entrepreneur; I have an identity of my own. I earn and contribute to the family income. Now that I have been working for more than six months, it is a milestone for me. I am glad I pursued my interest of doing something that most women do not consider doing. Everyone in the family and my community has started appreciating and respecting me for my hard work and persistence”.

Seeta Kethvas: Seeta Kethvas is 32 years old. She lives with her two sons aged 14 and 11 years old, husband and her father-in-law. Her husband works as a seasonal labourer. Speaking about her transition from a teacher to an entrepreneur she says, *“I have completed my graduation and was working as a teacher. Since childhood I was interested in two-wheelers. I would take care of my brother’s bike and assist him whenever he needed me. But back then no one thought women could be two-wheeler mechanics so I did not pursue it”*.



“I jumped at the opportunity when I heard about the two-wheeler mechanic course. I completed my training in 2019 and have been working at Yantrika service center for more than 7 months now. My passion for two-wheelers drove me into being a two-wheeler mechanic. I left my job as a teacher to do this full time. My family supported me with this decision. Being part of Yantrika garages is exciting”.



WOMEN 'TOTO' DRIVERS

From Homemakers to Professional Drivers

HOWRAH, WEST BENGAL

Women drivers in the public transport system are not a common sight in Howrah, a district in West Bengal. The roads are still dominated by the male e-rickshaw or *toto* drivers, as they are known in Howrah. However beating all odds, 14 women *toto* drivers are steadily changing the scenario in localities of Bauria, Khaskhamar, North Mill and Fort Gloster under the Uluberia Municipality of Howrah. Overcoming all social and structural barriers these women are setting an example for others to follow.

Having been trained by Coalition partner Nari-O-Sishu-Kalyan-Kendra (NOSKK) these women have taken up *totos* on rent from a private entity, against a daily payment of Rs.200. Owning the roads like queens, these women can be seen negotiating the mean streets every day for close to 7 - 8 hours. They earn about Rs. 300 to 400 per day.

EVOLUTION OF THE MODEL

It has been a challenging journey for these 14 women from being homemakers to professional *toto* drivers. It has been an equally difficult process for the partner organization.

When the training for *toto* driving was introduced under the non-traditional skills and livelihoods programme by NOSKK, it had very few takers. Following close to three months of mobilization, only three women came forward to enrol themselves for the training.

When probed, most women would say they are not being allowed by their families to enrol, they were concerned what would the larger community say,

they were worried about backlash from the male *toto* drivers and some even said they do not feel confident to take up driving. Ironically though, several young men turned up seeking to undergo training.

With these three women, the training process was initiated. Gradually, with persistent one to one interactions, home visits, counseling, and sensitization meetings with stakeholders more women came forward. Finally, 19 women came forth and enrolled for the e-rickshaw driving in 2019. Of the 19 women, at present 14 are regular *toto* drivers plying on the road across designated routes.

Negotiating Challenges to Launch *Totos* on the Road

Two types of *totos* are driven in Howrah. All of them are driven by male drivers. First are those *toto* drivers who run their vehicles on a fixed route and the second section of drivers drive without a fixed route. Those who follow a definite route have to be part of the e-rickshaw drivers' union and pay anything between Rs.30,000–Rs.40,000 as membership to ply on a particular route.. Women could not pay such a huge amount. Undeterred, the women decided to get firsthand information on licenses, protocols and other clearances they needed to drive on the road.

To begin with, the women found out they did not need a driving license to drive *totos* in Howrah, rather required 'route permission', a letter that mentioned the areas where they will be driving from the local councillor and

the local police station. After several rounds of follow-up with the local councillor and the local police station the women received their 'route permission'.

Having secured the 'route permission' the next step was the financing of their *totos*. None of the women had enough resources to buy one or pay a high rate of interest against a loan. Subsequently, they decided to approach a private entity from whom they took the *totos* on rent at the rate of Rs. 200 per day.

The women had secured the route permission; got their *totos* on rent but when they wanted to ply in the allotted route they again had to face the ire of male *toto* drivers' union. They went to the extent of threatening the women saying, 'We will see how you ply your *totos* on the road'.



They continued to discourage and scare the women stating, “Why are you trying to snatch away our livelihood?”, “It is not a woman’s job to drive with passengers”, “Will you feel safe driving in the night?” “How will you handle drunken passengers?”

WHAT ARE THE WOMEN SAYING?

When the women are spoken to, one can comprehend the confidence and the sense of self-worth that these women have gained.

Shraboni Pramanik, one of the drivers says, “One day when I was plying my toto, a police officer smiled at me and made a gesture of salute. Can you imagine? I was never given so much respect ever in my life. It made me cry”.



Building an Enabling Environment

With the male drivers turning hostile, the women soon realized they needed to reach out to all the stakeholders in a concerted manner if they wanted to ride peacefully on the streets. Facilitated by the implementing partner they held several rounds of meeting with a cross-section of stakeholders - District Magistrate’s office, the local councillor, police, the RTO office, banks, gram panchayat and even the male drivers’ union.

They succeeded in their attempt of creating an enabling environment. While the drivers’ union agreed to women plying their vehicles, the banks suggested the option of getting a loan from them at a subsidized rate of interest under the Swami Vivekananda Karmasasthan Prakalpa, a livelihood scheme of West Bengal Swanirbhar Corporation Limited. While these negotiations were on, the nationwide lockdown was announced. Resultantly the initiatives have been put on hold till normalcy is restored in the State.

Nonetheless, those women who are plying their rented *totos* even during the pandemic are earning whatever little they can.



These women are not only breaking gender stereotypes but are also gradually moving towards asserting their financial independence. Jhumpa Adhikary, a toto driver, points out, *“I completed the course, got the toto on rent and am earning money that is my own. Everything I have done without my husband’s support. My next step will be to get a loan from the bank and buy my toto”*.

Unfortunately, some of them are still battling gender stereotyping. Pointing out the ever-existing gender discrimination, Salehar Begum says, *“Not all my neighbours or my community are appreciative of the fact that I drive a toto. There are many moments when I am told, why don’t you do something else”*.

SUSTAINABILITY

With the women earning anything between Rs.300-Rs.400 per day, it is evident that driving a *toto* is an economically viable option for women. However, the primary concern for these women hailing from resource-poor settings is the base capital that is required to buy these *totos*.

Having identified this core concern, various avenues are being explored whereby these women can be supported for buying their *totos*. Dialogues have been initiated with nationalized and private banks for lending money to the women for buying *totos* at a subsidized rate of interest under the Swami Vivekananda Karmasasthan Prakalpa. The banks on their part have sought licenses from the women drivers. However, the RTO of Howrah district says driving licenses are not issued for *totos* they merely require route permission to ply.

Coalition partner is also advocating with the Government of West Bengal for the inclusion of *toto* driving as a course under ‘Utkarsh Bangla’, the West Bengal Skill Development Mission. This will ensure formal certification and government assistance for the women to buy *totos*. They are pursuing the matter with Members of Parliament.

As part of their larger vision of sustainability, much in the lines of the male *toto* drivers’ union, the formation of women *toto* drivers’ union is being envisaged. Once formed, this women drivers’ union will draw the attention of the authorities on gender-specific issues of safety, parking spaces, route rates, toilet and other infrastructural facilities for women *toto* drivers.

Testimonies



Soma Das, 36 years old, lives with her husband and her 19 year old son. While her husband is a daily wage labourer, her son is unemployed. Soma's aspiration to have a better quality of life led her to join the toto driving training. She says, *"As you know ours is a hand to mouth existence. Though I had never worked before, I wanted to work to support my family income. That is when I heard of the toto training. I immediately got interested. But I was hesitant and wondered am I eligible for the training as I had not studied much. After I spoke to the trainer all my hesitation vanished as he encouraged me"*.

"When I told my husband about it he neither encouraged nor discouraged me. Nevertheless, risking the wrath of my family and neighbours I joined and completed my training. I had just started driving my toto when the lockdown was announced. I am hopeful that once lockdown is lifted I can go back to driving and earn for my family. I'm looking forward to driving toto and building a better quality of life".

Mollika Hela, 46 years was widowed in 2003. Since then she has been bringing up her two children on her own. From being seen as a helpless woman to a professional toto driver, she says she has come a long way. She says, *"When I lost my husband in 2003, I was shattered. I did not know what to do. With much effort I secured a job as a cook in a nearby school. I managed to bring up my children with whatever little I earned. But I wanted my children to have a better quality of life which was possible if I earned better. So when I heard about toto driving training, I immediately decided to join and today I am a trained driver. I cook in the school in the morning and afternoon onwards I drive my toto. I am hopeful that with the additional income my children will have a better life"*.





JHILMIL ELECTRONICS AND ASHTAVINAYAK MAHILA GAT

Women Headed LED Light
Manufacturing and Selling Groups

PUNE, MAHARASHTRA

The gender stereotypes that are introduced to us in childhood are reinforced at every stage of our lives. And this is one of the reasons why we do not expect to see a woman if we happen to call for an electrician, a plumber or a carpenter.

Micro enterprises such as *Jhilmil Electronics* and *Ashtavinayak Mahila Gat* in Pune are challenging this very mindset and gender stereotyping.

Jhilmil Electronics and *Ashtavinayak Mahila Gat* are LED light manufacturing and selling micro-enterprises completely owned and operated by women. While *Jhilmil* is run by six dynamic women from Premnagar Community, *Ashtavinayak* is operated by nine women of Nagpur Chawl in Pune.

These women primarily are homemakers, and some worked as domestic helps. The trait they shared was the zeal to do something off the beaten track. This fervour to be different defines the women of *Jhilmil Electronics* and *Ashtavinayak Mahila Gat*. They have successfully challenged and broken the defined gender norms and paved the way for more women to follow suit.

EVOLUTION OF THE MODEL

CYDA, the Coalition partner introduced the electrician course for women as part of its non-traditional skills and livelihoods programme. Within this an additional stream on LED light manufacturing and repair of electrical appliances was introduced. The technical component

was facilitated in association with Tech Mahindra Smart Centre in Pune.

The curriculum for the course was carefully designed with a mix of technical and soft skill components. Along with the technical training of how the lights can be assembled, the women were given hands-on exposure to wholesale markets for raw materials, were encouraged to create a business plan, ideate on the promotion of their product and work out costs and profits for themselves.

Despite curating an interesting course, initially, it did not have many takers. Women had inhibitions, even gave into family and societal pressures and discontinued midway. However, a group of six women stayed on and completed the course.

Having completed the course, these skilled women began exploring opportunities to work as electricians, mechanics for repairing appliances. Despite their best efforts, the women were unable to get orders for any repair work. The women had a hard time to gain acceptance as professional electricians and mechanics.

Demotivated, the women considered giving up. At this juncture, CYDA put forth the idea of LED light manufacturing and selling to them. The women agreed, collectivized themselves into forming *Jhilmil* Electronics. They began LED light manufacturing. The group received their first order from the organisation itself.

The next hurdle to overcome was that of funds. How would they buy the raw



materials, pay rent or take care of any other incidental expenses without any base capital? Responding to the situation, they decided to pull together Rs.500 per member. They managed enough resources to buy raw materials from Rewarpat, the wholesale electronics market in Pune.

The women used one of the members' house for storage and assembling of the lights. Every day the women spent anything between 3 to 4 hours making these lights.

Scaling up Business

Jhilmil Electronics delivered their first order in time and it turned out to be a huge success. They earned Rs.14,000. This success gave the group the much-needed confidence. Resultantly they decided to explore LED light manufacturing and selling as a micro-enterprise opportunity. Everyone agreed that having their own business was better than having a 9 to 5 job. This meant they could balance it with their household chores.



While *Jhilmil Electronics* continued to explore opportunities to broaden their business horizon, the issue of getting seed capital was always a core concern. The money earned from their first order was not enough.

It is around the same time Young Entrepreneurs Summit was organized by

the Youth Aid Foundation. It is a network of organisation working on livelihood, led by CYDA. The group pitched their business idea and won. They used their award money of Rs.25,000 as seed capital to scale up their micro-enterprise.

Replication of the model: *Ashtavinayak Mahila Gat*

Jhilmil Electronics had already set an example for other women to follow. Based on their learning, another set of women sought to replicate the initiative. This group of nine women from Nagpur Chawl was trained by the women of *Jhilmil Electronics*.

The group came together and formed, *Ashtavinayak Mahila Gat*. They too received their first order from CYDA of Rs. 5,000. To expand their business they took a loan of Rs.1 lakh from their Self Help Group (SHG) at an interest rate of 2 per cent per year.

Having learnt from *Jhilmil Electronics* the tricks of the trade, members of *Ashtavinayak Mahila Gat* sought to cover all bases to ensure their enterprise is profitable. One of the members even travelled to Gujarat to source their raw materials at a cheaper cost. The group also managed to get a space in their community temple to assemble the lights. Every day they spent anything between 2 to 3 hours making the LED lights.



WHAT ARE THE WOMEN SAYING?

It has been a roller coaster of a ride for these women. Initially, for most of them attending the training itself was challenging. Taking care of all the household work and then attending the sessions was not an easy task, more so when their families were unsupportive.

The family members laughed at them when the women shared they were undergoing training to become electricians and LED manufacturers. Neighbours were sarcastic and opined it was an effort in vain.

One of the members, Sushila Jadav shares, “My husband laughed at me and said all this is a man’s job, are you sure you women will be able to do it”.

Some of the women themselves had to overcome self-doubt. For instance, Lata Gaikwad, member of *Jhilmil Electronic* shares, “I was very hesitant. I thought what can I possibly do? After all, I have not studied much. Will I be able to understand anything”?

However, the attitude changed when their business kicked off and the women started making money. Neelam Ambre says, “As soon as the business fetched me money everybody’s attitude changed. My family, neighbours became more supportive”.

Having overcome all difficulties Snehal Sapkal says, “As women, we can do anything if we decide. Once we decide and are determined we can surely overcome all barriers”.



SUSTAINABILITY

One can see *Jhilmil Electronics* and *Ashtravinayak Mahila Gat* emerging strongly as women-led non-traditional livelihood models.

While since their inception in mid-2019 till the nationwide lockdown in March 2020, *Jhilmil Electronics* had made sales of close to Rs.85,000; *Ashtavinayak Mahila Gat* had made Rs.10,000 since their launch in early 2020 till about mid-March when the Covid-19 pandemic struck the country.

Both groups are making earnest efforts to promote themselves. They have business cards, with their names and contact numbers. While packaging they ensure a business card is kept inside the package for repeat orders. They have tied up with local shopkeepers, decorators to display their LED lights, so that they can be contacted. In addition, the groups participate consistently in fairs, exhibitions to showcase and sell their products.

As part of their effort to create an enabling environment, CYDA has created a club- 'YES Club' which is a network of entrepreneurs who collaborate and come together for tapping marketing linkages. *Jhilmil Electronics and Ashtavinayak Mahila Gat* are part of this club.

With the onset of Covid-19, needless to say, business has not picked up, but the women are hopeful that with gradual lifting up of the lockdown they will bring their business on track.

In addition to manufacturing LED lights, they have also started taking orders for repair of electrical items that are regularly used such as fans, mixer-grinders, tube-lights, irons, etc. Once the situation is back to normal, the women seek to set up a proper manufacturing unit for LED lights with advanced machines and tools.

This micro-business has the potential to become a scalable and profitable model. Variations, innovations in their products coupled with proper marketing can enhance the scalability of this enterprise. To be completely sustainable they will need another 2 to 3 years, and most importantly will need investments.

Testimonies



Irfana Sheikh is 30 years old with a family of three members. Her husband is a bus driver. Irfana has studied till class VIII. She says, *“When I heard about the non-traditional livelihood programme I was excited and wanted to join. But my family raised objections. In fact my husband told me not to enroll. I was very keen on doing the training because I was tired of working as a house help. So I made the trainer speak to my husband. Following a lot of discussions between them, my husband got convinced and I joined the training. After the completion of training I along with other six trainees came together and decided to form a group of LED light makers.*

“Initially our biggest challenge was to get the seed money for starting our business. We contributed from our own pocket and began operations. We made our first sales in an exhibition. It was a huge success for us. We reinvested our profit to buy more raw materials. Today, we are known as a women’s group which manufactures and sells good quality LED lights. More importantly, we have set an example and changed the narrative that LED light making is a male dominated occupation”.

Lata Premnagar is 35 years old with a family of six members. Her husband is a daily wage labourer. Lata has studied till class IV. Speaking about her journey of being a LED light maker she says, *“In 2019, I heard about an organisation imparting training to women in non-traditional skills to be financially independent. But I was very hesitant as I had studied only till class IV, so I thought what good I could do. However, when I approached them, they encouraged me to pursue the training. After the training few of us came together and mulled over making LED lights. But it hasn’t been an easy journey. My neighbors and people in my community used to taunt me that I was wasting my time and money”.*



“Women in my group were keen to take up the challenges and establish for those who had ridiculed us that as women we cannot make and sell LED lights. By the end of 2019, we started working together and selling LED lights as entrepreneurs. Another big challenge for me was to step out of house to buy raw materials and make clienteles which are predominantly male. Presently, the sale is down due to Covid-19 pandemic however we are working on strategies to escalate our business”.



Women Security Guards

Protecting People and Places

RANCHI, JHARKHAND

When one thinks of security guards, we instantly think of a big burly man in uniform, wielding a baton. The image of a woman being a security guard hardly crosses anyone's mind. Traditionally, the security industry has been rather male-dominated but today, women in the security industry are gradually shifting the gender balance.

In Ranchi, we see 22 such women breaking the perception of a predominantly male-orientated industry by taking on diverse roles.

Through the non-traditional skills and livelihoods programme, Ranchi based Coalition partner LEADS is training women,

mostly from resource-poor settings to become security guards. These women in Ranchi are working as security guards in bank ATMs, malls, offices, educational institutes and schools.

They are breaking the age-old gender stereotype that women need protection, rather are reaffirming that women can protect employees, manage crowd, respond to the emergencies and even manage crises. Earning a decent sum of ranging between Rs.5,000 to Rs.10,000 per month these women are gradually turning around the stereotypes and choosing security services as a viable career path.

EVOLUTION OF THE MODEL

In 2019, with upcoming malls, factories and businesses in several pockets in Ranchi, LEADS saw the potential of job opportunities for women as security guards. Hence, they introduced the training course for security guards for women and girls. The training was launched in two areas of Naya Sarai and Hundru.

However, mobilizing and convincing the women and their families for taking up this role proved to be a daunting task. Most of the women, though willing were sceptical by the question that holds most women back - “What would my family think”. They were also worried about acceptance by their larger community.

At the same time, potential employers such as banks, malls, factories, were reluctant to accept women as security guards. A question that was repeatedly put forth was ‘there are so many trades in which women can be skilled in, why to train them as security guards’.

Majority of both employers and community representatives opined that this is risky business for women. It was seen almost like a life-threatening occupation to opt for, as far as women are concerned.

Several rounds of meetings, sensitization workshops, one to one interactions and home visits yielded results. The first batch of the training had only nine women step forward to be trained as security guards.



Training Process

Based on the community interactions and home visits, it was evident that the training process needed to include not only just the technical know-how but also components that would build the trainees’ understanding of gender, patriarchy, equality, equity, among others.

An expert who himself was part of a security agency was brought in as a trainer to undertake in-house training for the women and girls. It was a three month training module wherein women enrolled were trained on roles and responsibilities of a security guard, they were prepared for handling emergencies, trained in prevention and detection of fire, introduced to the biometric system, metal detector among others.

Placement as Security Guards



Having trained the women, the next logical step was to ensure placement of the trainees. In order to place them, a two-fold approach was adopted; firstly organizations were approached directly to absorb the trainees as security guards; secondly about 17 different security agencies were approached with detailed resumes of the trainees seeking their support in the placement of the women.

Both the approaches worked. The organisations that were approached directly such as the FITJEE willingly absorbed the trainees. They undertook a week's refresher course of the women and drew up an employment contract directly with the women security guards. They were provided with uniform and safety gear for their duty. These institutions paid directly to the women.

On the other hand, the security agencies such as SIS, CISS, Lakshya and others helped place the women at various malls, shops, coaching centres. In this case, contracts were drawn up between the security agencies and the women, as well as between security agencies and the employers (malls, shops, banks). Against a one-time deposit ranging between Rs.1,700 to Rs.4,500 the security agencies provided the women with uniforms, shoes and other items needed by them. Here, the women received their salaries from the security agencies.

A total of 66 women and girls were enrolled, of which 60 completed their training. Out of this 60, before the Covid-19 outbreak, 22 women were gainfully employed at various places in the district. At present only nine women continue to work as most of them have lost their job to the pandemic. However, their payments were settled by the employers.

WHAT ARE THE WOMEN SAYING?

Drawing attention to the fact that it has taken time even for the women to challenge their socialization process which ingrains in all of us the idea of defined gender roles, Neha Kumari says, *“The fact that we hesitate to take up such unconventional roles is because of our fear. Our fear of what our families will say, or what will our community say. But if*



we manage to come out of this fear we can do anything and be at par with men”.

Nonetheless, there are other women who from the very beginning seek to challenge the existing gender norms; Anita Kumari is one such woman who says, “I joined the

training of security guard at the beginning of 2020 to challenge gender norms. Essentially I seek to establish for everyone around me that men and women are equal. I want everyone to treat us equally with respect as they would treat a man”.

SUSTAINABILITY

Since the inception of the training, we are witnessing significant changes both in the behaviour of women trainees and also in the approach of the employers concerning women security guards. While more women are coming forward to train as security guards, employers too are more open and are employing women as security guards.

However, for the occupation to be further scalable and sustainable, persistent and relentless effort is needed. Liasoning and networking with security and placement agencies will be important for the successful implementation of the model.

A second component that is critical to ensure that women continue to be employed is to provide handholding of the trainees at least for three months even after their joining. And LEADs is ensuring the same by organising weekly calls with the women security guards to understand if they are facing any challenges or are seeking support of any nature.

A similar follow up with the employers is also needed. And this too is being done by the partner. Weekly calls are held with employers to understand their concerns about the work, behaviour, conduct or any other issue concerning the women employed as security guards.

Unfortunately, owing to the Covid-19 pandemic, malls, coaching centres, offices and educational institutions were shut after the announcement of nationwide lockdown and it has had an adverse effect on the livelihood of these women security guards. The opportunities before them in these critical times are limited, hence the only way out seems to be waiting for the situation to get better, for the economy to open up. The Coalition is hopeful that once the situation improves these women security guards will be reemployed by the respective employers or even get better opportunities.

Testimonies



Shashikala Devi is 27 years old and has a 5 year old son. Her husband works as a gardener. She worked as a security guard even during the Covid-19 pandemic at an office in Ranchi from March 2020 to July 2020. Talking about her experience she says, *“I worked for 9 hours daily. I am one of the few women whose family has been supportive in taking up the job of a security guard. I worked even during the pandemic. While I worked my child was looked after by his elder cousins”*.

“Working as a security guard gave me the opportunity to prove to the people around me that we women like men can work for long hours and take on additional responsibilities too. Unfortunately, owing to the pandemic my payments had become irregular hence I discontinued my job. I soon found another job with another establishment, but because of Covid-19 I am yet to receive my appointment letter from them”.

Ruth Hembrom is a 23 year old married woman who trained as a security guard in the last quarter of 2019. She worked at a FITJEE centre as a security guard. She says, *“Though I have not studied much I always wanted to have an identity of my own. Training and working as a security guard has helped me realize my dream of being recognized and respected”*.

“As security guards, we play a very critical role. It is our role to ensure safety and security of not only the premises but also of those people who are inside it or are visiting it. This job excites me. Due to Covid-19, presently I am not going to the institute but I am being regularly paid. My job is secure with the institute despite the fact that it has shut its centre temporarily owing to the pandemic. Once they reopen I will resume my duty”.





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