

VISION VIKSIT BHARAT 2047: CONTRIBUTION AND INITIATIVES OF DIGITAL INDIA FOR EMPOWERING RURAL WOMEN

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SKILLS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS FOR RURAL WOMEN: A PATH TO FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE

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Abstract

Rural women face significant barriers to economic independence, including limited access to education, resources, and employment opportunities. Skills development programs offer a pathway to empowerment by providing training in areas like agriculture, handicrafts, small-scale enterprises, and digital literacy. These programs equip women with the tools to start micro-enterprises, enhance productivity, and achieve financial independence. Additionally, they improve social status, confidence, and decision-making roles within households. Highlighting case studies and addressing challenges such as cultural norms and financial constraints, this paper demonstrates how skills development initiatives foster gender equality, poverty reduction, and sustainable rural development. Ultimately, the paper argues that skills development programs are not merely tools for economic empowerment but catalysts for enhancing the social status, confidence, and agency of rural women. By fostering financial independence, these programs pave the way for gender equality and holistic rural development.

Keywords: Digital Literacy, Resources & Economic Independence.

Introduction

Rural women play a crucial role in the socio-economic fabric of their communities. However, they often face systemic barriers that limit their access to education, employment opportunities, and financial resources. This persistent inequality not only stifles their potential but also hinders overall community development. Empowering rural women through skills development programs offers a viable pathway to overcoming these challenges, enabling them to achieve financial independence and contribute meaningfully to their households and local economies.



Skills development programs are structured initiatives designed to enhance the abilities, knowledge, and confidence of individuals, enabling them to participate in economic activities more effectively. For rural women, these programs typically include training in areas such as agriculture, handicrafts, entrepreneurship, digital literacy, healthcare, and other vocational skills. The goal is to equip them with market-relevant capabilities, fostering self-reliance and income generation. In addition to economic benefits, skills development empowers rural women socially and psychologically. It increases their self-esteem, enhances their decision-making power, and promotes gender equity within their communities. Moreover, financially independent women tend to invest in their families, prioritizing education, healthcare, and better living standards, which generate a ripple effect of development.

Significance of the Study

The study on “**Skills Development Programs for Rural Women: A Path to Financial Independence**” is of critical importance for addressing systemic gender inequities, fostering economic growth, and achieving sustainable development. Its significance lies in its ability to illuminate the transformative potential of targeted skill-building initiatives for rural women and the broader implications for society. In summary, this study is significant for its potential to inspire impactful interventions, promote gender equity, and unlock the vast untapped potential of rural women. By focusing on their empowerment through skills development, it addresses not only individual growth but also broader social and economic progress.

Review of Literature

Sonam Prabhakar and Ashok Nimesh (2022) in their article entitled “Skill development programmes for women in India: current status and future perspectives” this also aimed at gender equality and filling the industrial and service sectors' workforce. But there are several barriers to rural women's skill development that must be removed before

the government's skill development objective can be realised. Therefore, it is critical to understand rural women's challenges and find solutions that help them acquire and hone new skills. In this review article, we have discussed the role of skill development programmes in changing women's socio-economic status, confidence, and self-image and the problem and challenges in skill development training for women in India. The courses in skill development help find work and advance one's career. If the government and banks help young business owners get started, these people will create jobs for others and boost the economy. Policies such as increasing access to skill development by providing more seats for women, gender mainstreaming of training content and delivery, and usage of digital platforms for women's empowerment should be simplified.

Supriya Kumari (2023) in her article entitled "The Crucial Role of Skill Development in Women Empowerment" Women empowerment is an important topic currently. It inspires women to be aware of their rights and duties. Skill development is an important medium to bring self confidence and self-reliance among women. Skill development is a powerful means of women empowerment which improves productivity, employability and earning opportunities. It is the bridge between the job and the workforce. This article throws light on the roles and effects of skill development in women's empowerment.

Methodology

Articles were culled from scholarly publications and databases, including Google scholar, Web of Science, Publons, and Research Gate. Articles were uncovered by using search terms including skill development, skill India, entrepreneurship, startup-ecosystems, agricultural, socio-economic profile, and livelihood.

Skill Development Programmes

The Indian Prime Minister started the "Skill India" programme, also known as the National Skills Development Mission of India. The National Skills Development Corporation of India oversees its management. The programme was introduced on October 2nd, 2016, with the following goals: Through short-term courses, provide school dropouts, college dropouts, and young people without jobs with new skill development training, recognizes the skills that the present workforce has by certifying their abilities, encourage states to participate in the execution of the plan that will increase States' capabilities, promote uniformity in the certification process and start a method to create a register of skills, and improved infrastructure for training and alignment of training with industrial demands [4,19]. The essentials of skill development whereby the execution of such programmes alleviate social issues, accomplish economic growth, use demographic dividends, and empower underprivileged sectors on a socio-economic level. Regarding institutional mechanisms, Prime Minister Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), and the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship have produced notable benefits, but not the intended ones. It makes the case that skill development is a crucial prerequisite for technology adoption and women's

empowerment in the nation. India has to fulfill the growing ambitions of its young as it progresses toward becoming a global knowledge economy [4, 20]. It can be partially accomplished by emphasizing the development of talents pertinent to the new economic climate. The issue at hand involves the massive numeric expansion of juvenile skill training and the far more crucial goal of improving that training's quality. Hence, it prioritizes youth skill development as one of its pillars, intending to create opportunity, space, and scope for developing the skills of the Indian young and enhancing their technological knowledge. This skill certification program's goal is to make it possible for many young people in India to enroll in training that is relevant to their industry and would improve their chances of finding employment. Under the Recognition of Prior Learning programme (RPL), individuals with prior learning experience or skills will also be evaluated and certified [21-23]. The various major programmes and training for skill development run by the government for youth in India are given in Table 1.

The Role of Skill Development in Empowerment

Skill development is a cornerstone of empowerment, particularly for rural women who face multifaceted challenges in achieving financial independence and societal equality. By equipping them with market-relevant abilities, skill-building initiatives not only open avenues for economic participation but also foster social and psychological empowerment. This section explores the multifaceted role of skill development in transforming the lives of rural women.

1. Economic Empowerment

- **Increased Income Opportunities:** Skills such as farming techniques, handicrafts, digital literacy, and entrepreneurship provide women with the ability to earn an income and support their families.
- **Job Creation:** Vocational training enables rural women to secure jobs or create micro-enterprises, contributing to local economies and reducing dependency on others.
- **Access to Financial Resources:** Equipped with skills, women are better positioned to access loans, grants, and financial services, fostering greater control over their finances.

2. Social Empowerment

- **Enhanced Social Standing:** Women who contribute economically are often accorded greater respect and influence in their households and communities.
- **Strengthened Decision-Making Power:** Financially independent women are more likely to participate in decisions regarding family welfare, education, and healthcare.
- **Community Leadership:** Empowered women often inspire others, fostering a culture of skill-sharing and mutual support within rural areas.

3. Psychological Empowerment

- **Increased Confidence:** Acquiring and applying new skills builds self-esteem and a sense of accomplishment.
- **Overcoming Traditional Barriers:** Skill development challenges societal norms that limit women's roles, enabling them to break free from restrictive stereotypes.
- **Fostering Independence:** Women gain the ability to navigate challenges independently, reducing reliance on male family members or external aid.

4. Gender Equity and Social Transformation

- Skill development bridges the gender gap by creating equal opportunities for women in traditionally male-dominated sectors.
- Empowered women are more likely to advocate for their rights and the rights of others, driving systemic change in communities.

5. Sustainable Development

- Women who gain skills often prioritize sustainable practices, such as eco-friendly farming or ethical business operations, contributing to broader environmental and social goals.
- They play a critical role in improving community health, education, and overall well-being through reinvestment of their earnings.

Skill development is not merely a tool for economic upliftment; it is a transformative process that enables rural women to reclaim agency, challenge inequality, and contribute meaningfully to society. Empowering rural women through skill-building is thus a foundational step toward achieving inclusive and sustainable development.

Conclusion

Empowering rural women through skills development programs is not just an act of social justice but a strategic investment in sustainable development. These programs equip women with the tools and knowledge necessary to break the cycle of poverty, contribute to their families' income, and foster economic growth in their communities. By addressing the unique challenges faced by rural women—such as limited access to education, resources, and markets—these initiatives create pathways to self-reliance and financial independence. Moreover, they promote gender equality, improve household livelihoods, and have a cascading positive impact on the broader society. Collaboration among governments, non-governmental organizations, and private sector stakeholders is essential to scaling these programs and ensuring their long-term success. Tailoring training to local needs, integrating modern technology, and fostering an environment that encourages entrepreneurship can further enhance their effectiveness. Ultimately, empowering rural women through skills development is a transformative approach that not only uplifts individual lives but also strengthens entire communities, paving the way for a more inclusive and equitable future.

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