

## **SKILLING WOMEN, EMPOWERING INDIA: NIOS PAVING THE WAY**

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### **Abstract:**

Women participation in India's workforce is low, and this needs to improve for India to reap its demographic dividend. The progressing economy of India needs 119 million skilled workers between 2017-2022. However, around 88.5 million women are yet not into any form of education, employment, or training. The proportion of working-age women receiving any form of vocational training over the past decade has only increased from 6.8% in 2011-12 to 6.9% in 2018-19, Vs an increase of 14.6% to 15.7% for men.

There is an imminent requirement to empower girls and women in India through quality education and skilling. The Open and distance learning system can play a major role in achieving this mission.

National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), an ODL institution, is providing quality education and skill training to girls and women in the country through its special programs. The present paper mainly focuses on NIOS experience in integrating vocational training with school education for girls in more than 300 Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBVs), special Government residential schools for girls. This is in line with National Education Policy 2020, which recommends integrating Vocational Education into the educational offerings of all Secondary Schools over the next decade.

An attempt will be made in this paper to present the concerted efforts by NIOS for the education of girls and women, its impact, and the way forward.

Keywords: Skilling, NIOS, KGBVs, NEP 2020

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### INTRODUCTION

The increased participation of girls in education and training in the past years in India has made a positive impact on the families and society at large. But still an alarming number of girls in India have limited or no access to education and training. This exclusion limits girls' opportunities, threatens their successful transition to adulthood, adversely impacts their long-term health and well-being, and robs the world of their potential contributions (UNICEF 2020). Although India has one of the fastest growing youth populations in the world, its gender disparities pose significant barriers for the future of girls. Gender-related challenges such as restrictions on mobility, lack of schooling or dropping out of school, early marriage and violence persist in creating unfair disadvantages for girls within this large group of adolescents in India. (Sharma and Nanda, 2019)

There are an estimated number of 600 million adolescent girls in the world (UN DESA 2019). These girls can become the catalyst for a positive change in the society specially in developing countries if they are given adequate education and skill developing opportunities.

Girl's education helps to eliminate illiteracy; develop self-esteem and self-confidence (Nanda, P; Das, P; Singh, A. & Negi, R. - 2013). The benefits of girls' education are seen by individuals, their families, and throughout society. These benefits include reducing the number of babies women have; lowering infant and child mortality rates; lower maternal mortality rates; (Kumar, J. & Sangeeta-2013), protecting against HIV/AIDS infection (Latha,P.S.-2014). Every year of schooling helps a woman make better decisions for her and her family (King, E. & Winthrop, R.-2015). Education also teaches young ones the importance of keeping herself and her house clean and safe (World Bank Report, 2008).

Education is a powerful medium to empower a society in general and women and girls in particular. The literacy rate and educational achievement are indicators of development of any society. Since Independence, India has adopted many different paths and strategies for achieving gender equality and empowerment of women for prosperity and sustainable development. The overall situation and status of women also has improved over the years. <https://www.deccanherald.com/opinion/skilling-women-an-imperative-for-india-959496.html>

It is estimated that by the next decade, 75 million women will join the workforce in India (Niti Aayog), with over 90 per cent of them employed in informal sectors. If these girls are provided with market-oriented skills and training, they could be gainfully employed in formal sectors and earn their livelihoods. We need to have focussed women and girl centric initiatives including social and economic support, meaningful training opportunities to help them to enter different sectors of the economy and be part of India's progress.

This paper therefore aims to address the following aspects: -

- NIOS role in imparting vocational education to underprivileged girls
- What effect does NIOS intervention has on KGBV scheme and girls in particular

This paper is based on the focussed attempt by NIOS towards empowering young underprivileged girls from backward areas by providing them with skill training and education.

## **EDUCATIONAL STATUS OF WOMEN IN INDIA**

As per 2011 Census, literacy rate in India is 74.00 per cent and the rate of literacy among women is 65.46 per cent. The country had female literacy at the rate of 54.16 per cent in 2001 and witnessed an increase in total literacy rate from 18.33 per cent in 1951 to 74.00 per cent in 2011. The female literacy rate steadily rose from 8.86 per cent in 1951 to 65.46 per cent in 2011. Female literacy rate increased by around 14.8 per cent from 1991 to 2001. The increase in female literacy rate was 3.15 per cent above than the male literacy rate.

The gender gap in literacy has been lowering with each decade with female literacy rate increasing. However, the gender gap in literacy is still there. The data indicates that women lagged in comparison to men from the beginning in terms of literacy rate educational achievements. There are various factors impeding female literacy

- Social biases towards gender based inequality.
- Involvement of girl child in household work
- Low enrolment of girls in schools
- Low retention rate and high dropout rate
- Parents avoid spending money on girl education as they have to spend money on their marriage.
- Marriage at an early age

Apart from these reasons, a significant percentage of girls leave schools in between due to non-availability of educational institutions in the close neighbourhood and problem of regular and safe means of travel. Non availability of proper toilets is also one of the important reasons for not sending young girls to the school.

([http://164.100.47.193/Refinput/New\\_Reference\\_Notes/English/Girls%20Education%20in%20India.pdf](http://164.100.47.193/Refinput/New_Reference_Notes/English/Girls%20Education%20in%20India.pdf) )

The above reasons indicate that the first basic requirement for the girl child education is to have a physically and emotionally safe environment to learn. They must be introduced to the examples of other females in their community who have done better for themselves and their families so that they can also start imagining themselves as empowered adults. They need to be provided opportunities to learn and apply their skills in their communities which will help to build their self-confidence.

National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 recommends that by 2025, at least 50% of learners through school and higher education should have exposure to vocational education. Starting with middle and secondary school, quality vocational education is to be integrated smoothly into higher education and all secondary schools are expected to integrate vocational education in their academic offerings in a phased manner over next decade. Every child is expected to learn at least one vocational skill should have exposure to even more, if possible. This would lead to skill building, dignity of labour and importance of various vocations involving Indian arts and artisanship.

Vocational Training at the school level helps in introducing varied occupations to the students and inculcate a sense of respect for all kind of jobs. As a mandatory or optional subject in the curriculum, the students get a chance to understand their vocational interests and choose their careers wisely. Students will also get to learn about dignity of labour as they do things hands-on.

### **KASTURBA GANDHI BALIKA VIDYALAYAS (KGBVS)**

The Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) scheme was launched by the Government of India in August 2004 under Samagra Shiksha for setting up residential schools at upper primary level for girls belonging predominantly to the SC, ST, OBC and minorities in difficult areas. The scheme is being implemented in educationally backward blocks (EBBs) of the country where the female rural literacy is below the national average and gender gap in literacy is above the national average. The scheme provides for a minimum reservation of 75% of the seats for girls belonging to SC, ST, OBC or minority communities and priority for the remaining 25%, is accorded to girls from families below poverty line. The objective of KGBV is to ensure access and quality education to the girls of disadvantaged groups of society by setting up residential schools at upper primary level.

### **NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF OPEN SCHOOLING (NIOS)**

The National Institute of Open Schooling which has been working incessantly for more than 25 years to provide educational, training and certification opportunities to a varied clientele particularly the members of less privileged sections like scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and especially women and girls, differently abled etc.

In its endeavour for reaching the unreached, the NIOS has been marching ahead steadily to provide education through Open and Distance learning mode up to pre degree level to those who are unable to attend conventional schools for a variety of socio-economic reasons as well as to those who missed opportunities to complete school and developmental education for similar reasons. Over the last two decades, lakhs of learners have successfully completed their pre-degree schooling, both in academic and vocational streams, from NIOS and have either continued their higher education or joined the work force successfully.

## **NIOS VOCATIONAL OFFERINGS**

NIOS has been running more than 100 vocational courses for learners of different age groups in various sectors. Several tie-ups have been done with Ministries, industry bodies in the public and private domain like India Tourism Development Corporation, Indian Medical Association, Insurance Regulatory, and Development Authority of India, DGET, Microsoft, Ministry of Textiles, Government of Bihar and Maharashtra to provide relevant quality vocational education. These collaborations facilitate placements of trainees enrolled in the course after successful completion of the course.

Vocational Stream at Secondary and Senior Secondary Level is offered by NIOS where concentrated efforts will be put on skill training in the same or related areas combining it with two academic subjects to earn a Secondary or Senior Secondary certificate along with individual certificates for each vocational course. Additionally, NIOS has integrated Academic subjects with Vocational Courses compulsorily as one of the 5 subjects at Secondary and as a sixth subject at Senior Secondary level. This is in line with the recommendations of the NEP 2020.

With a focus on women and girl empowerment, NIOS has established a model training centre at Regional Centre, Amethi which is providing free of cost training to girls and women from the rural and backward areas. In sync with NEP 2020, Mukta Kaushal Kendras (Open Skill Centres) are being established by NIOS at 8 different places in first phase to provide free of cost vocational training to the youth in selected trades.

Variety of certifications are available to learners as per the course undertaken.

## **NIOS -KGBV MODEL**

As part of Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, NIOS-KGBV collaboration came into existence in 2010 with the aim to provide vocational courses and trainings to KGBV students. NIOS takes this exercise in collaboration with the respective State Governments of India. The KGBVs under State Governments are accredited as Study Centres of NIOS. Since most of Schools already have different types of Laboratories, which are converted into Skill Development Labs in specific areas. A suitable model is worked out where the training is carried out in these labs with hired faculty by the schools. The KGBV faculty is trained by NIOS for respective course curriculum, daywise training schedules to maintain uniformity in training across schools, transactional strategy and NIOS audio video support material available for learners. Examinations are carried out by NIOS with a joint certification awarded by both NIOS and the State Government.

## **ROLE OF RESPECTIVE STATE GOVERNMENTS**

- Collaboration with NIOS for undertaking Skill Development at the School level.
- Instruct all KGBVs to encourage students to take up one vocational course either, in addition to their five academic subjects or take up any one NIOS stand-alone course as part of five academic subjects from 10th to 12th class.
- Set up relevant Skill Development Labs.
- Identify along with NIOS, the skill development courses that could be run in these schools. These should depend on the assessed needs of that region and the infrastructure available as well as those courses where vocational opportunities are available and are in the interest of the learners.
- Ensure that according to the NIOS vocational course selected, appropriate infrastructure be created in schools and the schools then accredit themselves as NIOS Study Centres that are known as Accredited Vocational Institutes (AVI).

- Ensure that schools enrol students for NIOS vocational courses as per their aptitude, interest, and talent.
- Ensure that schools hire qualified faculty as per the norms of NIOS for holding the training classes in the contact programme conducted at the labs.
- Funding for this project would be borne by the Government of India/ State Government.
- Ensure that schools make available the learners for undertaking NIOS practical and theory exams on mutually convenient dates.

## **ROLE OF NIOS**

- Design, develop and prepare NSQF compliant courses and support material especially relevant to a particular state.
- Accredite KGBVs to become Study Centres of the NIOS.
- Conduct appropriate research on Skill gap and need analysis for the State for identification of need-based courses.
- Provide training to all the teachers/trainers of KGBV in the respective courses selected by the particular KGBV.
- Provide joint certification on successful completion of the vocational courses.

## **IMPLEMENTATION MECHANISM**

- Nodal officers are nominated by the State Government and respective NIOS Regional Centre will be the Nodal Centre from NIOS for the conduct of NIOS Vocational Courses at Schools.
- Schools will nominate co-coordinators for ensuring smooth conduct of vocational training at the labs and for co-coordinating with NIOS.
- Regular monitoring and progress of training is monitored at under Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan.
- An Executive Committee is set up to operationalise and implement the “Vocationalization of Education” in the state as also to monitor the implementation of the project.

## **NIOS COLLABORATION WITH RAJASTHAN AND GUJARAT**

NIOS is successfully running Vocational courses in Cutting, Tailoring and Dress Making and Beauty Culture and Hair Care in 167 KGBVs of Rajasthan since 2010. They have now applied for taking more courses viz. Basic Computing and Yoga. 65,546 learners have been registered in KGBV Rajasthan till date and 42,603 have been certified so far. A study conducted by NIOS revealed that trained girls felt empowered and started earning by doing small jobs of tailoring and beauty culture.

NIOS has collaborated with Samagra Shiksha, Government of Gujarat in 2019-20 to skill the girls studying and residing in Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) by providing vocational education inside the campus. Certificate courses in 5 selected courses are being provided in 164 KGBVs of Gujarat to skill 14,400 girls studying and residing there. NIOS certificate will help the girls to perceive the career in future after completing their studies.

Gujarat KGBVs selected five courses based on surveys conducted at KGBVs to find out the need and aspirations of the girls, duration of the courses and employment available in the area. The courses selected by schools are Cutting and Tailoring, Beauty Therapy, Indian Embroidery, Basic Computing and Yoga. The selected staff of KGBVs which are working as art and craft teachers, Computer teachers, Sports teachers, to be engaged for providing vocational training to girls. These teachers were trained by NIOS in each of the selected trades to

facilitate the girls in KGBVs. A total of 3647 girls have enrolled in the KGBVs accredited so far and have started their trainings.

The enrolment of girls has been very encouraging so far:

Table 1: Enrolment of learners in KGBV Rajasthan and Gujarat

| Course                       | KGBVs Accredited by NIOS | Previous enrolment | 2021-22  |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|----------|
| Rajasthan                    | 167                      | 19,344             | On going |
| Gujarat<br>(Started in 2020) | 164                      | 3647               | On going |



**Few Glimpses of online training of Teachers of KGBVs, Gujarat in Sept 2019**

NIOS has played a vital role in providing upward mobility to young girls for better life chances. NIOS is trying to onboard KGBVs of various states through the Regional Centers of NIOS

NIOS enrolment data of vocational courses reveals that a greater number of female learners take admissions in the vocational courses than males. This proves the impact of NIOS as an open Learning institution on women’s education. During 2017, 37% of males took admission in vocational courses as compared to 63% females which

is an achievement in terms of women empowerment. However, the trend is reversed in 2018 because of more enrollments in few sectors in that particular year.

Table 2: Gender wise enrolment in vocational courses of NIOS

| Gender | 2015  |        | 2017  |        | 2018  |        |
|--------|-------|--------|-------|--------|-------|--------|
|        | Total | %ge    | Total | %ge    | Total | %ge    |
| Male   | 11299 | 36.00  | 9936  | 37.00  | 37459 | 62.43  |
| Female | 19691 | 64.00  | 17201 | 63.00  | 22549 | 37.57  |
| Total  | 30990 | 100.00 | 27137 | 100.00 | 60007 | 100.00 |

Table 3: Trade wise gender wise enrolment in selected vocational courses 2015-16.

| Sl. No | Trade   | Male | Female | Total |
|--------|---|------|--------|-------|
| 1.     | Certificate in Basic Computing                    | 603  | 1207   | 1810  |
| 2.     | Certificate in Beauty Culture                     | 28   | 5052   | 5080  |
| 3.     | Certificate in Community Health                   | 2994 | 975    | 3969  |
| 4.     | Certificate in Computer and Office Applications   | 30   | 107    | 137   |
| 5.     | Certificate in Computer Applications              | 877  | 746    | 1623  |
| 6.     | Certificate in Cutting and Tailoring              | 46   | 5350   | 5396  |
| 7.     | Certificate in Data Entry Operations              | 91   | 162    | 253   |
| 8.     | Certificate in Desktop Publishing                 | 115  | 237    | 352   |
| 9.     | Certificate in Dress Making                       | 23   | 362    | 385   |
| 10.    | Certificate in Early Childhood Care and Education | 51   | 2111   | 2162  |
| 11.    | Certificate in Indian Embroidery                  | 6    | 48     | 54    |
| 12.    | Certificate in Library Science (CLS)              | 244  | 255    | 499   |
| 13.    | Certificate in Play Centre Management             | 8    | 33     | 41    |
| 14.    | Certificate in Rural Health for Women (Gramsakhi) | 0    | 64     | 64    |
| 15.    | Certificate in Secretarial Practice               | 4    | 48     | 52    |
| 16.    | Certificate in Stenography (English)              | 45   | 48     | 93    |
| 17.    | Certificate in Typewriting (English)              | 28   | 34     | 62    |
| 18.    | Certificate in Typewriting (Hindi)                | 202  | 82     | 284   |
| 19.    | Certificate in Web Designing                      | 91   | 84     | 175   |

|     |   |     |      |      |
|-----|---|-----|------|------|
| 20. | Certificate in Yoga                     | 263 | 252  | 515  |
| 21. | Cutting, Tailoring and Dress Making     | 51  | 1509 | 1560 |
| 22. | Diploma in Secretarial Practice (PA/PS) | 118 | 223  | 341  |

It is also observed that more female is taking admissions in Home Science and Hospitality sector, whereas more males are joining Health and Paramedical and Computer courses of NIOS. This implies that enrolment is dependent upon the learner's choice of a particular course.

### **BENEFITS OF NIOS-KGVB COLLABORATION**

Considering the fact that KGVBs provide residential facilities for girl students and NIOS has extensive experience in developing Vocational courses and the course content is interactive, easy to understand and globally recognized, The collaboration has proved to be immensely beneficial for all :

- Since KGVB provides free residential facility to the students, along with all regular school features, the dropout rate of students in KGVB is low compared to other schools.
- The students have enough time to pursue vocational skills through NIOS specialized courses in a structured manner, implementing the recommendations of the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020);
- Students get appropriate certification based on the course undertaken.
- A study conducted by NIOS revealed that trained girls felt confident and empowered.
- Many of the girls in Ajmer, Bikaner, Jaipur have setup their own tailoring and beauty center and have been earning their livelihood.
- The kind of vocational, personality development and entrepreneurship experience that the girls get as part of NIOS-KGBV program, many of them pursued additional professional courses after completing their schooling or opted for higher education.

### **IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF SKILL TRAINING ON THE GIRL LEARNERS OF KGBV IN THE STATE OF RAJASTHAN**

A study conducted by NIOS on impact assessment of skill training on the girl learners of KGBV in the State of Rajasthan revealed that the course was very beneficial for KGBV girls. Given the background from which the KGBV girl students join this program, the biggest impact on the girl students that was noticed was that the girls felt confident and more empowered.

Many of the girls understood the importance of vocational training for self-dependence, opted for vocational courses of their choice and later pursued further skills in those courses to take it as a profession.–Few of them became Instructors in school itself.

### **CONCLUSION**

The access to residential KGBV schools is a turning point in the lives of out of school and dropped out girls helping them reach to undreamt place. With continued efforts from government, society, parents support, girls of KGBVs are not only completing their 12-year school education but also moving forward to pursue career for self-reliance. They are opting for jobs, self-employment or pursuing further education. The girls from KGBVs who were denied education by their families and society are becoming role models. One chance of starting/continuing the studies changed the life of these drop out or never enrolled girls. There is a need for initiating more such concerted efforts for taking the girls in ambit of education and training. NIOS with the help of its Regional Centres is trying to collaborate with other states for providing skill education in KGBV schools.

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