



VIKALP: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON NON-TRADITIONAL LIVELIHOODS

Research Report

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Cover Photo

Neighborhood women gather outside their homes to discuss the area upkeep and work issues. As organized home-based workers, the women associated with the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) and Mahila Housing Trust (MHT) have led slum upgradation programs in their area and also received training on working from home and how to market their products.

Credit: Paula Bronstein/Getty Images/Images of Empowerment.

Disclaimer

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ASER	- Annual Status of Education Report
DDU-GKY	- Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana
EUS	- Employment and Unemployment Survey
ICC	- Internal Complaint Committee
IDI	- In-Depth Interview
KII	- Key Informant Interview
MSME	- Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship
NGO	- Non-Governmental Organization
NTL	- Non-Traditional Livelihoods
NTLN	- Non-Traditional Livelihoods Network
NWC	- Non- Women Concentrated
OECD	- The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PMKVY	- Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana
TAG	- Technical Advisory Committee
TL	- Traditional Livelihoods
WC	- Women Concentrated
WCSC	- World Class Skill Center
WEE	- Women Economic Empowerment

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Vikalp Exploratory Study on Non-Traditional Livelihoods, undertaken with support from the Ford Foundation, aimed at understanding enablers and barriers for women with respect to entry to and sustenance of “non-traditional” livelihoods.

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SECTION 1:

Introduction and Methodology

This study proposes an understanding that the world of work for women is not organized in the binary of traditional livelihoods (TLs) and non-traditional livelihoods (NTLs), sectors, or occupations, but is determined by existing gender norms reflected across the three pillars of social organization – households, markets and the state. From any perspective that we adopt to view “non-traditionality”, it will not be an exaggeration to observe that all the barriers are enhanced when women try to move into domains of work that are considered non-traditional. Similarly, enablers in the form of social sanctions are far and few when we consider non-traditional domains of work. The definitions of non-traditionality are determined by women’s social location and hence, the enablers and barriers they grapple with are highly sensitive to their positioning in social and economic hierarchies. To understand how work can achieve transformative potential in women’s lives, it merits inquiry in more comprehensive ways, which amplify the voices and narratives of women workers.

In this report, we begin with an overview of women and work, and unpack the conceptual comprehension of embedding NTLs within this understanding. We then present the guiding theory of change for this study, followed by the research findings. We end with a suggested framework for transformative work emerging from the narratives and recommendations.

Locating the study in the world of women and work

It is critical to unpack gender assumptions and stereotypical expectations for understanding the roles that people perform in the society and how these are mirrored in the economy. In development theories, enough evidence exists to establish that benefits of gender equality lead to improved social and economic outcomes for everyone. However, for the inverse to be positive, the process must be accompanied by public action to remove gender-related barriers (Kabeer, 2012).

Programming on women's economic empowerment in low-and lower-middle income countries has used an integrated approach between skill building, capacity building, providing financial services and enhancing employability (Dickson & Bangpan, 2012). Broadly considering the current economic status of women, this research was located to focus on women who are already part of the workforce, and learn from their experience and perspectives. The study engages with their experiences and adopts an intersectional lens, attentive to multiple vulnerabilities of women by virtue of their social location.

India is ranked among the ten lowest countries (136 out of 144 countries covered) for women's workforce participation.¹ The continuous decline in female labor force participation rates² in India has been well documented. This decline is paradoxical in the context of an average growth rate of 6 to 7 percent per annum. More recently, the severity has been compounded with a scenario of growing unemployment (Klasen & Pieters, 2015), rapid urbanization and disproportionately high domestic duties for women (OECD, 2018). There is rich literature on the analysis of this trend by labor rights theorists, feminist economists, social scientists, demographers in India, who explore the set of underlying social, economic, and political barriers that limit employability and employment opportunities for women (Abraham, 2013; Chatterjee et al., 2018a; Gothoskar, 2016; Klasen & Pieters, 2015). Women also often concentrate on distress driven work, which is typically semi-skilled, low paid and offers no growth. The increasing absence of women from the workforce, some have argued, is due to increased participation of women in educational institutions or withdrawal of women from the labor market as a result of upward mobility of the households; others have focused on the non-availability of jobs that are suitable for women in terms of skills, location, timings and so on (Sinha, 2019). This explains why mechanization leads to women dropping out of the usual sectors as well (Chaudhary & Verick, 2014). This study, therefore, does not directly address the question of decline in women's work force

participation rates and presupposes a context where the male breadwinner ideology (Bernard, 1981) is nearly universal.

Rather, the learnings from this study are in form of enablers and barriers to their work, especially for them to be transformative, with some understanding of occupational patterns in women's employment. The inquiry into these enablers and barriers are based on the gendered consciousness presupposed in the structure and organization of the labor force; in which some jobs are perceived to be better suited for women and others for men. The perceptions of gendered roles in the economy have historical, cultural and socio-economic connotations, and are nearly normalized. These gendered roles are entrenched in gender division of labor, wherein women's paid work is consistent and simultaneous with unpaid reproductive and domestic work such as running the household, involving cooking, cleaning and taking care of the elderly and children. This continues to inform studies working with the distinction between productive and unproductive work, public and private, and so on (Azim Premji University, 2018; Sreerekha, 2017).

In this context, the **International Center for Research on Women (ICRW)**, with support from the **Ford Foundation**, conducted this study to unpack what are the barriers to work and within it, to work in non-traditional roles. The study objectives and methodology are highlighted in **Figure 1**.

Methodology

The research study comprised five phases. However, one of the key steps undertaken before the beginning of the study was to form a technical advisory group (TAG). All research activities were completed over a period of 24 months. The TAG consisted of prominent experts in the field, economists, policymakers and practitioners to advise and enrich the research at different stages.

¹ World Economic Forum. (2017). The Global Gender Gap Report. Retrieved from http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2017.pdf

² Labor force participation rates includes those who are "active" in the labor market i.e. those who are employed as well as those who are "seeking employment" (unemployed). Workforce participation rates on the other hand, include only those who are currently employed.

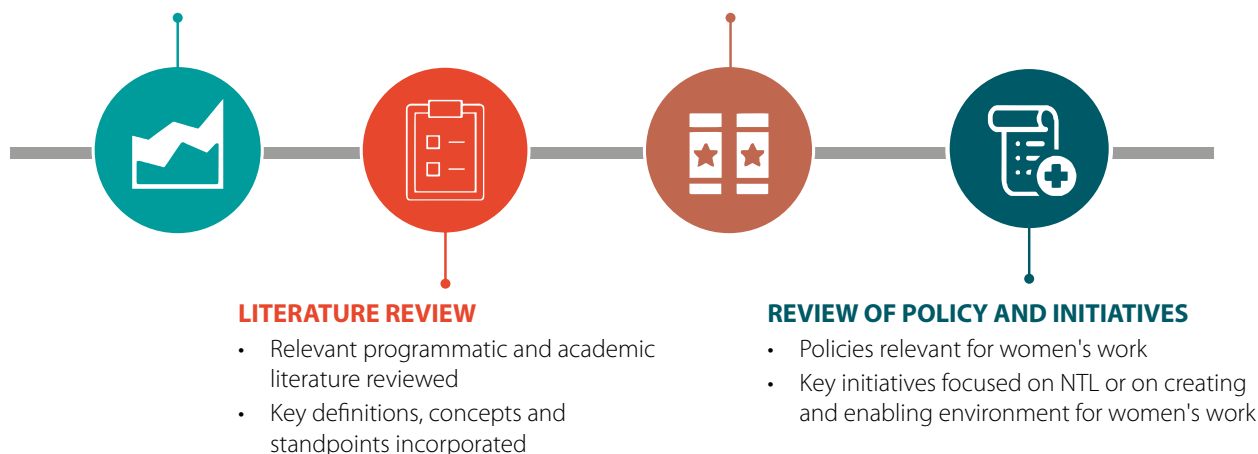
Figure 1: Objectives and Methods of the Study

TRENDS ANALYSIS

- NSSO data from three labor surveys 1993- 94 to 2011-12 analyzed
- Sectors selected for the study

QUALITATIVE STUDY

- Interviews with women in selected sectors
- Interviews with their male co-workers
- Interviews with other stakeholders



Study Objectives

- Unpacking traditional and non-traditional livelihoods for women
- Understanding the status of working women in india
- Identifying enablers and barriers for their entry and sustenance
- Documenting and analyzing relevant policies, schemes and initiatives
- Developing a framework to guide research, policy and practice on women's work

Three consultations were held with the TAG in August 2018, March 2019 and February 2020. Details on each phase of the study are provided in **Annexure 1**.

The first two phases (trends analysis and review of literature) illustrated the nature and extent of gender segregation within the labor market, across sectors, industries and occupations, and also provided us with information on where women have been consistently and "traditionally" employed, as compared to their presence in non-traditional sectors. This exercise is an effort that contributes to reformulate NTL from the perspective of understanding the characteristics of employment for women who are already part of the workforce by analyzing women's employment data in terms of the sectors of employment, mode of transport, marital status, number of children, and occupational categories and so on (refer to **Annexure 4**).

We found that 27.6 percent of the workforce is women and the five sectors where women's participation is higher than this average are agriculture, manufacturing, education, health and paid domestic work. Even within these sectors, there is visible occupational segregation – where women are concentrated in low-paying and low-skilled jobs. – We found that there was gendering of roles where women's participation was less than 27.6 percent. For example, in the field of retail, which is an upcoming sector with jobs and income potential, the majority (52 percent) are employed in gender stereotypical roles as models, demonstrators and salespersons. Please refer to findings from the trends analysis in **Figure 3**.

Hence, we reconceptualized NTL as it exists in the current discourse, to be reframed as "non-women concentrated" jobs and TL as "women concentrated"

jobs. Based on this rationale, we used the female workforce participation figure of 27.6 percent to define "women-concentrated" (i.e. sectors that were above this cut-off) and "non-women-concentrated" (lower than this cut-off). Please refer to **Annexure 3** for detailed analysis of women's employment data in terms

of the sectors of employment, nature of employment, educational levels of working women, overlaps between marital and work categories, and so on. Based on these characteristics and purposive sampling, finally, the following sectors were selected as the sampling framework for the study:

Table 1 : Sampling Framework for the Primary Qualitative Research

	WC sectors		NWC sectors	
	Health	Apparel manufacturing	Retail trade	Information and communication
WC roles	Anganwadi workers		Salespersons, Demonstrators	
NWC roles		Corporate managers		Computer programmers

*WC - Women Concentrated; NWC - Non-women Concentrated

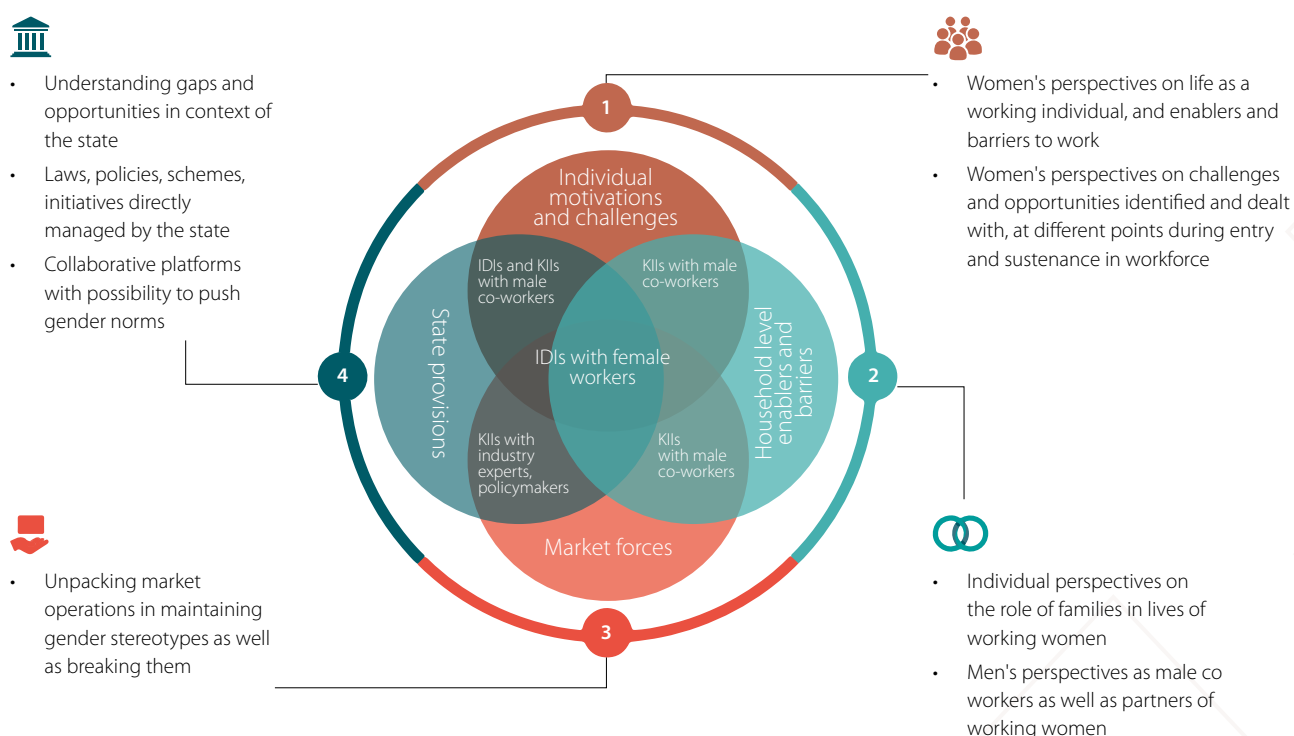
Within the selected sectors, we interacted with following groups of participants:

(a) In-depth Interviews (IDIs) - women working in traditional and non-traditional livelihoods: **10 participants** (Profile of women interviewed attached in **Annexure 4**),

(b) Key Informant Interviews (KIs) - community of male co-workers³ : **6 participants**, and

(c) KIs - Representatives from the selected sectors; state/government actors, employers, private sector and industry associations, skilling and training institutes, trade unions and activists: **18 participants**.

Figure 2: Visual Representation of Thematic Areas Covered in Various Interviews⁴



³ The primary participants – working women and men – are not part of any livelihood or employment implementation programs by civil society organizations or non-governmental organizations.

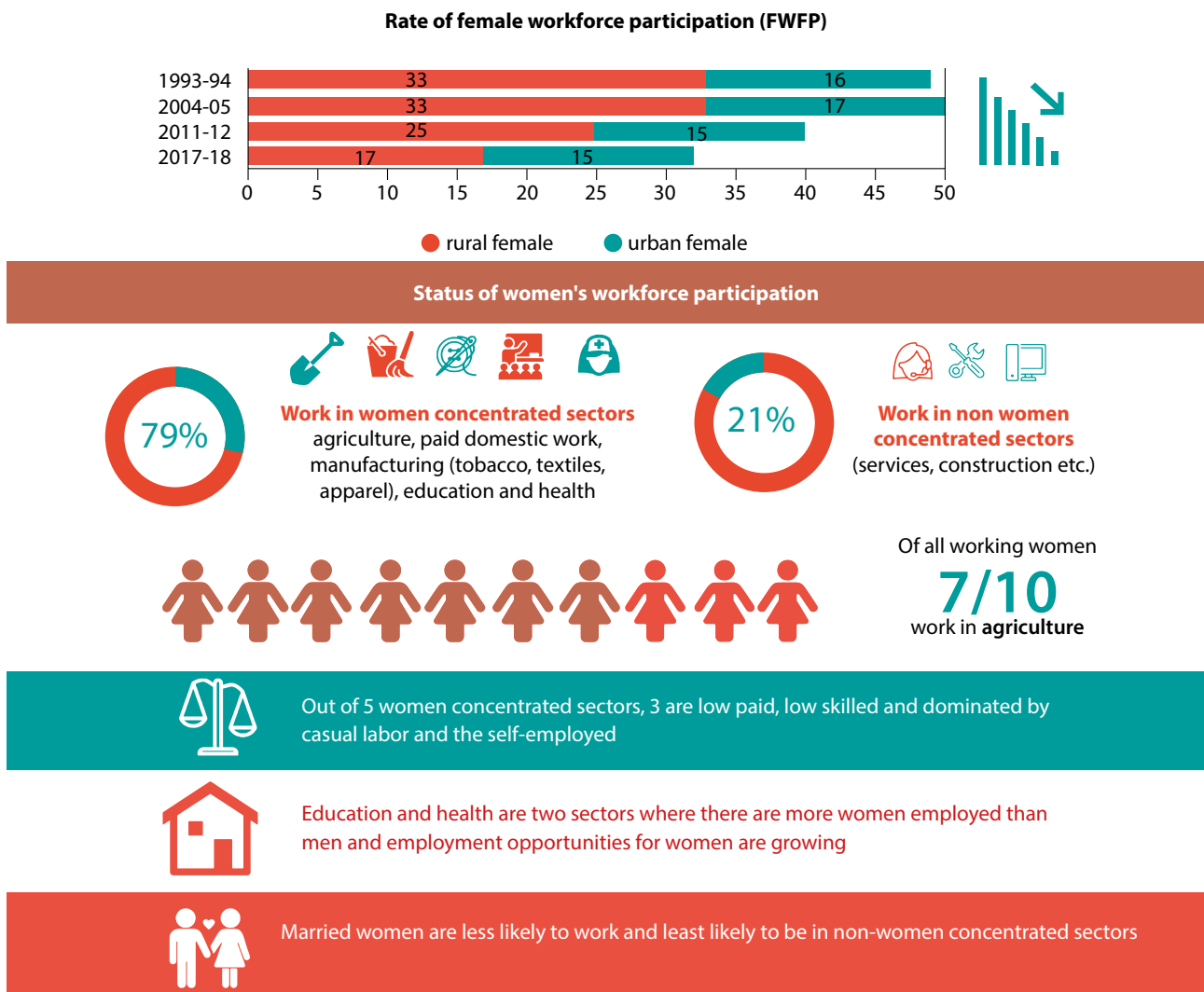
⁴ The components of individual and household, market and state provisions is detailed in Figure 5.

Limitations of the Study

The study is limited in its scope and approach in the following ways:

1. The scope of the study is limited by its focus on formal, paid employment. Given the paucity of large-scale data on informal sectors and challenges of classification, the study could not incorporate the same. However, in future, we hope to be able to expand our work to include informal workers.
2. The study looks at women's work within the heteronormative matrix of gender. The questions and analytical lens of the study currently do not consider the realities of other gender and sexual identities.
3. The study is limited to Delhi NCR and hence, resonates with attitudes of workers in urban centers within NCR. The four sectors chosen are not representative of the entire female workforce in the market or a universal perspective on these sectors. However, the study does shed some light on sectors that are expanding opportunities for women workers and can be studied further.
4. The policies and schemes referred to in this document are those that have been implemented at the national level, not at the state level. Therefore, the understanding of policies, schemes and initiatives is not exhaustive.
5. The study does not delve into barriers women face resulting from pressures to bear children and other related challenges in their professional lives. This is a critical element for understanding the narratives of working women and merits greater focus.

Figure 3: Some Findings from the Trends Analysis



SECTION 2:

Unpacking Non-Traditional Livelihoods and Conceptual Framework for the Study

NON-TRADITIONAL LIVELIHOODS: WHY DO THEY MATTER?

The concept of NTL may be understood as emerging out of a collectivized developmental response to unpack and tackle barriers faced by women while aspiring for, securing and sustaining livelihood⁵ opportunities through certain occupations within the Indian economy.

In this context, a few organizations and individuals created a coalition in 2016, known as the Non-Traditional Livelihood Network (NTLN).^{6,7} The NTLN aims at generating livelihoods, particularly NTL, for

socially and economically marginalized women in urban and rural India. As per the network, NTLs intend to challenge gender division of labor⁸ and gender stereotypes by exemplifying women in male dominated roles, for example, women as e-rickshaw drivers or four-wheeler drivers, mechanics, masons and so on. At present, efforts are focused on the supply side of the equation, i.e., training women and equipping them to join some of these roles identified by the members in this collective based on scoping of opportunities. Organizations and initiatives have defined their respective pathways to the NTL approach by center-staging opportunities for training and access to labor market, specifically in non-traditional skills for

⁵ Livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stress and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base. (Chambers & Conway, 1991).

⁶ About the Non-traditional livelihood network. <https://www.ntlnetwork.in/about-us/> accessed on December 10, 2019

⁷ Members of non-traditional livelihood network in India. <https://www.ntlnetwork.in/members/> accessed on December 10, 2019.

⁸ The gender division of labor is fundamentally allocation of work between men and women (Gender Division of Labor. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/social-sciences/gender-division-of-labour> women accessed on February 24, 2020.) Work includes that which is considered productive and paid for (included in the national accounts) as well as that which is unpaid and used for domestic consumption (excluded from the national accounts) between men and women as appropriated by culture and society. It heavily influences women's (disproportionate) burden of unpaid work and care work in the household leading up to (limited) participation in the labor market in India (Pandey, 2000).

women from resource poor backgrounds. However, the definitions do not clearly identify the selection criteria of these skills and trades. Some of the existing definitions (Azad Foundation, 2016a; EMpower, 2010) conceptually state the idea and need for NTLs:

- EMpower uses "non-standard income" and "non-gender normative" to imply non-traditional. The emphasis is on women breaking the normative expectation of what they can do, allowing *"young women into new public spaces, even if they continued to work in familiar and more traditional sectors"*, away from the domestic and home.
- The Azad Foundation defines NTLs as *"livelihood practices that help women break stereotypes and challenge the gender division of labor emerging from the intersections of gender, caste, class, religion, sexual orientation, disability and other marginalities and oppressive structure, with a dynamic context of space and time. NTL increases the set of viable livelihood choices available to women and gives them access and control over skills, technology, market, mobility and resources. It creates economic stability along with psychological, social and political empowerment."*

Although there is a similarity in the core ideas, their operationalization varies in real life context.

However, these approaches may not focus beyond individual women, to shift the status quo maintained by market demand and supply systems as well as policy mechanisms, which are inherently gendered. This leads to a situation of lopsided participation of women in certain sectors and roles within those sectors, in the first place, and training and skilling in certain trades may not change the functioning of the systems. Historical essentialization of the social location of women within the domestic sphere (Raju, 2013a) and in unskilled, low paid and low productivity roles in the labor economy (Kannan & Raveendran, 2012; Sinha, 2019) has been well researched.

A closer look at the operationalization of the organizations and programs working on NTL reveals that they problematize gendered structures by integrating women into male dominated jobs/ roles with high visibility in the public domain through an extensive training program. Some examples of these roles are e-rickshaw drivers, carpenters, cab drivers, electricians, two-wheeler repair services and so on.⁹ Training is a comprehensive effort that equips women with technical skills (British Council, 2016) and life skills¹⁰ (Gothoskar, 2016). It simultaneously builds capacities of the women to question their subjective position in socio-economic hierarchies as their location in the labor market is not insulated from this positionality. Research in skilling landscape also reveals that recent initiatives in breaking the gendered division in skill development demonstrate a potential for success- *"... young women trainees in non-traditional trades and skills seemed to have gained a great deal of self-confidence from engaging in the training process: from negotiating with their family to enrolling in a program to postpone marriage and to actually participate in a course. Even the questioning of gender-based binaries in the skills-training opportunities (by participating in non-traditional trade courses) has made it easier for them to question other stratifications and exclusions"* (Gothoskar, 2016). To understand further why this approach is important, we asked experts to reflect on the elements what "traditionality" and "non-traditionality" imply, some reflections are as follows:

- The traditionality of gendered roles is an extension of distribution of labor within the household which feminizes and endorses stereotypes about the ability of women and influences their roles in labor market. It is crucial to challenge the intra-household division of labor and the perceptions that it creates in the market, for both men and women. Often, these roles and division of labor are also permeable and fluid.

"Regarding the gendered nature of work/ roles which women undertake there are examples of the

⁹ The trainings offered by Archana Women's Center consists of masonry, carpentry, woodcraft training and so on. <http://www.archanawomencentre.com/archana-womens-center-page.php?page=training> accessed on January 14, 2020. The trainings offered by CARM-DAKSH are motor mechanic, e-rickshaw driving, mobile repairing http://www.carmdaksh.org/carmdaksh_news.php?n_id=16&secfun=c74d97b01eae257e44aa9d5bade97baf accessed on January 26, 2020.

¹⁰ "Life skills" are defined as psychosocial abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. They are loosely grouped into three broad categories of skills: cognitive skills for analyzing and using information, personal skills for developing personal agency and managing oneself, and inter-personal skills for communicating and interacting effectively with others. URL: https://www.unicef.org/lifeskills/index_7308.html accessed on 13th January, 2020

construction sector where women undertake a lot of load bearing (working as head-loaders) as well as does unpaid work at construction sites like cleaning and arranging space and tools before and after the day's work"- KII

- The expectation of what kind of work women can do can be rooted in anatomical differences which frames the "biological basis" (based on body strength, reproductive roles of childbearing and childcare) and appropriation of roles based on the perception of competitiveness, ambitions, skill set which is gendering the emerging markets. This has played out particularly in jobs that witnessed mechanization overtime and have been masculinized (Kulkarni & Hatekar, 2013).

"Despite the participation of men or transgender persons in say sex work or women in automated heavy engineering sector, which precludes the use of muscular strength, these continue to be viewed as feminine and masculine occupations."- KII

"The first thing that comes to mind when I think of traditional or non-traditional are the stereotypes and the gender barriers that women face, girls face. A huge variety of employment opportunities are inaccessible to them. You look at farming, the moment machinery is introduced women are no longer counted as farmers, and this is a man's job."- KII

- The discourse on non-traditionality must encourage a shift from insecure to secure, devalued to valued and from hazardous to safe work, and focus on not just where women are working but on the conditions of their work, i.e., "decent work".¹¹

"Labor market is characterized by capitalist extraction which leads to 'insecure work', 'devalued work' and 'hazardous work'. Therefore, the critical question is not where the women are working but what are the conditions of their work. 'Decent work' must be the basis of any transformative process." - KII

- In case of intergenerational transfer of skills like in weaving, small scale industries, it is important

that the skills are well-linked to the markets by dissociating from traditional forms of recruitment (involving middlemen) and payment (piece-wage and contractual work). These means of trade practices have exploited workers by inadequately compensating them for their effort and time. So, while these skills continue to be non-traditional by uniqueness of the method or raw materials, there is very little incentive to continue with the market without fair market compensation.

"Existing traditional skills and knowledge which are also community and region based like weaving, traditional medicinal cures, printing are passed on from one generation of women to next but without adding to their economic status because there is little attention from policy to connect them to the market." - KII

- Traditionality has an element of temporality suggesting that it emanates from the past. On the contrary, upcoming job roles in manufacturing and expanding services (including those offered by the gig economy¹²) are witnessing gender-specific career paths undergirded by discriminatory perceptions and beliefs prevalent in the market and in industries, for example, women's role in hospitality where they are designated housekeeping jobs.

"Most women prefer joining salon and spa services. Stereotypes affect the kind of job that men and women select and/or are already trained for. It is expected from customers too. It is assumed that part-time jobs like paid domestic help will be fulfilled by women whereas deep cleaning and car cleaning by men, mainly because latter involved machinery." - KII

- In order to reverse some of these trends in male dominated jobs and create visibility for alternative occupations for women, some trades have gained more popularity over others as non-traditional for women, but the rationale of selection of these trades have not been clarified.

"Our approach is also to motivate them to be 'changemakers' apart from being able to earn. Entry of

¹¹ ILO defines decent work as sum of "... the aspirations of people in their working lives. It involves opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men." <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/decent-work/lang--en/index.htm> accessed on December 6, 2019.

¹² Gig economy or platform refers to a work arrangement and earning from such activities outside of traditional employer-employee relationship [prsinidia.org/sites/default/files/bill_files/Code%20on%20Social%20Security%2C%202019.pdf](https://www.prsindia.org/sites/default/files/bill_files/Code%20on%20Social%20Security%2C%202019.pdf) accessed on February 20, 2020

women in specific workspaces also changes the culture of the place. For example, when women are repairing bikes it changes the perception as well as the behavior of customers as well as other male co-workers." - Kll

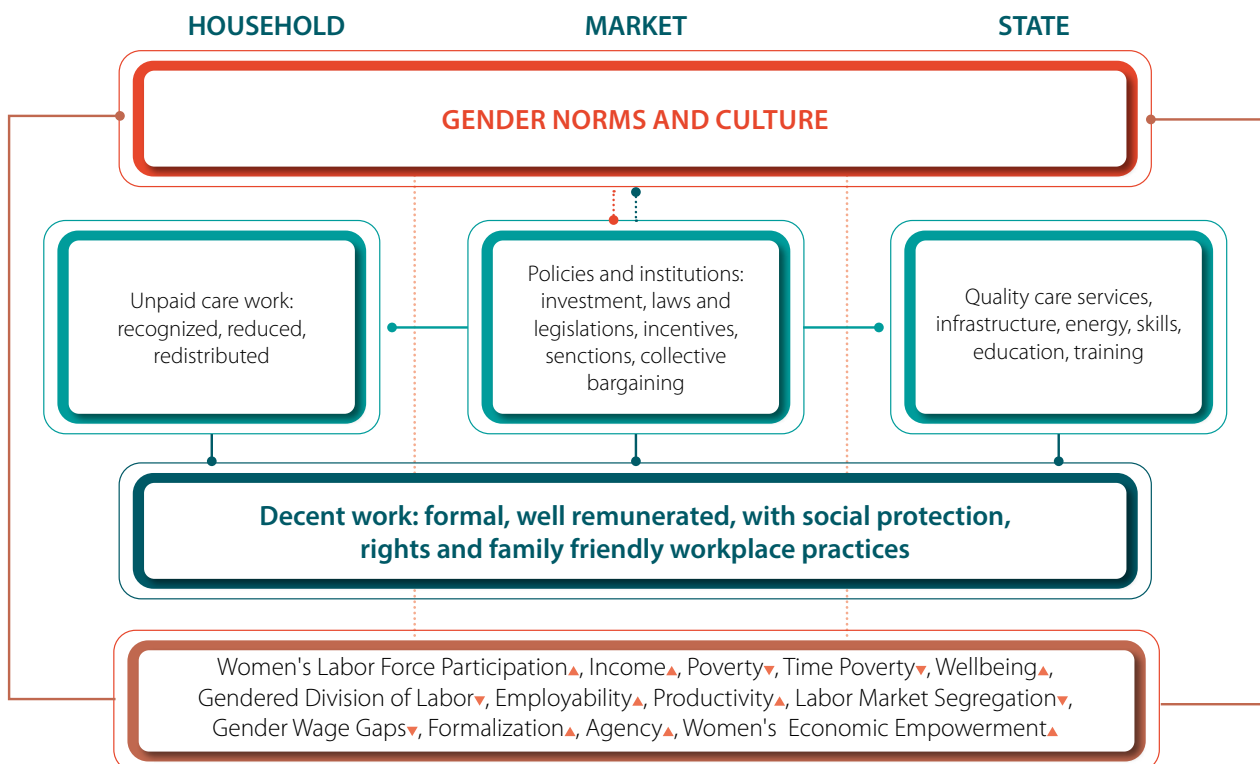
NON-TRADITIONAL LIVELIHOODS: A THEORETICAL CONSTRUCT APPLIED IN THIS STUDY

One of the objectives of this study was to unpack NTLs, not just through a developmental approach, but also by understanding the meaning it derives when applied to the context of the alarming decline of female labor force participation in the economy. This study was informed by ICRW's earlier research on understanding and measuring women's economic empowerment (Golla *et al.*, 2018) that recommends interrogating underlying factors that shape norms and institutions in order to analyze the nature of women's participation in an economy. For this study, traditional and non-traditional are also understood through organizational and social systems that govern activities and mediate relations between individuals, and their social and economic environment within the institutions of

household, market and state (ICRW, 2018). These institutions are critical nodes that influence the distribution and use of resources such as human (e.g., education, skills), financial (e.g., loans, savings), social (e.g., networks, mentors), and physical (e.g., land) (Golla *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, this study complements the existing grasp on what non-traditionality signifies along the continuum of these different institutional nodes.

The study also inquired about factors or conditions that improve or impede the position of women in the labor market irrespective of the roles and sectors they are in. These factors and conditions are not necessarily informed by any intervention but are those which are identified by different participants in the study as potentially transformative for working women. This study in its inquiry around the concepts of TLs versus NTLs gathered responses from representatives as trade unionists, representatives from government departments, policymakers, members of the NTLN, and bilateral agencies and foundations (donors) in India. The responses suggest that there is a predominant preoccupation with the declining workforce participation of women. In line with the

Figure 4: Theory of Change for Women's Work



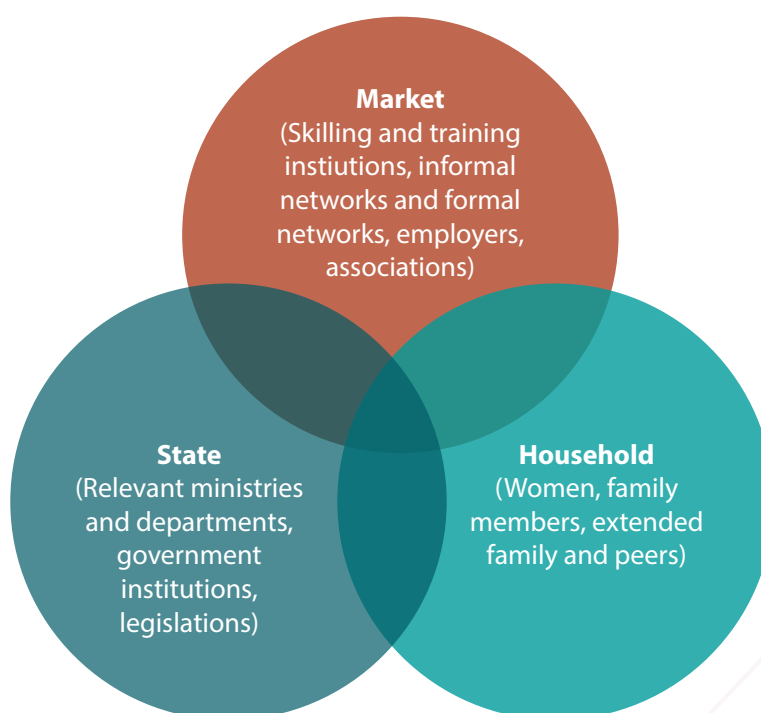
three structural nodes of households, markets and the state that determine women's work, as described in the preceding sections, we referred to the following theory of change to situate our research questions. This theory of change was developed by ICRW¹³ as part of its work to deepen the understanding of gender in the discourse for women's economic empowerment and livelihoods.

Among other constructs, this theory of change recognizes that the disproportionate representation of women in certain sectors and occupations contributes to labor market segmentation as well as gender wage gaps that undervalue women's labor and inflate the numbers of the working poor. It also states that securing a pathway to decent work and addressing unpaid care work is fundamental for women's economic empowerment (ICRW, 2018). It has also been postulated that gendered relations in various domains create a dominant model of "femininity" and "masculinity" (Paechter, 2006) based on the division

of roles and responsibilities and values associated with it. These are reinforced by markets and the state. Therefore, they are termed as bearers of gender "*when they reflect and reproduce preconceived notions about masculinity and femininity as routine aspects of their rules, procedures and practices*" (Kabeer 2012, 13). The ICRW framework also suggests an interconnectedness between these domains strung together by gender norms, and cultural factors.

This exercise assists in reformulating NTLs from a perspective of understanding the characteristics of employment for women who are already a part of the workforce by analyzing the women's employment data in terms of the sectors of employment, nature of employment, demographic characteristics, and occupational categories and so on (refer to **Annexure 4**). The two conceptual standpoints that must be foregrounded to explain this approach to NTL are as follows:

Figure 5: Intersections of Enablers and Barriers to Women's Paid Work



¹³ICRW's Theory of Change on Women, Labor and Livelihoods is an unpublished manuscript.

Firstly, these new categories are not meant to subsume or substitute NTL. On the contrary, WC/NWC is a prism through which we reformulate the meaning of NTL. This situates NTL in the wider economy, removed from its preordained domains/ trades. We make a shift from building an understanding of women's participation in the economy from the binary of traditional and non-traditional. Hence, stepping away from the common consensus of the NTLN collective that categorizes roles and jobs as male-dominated and therefore, non-traditional for women. In its stead, the theory of change assumes that livelihood or economic enhancement of women is an entry point into gender equality. This recognizes an improvement in "capability" (Nussbaum, 2011) aligned to agency, strengthening and supporting "decision-making" aligned to relations to make her negotiations, and "enabling environment" aligned to structures that improve and sustain conditions of work (Tibi & Kittaneh, 2019).

Secondly, we replaced the binary of non-traditional versus traditional as located in the larger economy by center-staging women's paid work in relation to the common core of household, state and markets (ICRW, 2018) where several shifts in capabilities, decision-making and enabling environment occurs to make women's paid work sustainable. Kabeer (2012) differentiates between the three domains on the basis of how the gendered constraints play out in each of these. She categorizes the norms, beliefs and practices that emerges from household, family and kinship relations as intrinsically gendered.

We apply this understanding in our analysis of the narratives of women working in selected sectors and within them, selected roles, to understand where in these three domains does the impetus for change lie,

starting from voice and agency of individual women to responses from the household, the market and the state, for women to make non-traditional choices. The sample of working women interviewed in this study is situated in different "intersectionalities" (Shields, 2008) marked by their social identities of class, caste, geographical location, and so on. These different and overlapping social identities operate beyond the segmentation of work between men and women in the economy. These sources of discrimination and disadvantages affect the choices and opportunities available to individuals- both women and men- even before they are working entities. (Gopal, 2013). The research team was cognizant of such differences between the participants and refers to them while elaborating on findings from the study. However, the focus remained on the narratives of women that were punctuated with choices and decisions that hint towards potential shifts or persistence in the structural constraints faced by them in these domains.

It is important to note here that presentations of caste and class hierarchies within the selected sectors and job roles have not been assessed as this was beyond the scope of the current study. We, however, are cognizant that specific job roles are accessible to women from specific socio-economic backgrounds. For instance, the profile of respondents who were corporate managers is very different from the profile of respondents who were frontline health workers. Despite this wide range of profiles, many influencers for women in entry and sustenance to work remain rooted in similar contexts of harmful gender norms. While subjective experiences vary for each of these respondent groups, we present aggregated findings representing the most critical elements from our narratives.



SECTION 3: Narratives and Experiences: Study Findings

ENABLERS AND BARRIERS IN WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT

Existing literature explores factors affecting women's employment such as rising household incomes, a lack of opportunities commensurate to educational attainment (Das, Deb Kusum, Choudhury & Singh, 2015; Klasen & Pieters, 2015), increase in education of young females (Chatterjee et al., 2018b), patriarchal norms and cultural practices (Hirway, 2012), very low rate of growth of employment (Azim Premji University, 2018), and unaccounted care work. The qualitative nature of the study depicts an interplay between these factors in lives of the working women. This interplay throws open common points of friction and that of congruence between the core of household, state and markets, and the working the lives of women. These negotiations are embedded in a myriad of social locations and intersectionalities where these working women are situated. The factors influencing women's entry and sustenance in paid work has gradations and contours. In the sections that follow, enablers

and barriers are intertwined in their presentation. This format of presenting the findings, as informed by the experiences of women, is not narrated as standalone categories of enablers and barriers. The working women position the self, situated in different domains, accessing different levels of support or deterrence that they experience. Therefore, these findings are representative of this complexity yet attempting to bring to the fore patterns of commonality from these varied individual experiences. Subsections with the findings in each domain are followed by key takeaways to highlight some of the trends.

3.1. ENABLERS AND BARRIERS: INDIVIDUAL AND HOUSEHOLD LEVEL

1. Entering the workforce: The following section discusses the pathways connecting women's journey from households and training/skilling/educational institutes to the labor market. The participation in education and employment is driven by a separate set of factors (Klasen & Lamanna, 2009), given that there is

an increased impetus on skilling and training in India (Ghosh, 2015). In our study, the **entry points of women** in the workforce seem to be facilitated by skills training and distress driven need for additional income within the household.

1.1. Graduate level education followed by skills training: Nearly all the women workers who participated in the study were graduates. To join in the job market, nearly all of them enrolled in specialized training and skilling, which ranged from central and state initiatives such as Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY), World Class Skill Center (WCSC) and courses in private colleges. One of the paths to be job seekers was paved by these different institutes. These institutes channelized job search strategies, job openings and opportunities to the job seekers (Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL), 2018) which improved their motivation and access to the market. These women joined the skilling and training institutes immediately after or during their graduation degrees. This is in congruence with literature positing an increase in the probability of employment at higher levels of education, especially after the completion of graduation (Chatterjee, Desai, & Vanneman, 2018). The additional gap between the youth seeking jobs and the employers seeking skilled professionals can be resolved by the institutes, particularly for formal jobs. The study found this to be successful irrespective of the quality of formal education. It is interesting to note that women's choice of enrolment in skilling institutions or employment is controlled and sanctioned by the male members in the household. Thus, becoming a site of control on women's lives.

The Anganwadi workers¹⁴ (in health sector) did not enroll in any training or skilling institute but joined the workforce for additional household income. This kind of employment is distress driven and compel women to work to support themselves and their families (Chaudhary & Verick, 2014). There is also an undercurrent of class when considering access to

education, and skilling. One of the ways of measuring class is "capital" (Vaid, 2014). Even though no direct questions were asked to determine levels of capital, access to resources and time available for women to substitute household tasks with paid work opportunities were proxy variables that played out in deciding their education and skills levels. The next point elucidates this further.


1.2. Need for additional income at home: The Anganwadi workers were graduates but did not enroll in skilling prior to joining work. There was strong influence on decision of women's education and skilling controlled strongly by the male members of their natal families before marriage and marital family after marriage. The Anganwadi worker who wanted to study nursing was discouraged because, *"My mama (maternal uncle) was adamant about not sending me there, saying the environment there isn't good. It is a gents' department and doctors are not good to women. My parents also got influenced by that. They thought it's a long course of 3-4 years and sending me away for so long might spoil me."* These women did not join the workforce and were married after or during their graduation. They joined the workforce in need of an additional income in their respective marital home. There is a long gap between joining the workforce and their last educational degree. The key outcome of marriage being conceding of control to the marital family. This is combined with lack of understanding of skills required and appropriate channels to approach the market. This increases the barriers to enter the labor market to access formal jobs. When asked about why she chose the job at the Anganwadi center, another worker responded, *"This was it. My husband said that there are vacancies here [at the center near her house]. So, he got the forms and we filled it up. Everything is so difficult in our country that getting a job here [at Anganwadi center] is difficult as well."* In this case, work-life choices are made by the male member of the household reinforcing the male breadwinner ideology which extends to not only providing for the family, but also to making decisions around allocation of women's labor.

¹⁴An Anganwadi worker (AWW), a woman selected from the local community, is a community-based frontline honorary worker of the Integrated Child Development Services program (ICDS) in India. Their understanding, communication skills, and approach are needed to implement the grand projects of the state and central governments, making them the most vital link in delivering the "health for all" mission. Accessed from <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Profile-of-Anganwadi-workers-and-their-knowledge-in-Sondankar-Kotnis/bd1888c6e87811c62e6318c2d9b4c865ad1f7bfc> on March 21, 2020

The following excerpt sheds light on exercise of similar form of control: *“Like I told you, my salary is delayed by six months or so, how could I manage my family without salary and for so many months. My wife was interested in bridal makeup during marriage season (she was not interested in studying) so, she requested to do a beautician course. After discussion with my parents, we helped her to take admission in a beautician training institute. After a year’s training, she started working at a nearby beauty center. It is because of her job we can save some amount regularly which we weren’t able to do before,”* explained a male co-worker working as a data operator in IT sector while discussing what circumstances led his wife to work. Furthermore, AWWs are socially sanctioned because the occupation is rooted in care of children, pregnant women and their health. It is also a part-time role often closer to the place of residence. These conditions related to the nature of work and workplace operate to allow the norms about gender roles to persist.

 There is evidence that indicates a possible relationship between the economic status of the

women participants, and them striving to earn supplementary income during their graduation. The research did not enquire about the social class of the participant but subjective reflection by participants during interviews suggested that women in WC were mostly first-generation working women from their respective families. Their supplementary income from part-time jobs enabled them to join the market in small ways like filling application forms, applying for courses and take entrance tests, etc., shifting the decision-making within the household away from the male providers.

 The barriers for entry to jobs in traditional roles such as, tutoring, Anganwadi center, part-time teaching, etc., are lower in contrast to formal jobs in the workforce because these conform to the prevalent social and gender norms, sometimes in naturalized care-based work and in others distress driven. Usually, these TLs are also located closer to the women’s residence. These role perceptions and constraints have led to creation of occupational segregations in the labor market.

PARTICIPANT NARRATIVE 1

Sana¹⁵ travels 3 hours every day from Shahdara to Noida to her workplace (approximately 30 kilometers one way). She works as a sales executive in a retail store in a prime location frequented by customers. Sana joined this store after two short stints of paid internships a year and a half ago. She was introduced to these workplaces by her training institute, WCSC. The WCSC is Delhi state-government skilling initiative, started in 2012. Training in retail is one of their four courses besides hospitality, digital marketing and finance. Sana delightfully described her training and mentorship experience. She learned about the center when it was brought to her notice by her father who insisted that she should give this a shot after she graduated. Her first choice was finance, but she did not qualify in two subsequent selection rounds and thereafter, decided to join retail. The deciding factor to continue her training with WCSC, albeit a different course, was due to testimonies of good placements from the alumni.

Some of the highlights of the training institute that made a lasting imprint on her were the state-of-art training infrastructure with mock setups, trainings facilitated through technical and interpersonal skills, and continued mentorship from the master trainers at the institute. When she finished the course, she

¹⁵ The names of the participant and any other identifiers have been changed for anonymity following the confidentiality clause of the consent process.

was equipped in customer dealings and trained to represent the brand values of her workplace as a salesperson. The training period was also her first time travelling independently using the metro. As part of her training, she was initiated into the labor market with a paid internship followed by formal placement as a sales executive at the retail store.

This job has been an enriching experience because she considers herself to be a representative of the brand she works for and enjoys dealing with the range of customers in a professional workspace. She shares a healthy work relationship with her co-workers and managers. She is free to discuss tasks and workload with her manager and any other discomfort she faces at work. Positive exposure from working comes in many forms such as in her dealings with the customers, behavioral changes, interaction with different kinds of knowledge systems- finance, accounting systems, and so on that motivates her to continue working. Training and working are accompanied with her freedom of mobility to meet friends and visit places, for which permission had to be sought earlier, and having an income that saves her the stress of asking for money from her father, which was burdensome.

In discussing the demand side of the market for salespersons, she observes that overall, percentage of male salespersons exceeds females. The composition was similar during the training program at WCSC as well, where only 32 percent of her batchmates were females. This market demand for male salespersons is higher because the footfall in the stores increases evening onwards and the requirement of staff is higher in those hours. Women are often unable to work in the late slots for a variety of reasons related to safety and other responsibilities at home. For similar reasons, at her workplace only 2 out of the 9 staff members are females. She confided that she understands this because she is also responsible for making breakfast at home before she leaves for work and helps her mother with dinner when she returns home around 9 PM. This has changed from before her training course started when she was responsible for all the domestic chores along with taking tuitions. She realizes that her two brothers have a choice to fulfil a task given to them but for her it is a non-negotiable because she considers it to be her responsibility. The household related work is a constant tussle which she describes as:

"If you are unmarried then you get support from your parents in everything. For example, if I do not help my mom because I am tired then she manages it herself. She understands my problem and she will not bother or taunt me. But after marriage you will find very few people who are going to support you, if my in-laws allow me to work it will be on the condition that I manage the house because nobody is going to fill that gap, everyone thinks that it's my work and it's a choice to work outside. So, I will have to take that burden."

At work, the two provisions that she thinks could make working more conducive are transport facilities that can make the commute back to home in the evenings easier and enable women to manage the evening shifts too. Currently, evening shifts begin at 12:30 pm and end at 9 pm, for which women employees are not appointed. Secondly, a washroom inside the store would be favorable. The one they use now is outside store premises.



2. Sustenance in the workforce: The following pointers discuss factors that affect sustenance women's work at the household level.

2.1. Women's work and intersections with marriage

Between men and women workers, the proportion of economically productive activity and unproductive activity (unaccounted production for consumption within the family) is starkly different. This pattern of activity directly impacts the time spent at home and outside of home, i.e., at workplace. A segment of Indian women's movement 1970s onward, for instance, had pushed against ignoring the unpaid economic work of women within the household. It was also emphasized in *Towards Equality* (Guha, 1974) and *Shram-Shakti* (National Commission on Self-employed Women and Women in the Informal Sector, 1988), to underscore that paid work and unpaid work co-exist for women. Therefore, the study probed both working women and their male co-workers to understand how women maneuver the continuum of work.

2.1.1 Balancing paid and unpaid work: As per study participants, there are three ways through which families manage unpaid work. First, working women perform a huge share of household chores before they leave for work and after they reached home. Second, in the absence of working women at home during the work hours, other female family members often attend to the remaining household tasks. Third, the family hires paid domestic help (women, mostly) to take care of household chores. As discussed above, these vary depending on family structures and resources available to substitute the unpaid care and domestic work.

The implications of such an arrangement are:
a) the role of men as caregivers/ nurturers or sharing joint responsibility of domestic chores is not mainstreamed or a viable alternative is not available. Similarly, the role of care giving, especially for children, is redistributed intergenerationally among women (mother or mother-in-law) in both nuclear and joint families. b) For working women,

the fulfilment of household tasks is articulated in terms of glorified values of adjustment, cooperation and so on. The values are expressed as a principle of femininity, *"Women should be responsible toward their household work. When one does not do her household work, that's when problem arises."* -Participant working as a computer operator in the Information and Communication sector

The burden of household work rests on women, with or without marriage. Marital status combined with reproductive duties is navigated considering these roles and responsibilities that have culturally gained primacy in women's lives (Sudarshan & Bhattacharya, 2009). The state and private sector are not committed or accountable for provisioning care roles in terms of crèche, community kitchen and so on, making the household and women in it, default custodians of imparting these roles. This is widespread in the cultural context where the social location of women within the domestic sphere is essentialized. So, marriage and provisioning of care roles affects the choices of roles/ sectors where women work. In a study on women workers in Delhi (Neetha, N., Mazumdar, 2010), it was found, *"the service sector in Delhi was composed of 70 percent unmarried women, of the age demographic below 26 years (concentrated in sales), while women above 36 years of age were seen concentrated in managerial and clerical non-customer oriented jobs"* (2010, 46). They further conclude that the only occupation, where married women outnumber unmarried women, is the managerial category. Marriage and childbearing affects both the participation in the labor force and imposes limits on the choice of work women can do, amplified due to the lack of provisions and services to alleviate their reproductive roles.



Marriage affects women's work in different ways to create sectors that can be divided based on gender and choices available for unmarried or married women. These practices inform perceptions and notions about women's work (essentialized notions of womanhood; compatible with married women being AWWs and teachers).



Childcare has been an ever-present concern, however, women from different social locations and sectors managed paid work and childcare in varied ways depending primarily on different care arrangements within the household.

2.1.2 Marriage and flexible aspirations: Given that the norm for women in India is to be married, there are several negotiations with different stakeholders in marital homes, with in-laws and the spouse, for women to work. In the shifting structure of the market, where educated women in urban centers are increasingly working in service sector roles, there lies the assumption of "flexible aspirations" of working women (Vijayakumar, 2013). The shift from male breadwinner standard operates on a "far, but no farther" gendered paradigm (Raju, 2013b), wherein women have been taught to embody modern cultural ideals alongside the traditional values. The status quo within the household does not shift, which leads to a double burden or work for women.

"We are called superwomen, you know. We do work at home as well. We make breakfast and prepare lunch before leaving since my mother is elderly, so they can eat whenever hungry. I reach home by 2, then heat the food, and prepare some more."- Participant working as AWW in the sector

"We are in 21st century, everything gets decided before marriage. What are you expecting from daughter-in-law; like will she go for job or will she stay at home? If these things aren't pre-decided then, for example, boy's family can say why didn't you tell us that you want to work or the girl can say why didn't you [the girl] tell me not to go for job after marriage? Sometimes, boy and girl agree about her working but if it is not discussed with family it creates an issue later, so it is better to clear everything before marriage."- Male co-worker working sales executive in retail sector

Working women can pursue their career while prioritizing and seeking acceptability from their families. In our conversation with working women and their male co-workers, it emerged that there is an understanding of what is "respectable" and

"acceptable" in terms of work for women. Women who identified themselves as middle class and aspiring to work find it easier to make a case for paid work with their household members for government or public sector such as AWW and IT data operator in government offices. In another example, women in retail, mostly unmarried, are made conscious of how their femininity is incompatible with that of respectable working women because of their interaction with customers who are strangers. A participant who is a sales person in the retail sector said, *"teaching, engineering, doctor etc. are respectable jobs but if a girl is working as sales girl in retail shop then they consider it disrespectful because in sales, one has to interact different kind of people, everyday, which they don't like."* There is literature (UNICEF & ICRW, 2011) that suggests that educated women are better at articulating terms of their marriage; however, the evidence was not conclusive.

2.2. Women's income and bargaining power within households

To discuss women's paid work, we begin with an understanding that nature of women's paid work is dependent on their burden of unpaid domestic and care work. According to OECD data, women in India spent an average of 352 minutes a day in unpaid work, compared to 52 minutes a day for men. On the other hand, the proportion of paid work by women is 185 minutes per day as compared to 391 minutes for men (OECD, 2018). Summing up the paid and unpaid work for men and women, respectively, the total work done by women exceeds work done by men and a huge chunk of unpaid work is fulfilled by women. When women enter the domain of paid work, the first set of barriers lie in negotiating their traditional role of primary caregiver. As per the women interviewed, their income is generally allocated to negotiate the burden of unpaid care burden, even if not it does not completely offset it. This is accompanied with the rising household income that increases *"the opportunity cost of domestic activities for women. Additionally, as the financial necessity of women to engage in outside work drops, most families are keen for women to stay at home as it is reflective of a rise in social status."* (Ghai, 2018). There is extensive literature on how women's employment and earnings increase

their bargaining power within the household (Acharya & Bennett, 1985; Klasen & Lamanna, 2009; The World Bank, 2001). In this study, we find that women's income may be viewed as a resource that supplements the household's pool of income. This does not necessarily imply greater control for them with respect to intra-household decisions on allocation of those resources (The World Bank, 2001). While it is difficult to measure the change in bargaining power owing to an increase in the contribution of women's earnings in the household income, we closely look at how the income earned is instrumentalized to negotiate in varying degrees in different aspects. The two common threads captured in our interviews were as follows:

2.2.1 Contributing to the pool of income within the household: Some women draw a proportion of money to use for their personal consumption, and the remaining income is pooled with the family income. Our participant working in IT sector as a data collector said, *"I do some selective work like getting grocery, dusting floor or sometimes I prepare the curry and they [in-laws] make chapatis themselves. So, things are easier for me and I hand over my salary to my mother in law."* This choice and control of what to do with her income was higher when she was unmarried, *"Before marriage, sometimes I gave some money to my mother."* An unmarried salesperson shared, *"There is no compulsion to contribute money to my family, but I contribute whatever I feel. All my brothers and sisters have started earning and they manage their own expenses."*

The allocation of income to the household, natal and marital, differs before and after marriage. Unpaid care continues to burden women in natal or marital households, but the income is leveraged differently by women to continue her paid work, sometimes just to sustain working. This reflects the level of internalization of norms around women's primary duty towards their household. Their choice of paid work must be balanced by contributing to domestic chores as well as other means possible. *"I think typically I am running the kitchen because the minute you get married the responsibility of food and running the kitchen is there including ensuring that your house is clean, those things are primarily there"* –

Interview with a corporate manager in manufacturing sector

2.2.2 Deciding the allocation of income:

The rising income effect (Chatterjee et al., 2018c; Ghai, 2018) is postulated to have a drastic impact on female labor force participation rate. Interviews hinted towards working women contrasting their income with their family income, i.e., the income of the male counterparts (husbands) in this study. We also found that when income of women is equivalent or higher than their male counterparts (in marriage), there is an increase in bargaining power over allocation of income by women. There is sizeable literature that links women's employment and earnings with increase in their bargaining power in the home (Klasen & Lamanna, 2009; The World Bank, 2001).

While it is hard to measure the bargaining power by different members of the household, the interviews pointed toward measurable contribution made by working women by means of asset creation, paying off debts, rent coverage and education related expenses, i.e., toward the well-being of the family. It indicated her increased control over decision-making and bargaining power within the family. In an interview with a woman working with a gig economy platform as a salon trainer, she confided, *"With my salary, I was able to purchase a home, and car for the family, and spend money on jewellery. My husband is willing to cook and take care of children. He even left his low paying jobs to assist in pick up and drop for me between jobs, to reduce the time spent in travel"*. This was seen in a few cases but across different sectors and roles independent of educational attainment.

Factors that bring about a change in the status quo of the family in aspects of women's role in decision-making and share of household chores between men and women are: conditions of work for women that incorporates policies like flextime, paid leaves and income commensurate to work done without devaluing it and create a culture of dignity for workers (taking measures to ensure safety, respectable work environment). In this particular instance, when the

woman shifted from being employed in a salon to this platform economy, she was incentivized by, *"The flexible work hours allow them to be part of their children's life, i.e., attend PTAs, make sure the children are well fed etc."* Such workplace policies are explicit recognition of women's unpaid work, giving them more control over their time and labor, especially in the near absence of public provisioning of care. Similarly, another salesperson has sustained her employment so far because of better working conditions. *"Usually this market remains close on Wednesday so on that day the shop remains closed but during exhibition days our store remains open for all days and in which case we get compensatory including 12 leaves annually. They [employers] have provided medical insurance."*

3. Desirable conditions at workplace and work for women

The macro data suggests an increase in women's demand for regular salaried workers¹⁶ as opposed to self-employment or casual employment. Additionally, with the increase in educational attainment from illiteracy to being a graduate college, the probability of women seeking salaried positions or white collared position increase with a simultaneous decline in other kinds of work like self-employment and casual employment (Chatterjee et al., 2018a). The increase in white-collar jobs which are the only jobs likely to pull in highly qualified women in the labor market have not been able to keep in pace with the increased supply of these women (Klasen et al, 2013). The share of white-collar services in urban employment has fallen from 19 percent in 1987 to 17 percent in 2009, while the proportion of graduates in the working age population has increased precipitously from 11 percent to 21 percent (Ghai, 2018). Therefore, one of reasons for decline of women from the workforce can be attributed to the mismatch in jobs available and those that women want to engage in. Some of the discussions on desirable conditions to continue working are directly linked to workplaces and manifested in two distinct forms.

3.1 Intangible benefits of employment

One of the direct and obvious reasons for employment is income. While this is an important consideration for employment for women, there are other values that they draw from their work-recognition and identity within the household and in the public sphere (Talukdar & Linders, 2013). Despite gendered ideology being reinforced by the market in terms of job creation and degree of equality in opportunities (Vijayakumar, 2013), these women candidly expressed their improved self-perception. Women employed as a data collector in IT articulated this as, *"I told them [her in-laws] that the job is not just for money, one can learn many things, for example, I learned how to deal people which I couldn't do before joining."* Similarly, salesperson in retail emphatically stated, *"I like to work, and I cannot sit ideal. You can earn name, fame and money, but I think name and fame matters more if people know that this girl is manager or store in-charge of XYZ store with a job title"*. Another participant employed as computer programmer added, *"Once you start a job, you meet people alongside work, that's the mindset which one develops over the years."* Anganwadi workers, though critical of their status as workers, asserted themselves in words similar to, *"The good thing is that Anganwadi work has made us leaders in the community. We have learnt to speak in public without fear"* (Sreerekha, 2017, p. 192).

The interviews with women raised questions about self-worth in an occupation that is stigmatized as women's work (on account of being traditional and gendered market ideology) reflected in the sense of self they derive from this work.

3.2 Visibility of employment

There is further evidence to suggest that educated women aspire for white-collared jobs in the economy, the decline of which has corroded the aspiration of working women. Congruent to studies that marriage is considered an alternative to the labor market (Ghai, 2018), the expectation to give up education and career prospects for marriage and reproductive roles had to be resisted. The decision to be employed,




¹⁶ The participation of women in regular/salaried employment has increased at a higher annual rate (4.7 percent) compared to men (2.9 percent) from 1993–94 to 2011–12 (International Labour Organization, 2018).

especially after marriage, is a household decision and does not pivot around individual choice and aspirations of women. Therefore, to sustain working; the place of work, conditions of work, and the benefits are intrinsically tied to legitimacy derived from her work especially within her family. These conditions, undoubtedly, iterative of some dimensions of decent work (International Labour Organization, 2008), if not all, like "security in the workplace and social protection for workers and their families" and "offers prospects for personal development". The interviews show that these are combined with their aspiration to be employed in sectors that give them a sense of pride and conviction as well as social legitimacy. Apart from public sector jobs, there was evidence that other terms and conditions that have ascribed social legitimacy to women's work. In urban Delhi, women across sectors described that their bargaining power to enter and sustain themselves in jobs was enhanced by the degree of "professionalism" offered by the jobs. Professionalism was signified by public sector jobs, specified hours of work and provisions of choice of work-slots and flexi-timings, established codes of conduct and regulated implementation of codes and grievance redressal, an opportunity for professional growth, brand value and accountability of employers. These terms and conditions both fit the demands of the market and have greater acceptability associated with it.

"Professionalism is quite important. In fact, when we are appointed by any brand, we act as the face of the brand and represent the whole brand. So, it is quite essential. In addition to that, everybody has an equal task to do at the store. The morning shift is from 10 am to 7 pm."- Interview with women employed as a sales executive.

This is not removed from the imagination of belonging to a certain class of workers by differentiating themselves from the femininity that is considered domesticated or "older, parochial" (Radhakrishnan, 2009, p. 197). It is also interesting to note that male co-workers' interviews did not make a reference to professionalism or its role in their career ambitions. But they held an implicit expectation for women to fit into some of the attributes of professionalism listed above. A male co-worker working as a sales executive in retail said, "My sister completed diploma in accounts

and worked as part time employee in BSNL just to learn and have some experience. she is now preparing for a government job." With regard to his brother's career, he said, "I suggested to him [his brother] that a degree is proof of your capability but if you want to earn money then you should think beyond your field of study and keep an open mind". This offers a glimpse of gendered conditioning of career ambitions entangled within gender segregated approach in the labor market.

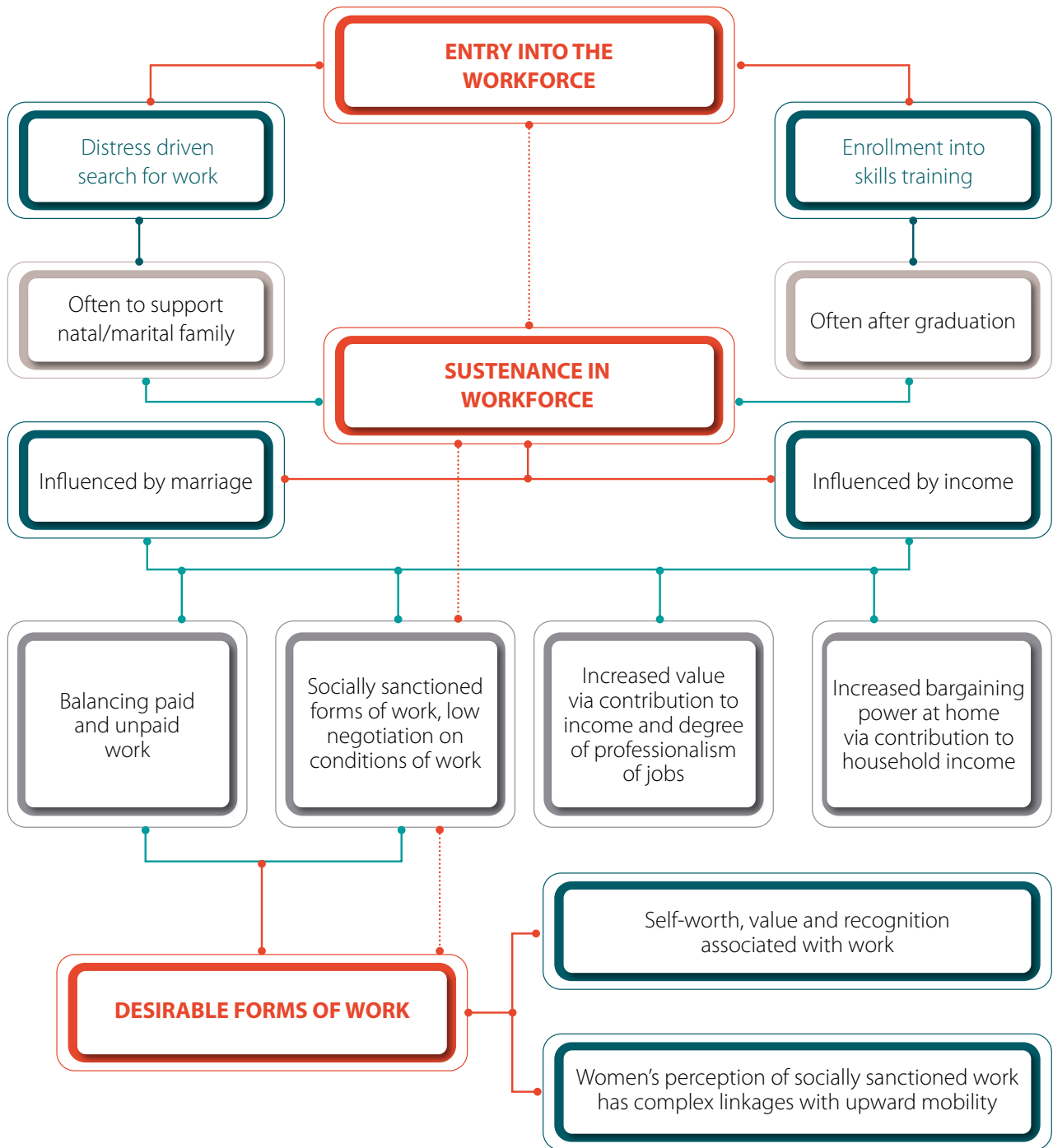
-  For working women, the benefits drawn from economic prosperity are more than mere income, and they challenge the assumption that self-worth can only be derived from individualized notions of aspiration and ambition.
-  Better condition of work translates into improved status in household and community.
-  Professionalism is a combination of different aspects of "decent work" and expressions of social mobility. This social mobility is not just intergenerational redistribution of economic opportunities but also an expression of upward class mobility.

3.2. ENABLERS AND BARRIERS: MARKET AND EMPLOYMENT RELATED

1. Skills training: Benefits and links to markets

As discussed above, skilling and training are found to introduce women to employability opportunities in formal jobs and initiates them into new social networks. Skilling and training institutions are also the point at which their lives intersect with others outside their families and kinship ties, away from the household or domestic realm (Neetha, 2004). The mentorship and guidance available in these spaces are strengths that encouraged trainees. This is combined with their emerging social identity as job seekers and an economic entity is shaped here. The informal and social networks facilitate it further. Women reported that their participation training helps them to comprehend the demands of the market and supports their future growth and professional development. "WCSC helps a lot, particularly girls; they provide placements to students. I was placed for my hard work and my tutors have guided me throughout, through practical and I carefully followed

SNAPSHOT OF FINDINGS FROM INDIVIDUAL AND HOUSEHOLD DOMAIN



their instructions, they even made us do role plays. In practice sessions, they taught us all about customer service such as how to behave with customers, how to tackle an angry customer etc. It was a good experience for me, and I can say if I act as a professional then it is just because of WCSC.”- Interview with a woman employed as salesperson

This study highlights skill development as a key policy issue, with a renewed push on existing schemes by the central and state governments in recent times. In our discussions with training institutes, two recurring problems came up: an overall lower utilization of seats at training centers and drop-outs during the

course period. According to administrative staff at these institutes, it is due to asymmetry of information between demand and supply; and the drop-outs occur because the trainees are unable to gauge the time and effort that is required in the course. The enrolment of female trainees is low across courses. This was corroborated with study of Industrial Training Institutes¹⁷ (ITI) graduates (CENPAP, 2012) across all Indian states that indicates a consistent increase in overall drop-out rate from 2005 to 2011 compounded with the decline in pass-out rates in the same period which states, *"A significant proportion of women pass-outs were not available in labor market due to various personal reasons related to their stereotyped gender roles assigned to them' and '... monthly wages were significantly higher for males in comparison to female pass-outs."* (CENPAP, 2012, pp. xiii–xiv).

These stereotypes are addressed by individual initiatives such as those in the NTLN by investing resources not only to skill women in certain trades but also a focus on life skills, as discussed earlier (Adler & Stewart, 2004; Azad Foundation, n.d.) along with mobilizing the community around them to facilitate their entry and sustenance in the skilling programs as well as into the labor market. Bilateral agencies have made efforts to dialogue with industrial clusters and employers towards attitude change which, according to an expert interview, currently believes, *"They [employers] are happy being away from women employees because they will have to create structures within the factory or within the work space where they have to accommodate rights of women worker, which they want to avoid as much as possible. The boys' in ITIs are getting placed by bigger companies like Maruti, Voltas etc. In girls' ITI, employers do not even step in for placement."*

The dimension of occupational segregation was noted in the difference between courses offered to men and women. Women ITIs by and large offer *"only non-engineering courses especially women-oriented trades such as tailoring, embroidery, stenography etc."*

(CENPAP, 2012, p. 11). According to report, there is a clear distinction between male and female pass-outs with engineering and non-engineering courses, respectively. There seems to be a clear gender division in the preference of trades. Although, what leads them to make such preferences must be inquired more deeply to understand this trend further. One plausible reason for the lower demand for women trained in these trades can be explained by the missing thrust on creating demand for work environment that absorbs women workforce. The market, both ideologically and physically, is structured to accommodate male workforce. The expert added, *"Traditionally, factories had no toilets for girls, so the first thing which we asked was to create women friendly infrastructure."*

2. Formal and informal associations: Women's bargaining power and voice

People associate their workplaces in a wide variety of ways which extends from informal networks to discuss daily dilemmas, to formal unionization that manifests in seeking structural change. This association and formation of networks often act as support systems. Often when there are issues at work, women prefer discussing and consulting their friends and peers about it. Women have reservations about disclosing issues to family members. One working woman participant stated, *"If they [family members] come to know about these incidents then they will not allow me to do this job. They will say better to stay at home and there is no need for this kind job."*; while another explained, *"what happens when you speak to your own family or parents is, they get stressed and their biases obviously come to play, there are emotions attached. If you are lucky to have friends who can give you unbiased suggestion and sometimes just like talking can help."*

While multiple studies (Donald et al., 2017; International Institute for Population, 2015–16) and national level data have documented restrictions on women's freedom of movement and its impact on their ability

¹⁷ "The main institutions under the craftsmen training scheme in India are public Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and private Industrial Training Centers (ITCs). The aim of the ITIs and ITCs is to provide skilled workers to the informal sector; however, evidence shows that both institutes have performed poorly on their mandate. ITIs have been criticized for offering training in trades that are outdated and not relevant for the modern day employment requirements." (Bala & Singhal, 2019, p. 14)

¹⁸ Govt doubles salary of Anganwadi workers - The Hindu. (2017). Retrieved January 29, 2020, from <https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Delhi/govt-doubles-salary-of-anganwadi-workers/article19333885.ece>

to work, comparatively lesser evidence is available on the influence of women's networks and social support groups outside of the household once they start working. Drawing from limited evidence (Golla et al., 2018; Pavanello et al., 2015) on the significance of women's groups and networks at the community level, mostly from the context of self-help groups we triangulate our findings to say that formation of informal networks for women outside the homes is linked to their increased mobility, negotiation and decision making skills which is obtained in the process of training, skilling and education.

Sometimes, the line between informal and formal associations may get blurred, especially at workplace where co-workers may be part of both. The former serves as means to help, access to resources, opportunities and support and provide a sense of belongingness; latter is formalized form of collectivization like workers union that gives women a platform to voice their concerns, ability to assert their negotiations more effectively, and "negotiate the marginalizing structures" (Purkayastha & Subramaniam, 2004, p. 122). Example of one such process was when Anganwadi Union rallied for an increase in pay with the state government for an increase in their pay. *"The honorarium paid to about 22,000 workers and helpers at Delhi government-run day-care centers under the Anganwadi scheme was doubled. The revised honorarium of Anganwadi workers and helpers is ₹9,678 and ₹4,839 per month, respectively and an additional ₹500 and ₹250 per month, respectively, for mobile/internet charge compared to ₹5,000 and ₹2,500 the workers and helped got prior to September 2018."*¹⁸ Similarly, data operators employed in government offices across India unified as an union to fight contractualization of their jobs and instate regularization. Both male and female pointed towards broader conditions of work within which women are disposed to covert forms of gender discrimination (refer to Case Study 2). A male data operator in IT sector shares, *"I thought of quitting this job but one of my colleagues suggested that we file a court case against this issue [contractualization resulting*

in erratic salaries] and then we filed a case in labor court. There we got support from the labor commissioner and he assured us as we are fighting for a good cause, but it might take longer. He promised to refer it in labor court to move to regularize our jobs."

In India, the overall movement on worker's union has been curtailed. The uneasiness of retrenchment of labor unionization activities was expressed by a labor rights activist as, *"... the attack on freedom of association is phenomenal, there is no collective bargaining. It does not even get to collective bargaining because freedom of association is tough enough. There is termination of workers. Workers are scared to say they belong to union or being caught with union membership card in their pockets, they would lose their job. There is also illegal termination as union this is a very difficult time because there is no support from the government."* The success of data operators to organize into a union in public sector set-up can be juxtaposed with the inability of salespersons to unionize in private sector owing to the labor standards that are legally enforced. In case of latter, the response of the state in the times of increased privatization, to say the very least, is "muted" (Singh, 2009).

These associations formed by workers may not always be issue or agenda based but are multifaceted. They are important because they stimulate broader workers' rights- accountability of employers and state actors on a range of issues such as getting child-care facilities, enhancing mobility in relation to employment, steady pay and social securities. While some of these issues are related to work and employment, they are often linked to creating pathways for enhancing women's agency.¹⁹



The networks formed by workers and women in different jobs and roles can be formal, like unions or informal like peer circles and so on. These networks aid and help for women to overcome their day-to-day hurdles as well as collectivize to demand accountability as workers for structural changes.

¹⁹ In their paper Measuring Women's Agency, authors arrive at three key constructs of agency upon review of multiple measurement frameworks: a) Individuals need to define goals that are in line with their values b) Individuals need to perceive a sense of control and ability c) Individuals need to act on goals. (Donald et al., 2017)

**PARTICIPANT
NARRATIVE 2**

Arun has been working at Central Government Health Scheme (CGHS) center for 11-12 years as a data collector. His career started with the walk-in interview advertisement for computer operators at the center when CGHS was upgrading its record keeping systems from physical to electronic based. At the time of joining, he was a graduate in physical sciences with a year-long computer software course. He was married a year after he started his job. He now lives here with his parents, his wife and one son.

When he started work in 2006, the new recruits in his role were trained for the computerization system and trained everyone with set module after which they were appointed directly for work, but the salary was paid by a third party outsourced by the state. Until 2012, the outsourcing of payment rendered the workers contractual and exempted them basic benefits like bonus, maternity leaves, sick leaves and so on. After 2012, the troubles increased because the salary was extremely irregular. The nature of employment remained contractual despite discussions on regularization and the company that was outsourced to pay their salaries was frequently changed, each one with their new set of terms and conditions but all with no regards for worker's right. When the employees started filing formal complaints, they faced backlash in the form of termination letters and verbal harassment from seniors and other permanent employees who felt threatened from regularization of the data collectors. His female colleagues who are part of the union and hence, petitioners on the case, were also harassed in an unspoken manner by the senior employees by locking the female washrooms, removing the fan from their room, giving bad character references, increased surveillance of their entry and exit timings and so on.

The data collectors working in CGHS centers across the country formed a union, registered and approached the labor court in 2013. The first issue to fight was to nullify the vengeful termination orders against data collectors working on contract basis all over India. He added, *"When our termination orders were issued, 100-150 workers protested in a rally in front of labor commissioner office. There we pursued them to refer our case to higher court. There were male, females, old aged people in our rally which forced them to listen to us and file case against this matter."*

The backlash increased when this case was filed in the court of law, but the union decided to fight it despite the increased gap in salary payments. The data collectors were asked to work at different centers in Delhi on rotational basis instead of hiring more employees at centers, increasing the workload of the employees. Transfers and posting at far off locations became new ploys to harass the employees. Arun currently works at three different centers through the week that is spread across the length and breadth of the city. While he discussed this hostile work environment, he continues to work here because if the union wins the case, he will receive all the salary arrears and will be regular employee with the government.

In the meantime, he admitted, that the resources within the household got strained. It is then that the family considered that his wife should also work. According to Arun, she was interested in working as a beautician. Following the family discussion, she enrolled in a one-year course, after which she started working in a salon about a kilometer from home. Given her work-timings and household chores, she started waking up at 4:30 am instead of 5:30 am to finish off all the chores before she left for work. Arun's mother took care of his son when he returned from school and other related chores. They considered creche facilities, but it was very expensive, and the staff was

unreliable. Arun considered the joint family to be a boon. The outcomes of such hostile working conditions and salary was vastly different for his female colleagues, some of them even quit. He described, "Before the case started, women who got married, didn't get salary on time for many months, and had to furthermore reach office by 7.30 am in the morning after managing household work, they simply quit the job." He added, if his female colleagues work as contractual workers with erratic timings and salaries equivalent to minimum wages, they preferred working elsewhere. A few of them quit a few months after their marriages because of absence of policies like maternity leave policy, compensatory leaves, sick leaves and so on. In some cases, the harassment is sexual and owing to their status as contractual worker, the internal complaints committee refuses to address the case and suggests filing police complaint. But the reputation of the women and their future job prospects are at stake and is deterrent to filing the report. Arun believes that the court case will be in their favor.



3. Gender segregation of jobs and roles is reinforced

Job roles for women are derived from cultural assumptions and expectations in relation to their gender roles and other factors such as caste and class²⁰. For instance, research on global value chains in apparel manufacturing shows that the women are concentrated in labor intensive roles which are majorly low-skilled, low-paid for a variety of reasons including skills, but also cultural factors, "where jobs involving machinery may be viewed as being more suitable for men than women" (Farole, 2016, p. 5). Our study further validates that women are often kept out of certain job roles, for example, as one of the participants explains, by differentiating between "fringe functions" that are fulfilled by women as opposed to "core business functions" undertaken by men. The participant adds, "For every organization, there are certain roles that form the core competency. So, you have marketing sales which is what brings in the money. You have HR that manages the workforce that is bringing in the money and you have finance that is managing the money that comes through.

That is what businesses are based on. Then comes in the support functions, the biggest one being the manufacturing and logistics. Now both manufacturing and logistics are support functions of a business that are heavily women dominated." - Interview with a male corporate manager (co-worker). Our data further indicates that many of these biases are not only instilled during the hiring processes but also in the way these roles are structured and managed. For instance, sales related roles at entry and mid- levels involve working in smaller cities with extensive travel. Given glaring issues with public safety of women, regressive norms for women on living and traveling alone (Lamb, 2018), these roles are most often taken up by men and hence, progress from bottom to top rungs is male dominated.

In another example for gender segregation, in urban metropolis contexts like Delhi, labor market activities are shifting and mediated by digital platforms, leading a number of women into "freelancing" arrangements in the gig economy;²¹ for example, with platforms such as Uber, Zomato, UrbanClap. "On-demand-jobs"²² specifically like UrbanClap, are attracting women

²⁰ Govt doubles salary of Anganwadi workers - The Hindu. (2017). Retrieved January 29, 2020, from <https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Delhi/govt-doubles-salary-of-anganwadi-workers/article19333885.ece>

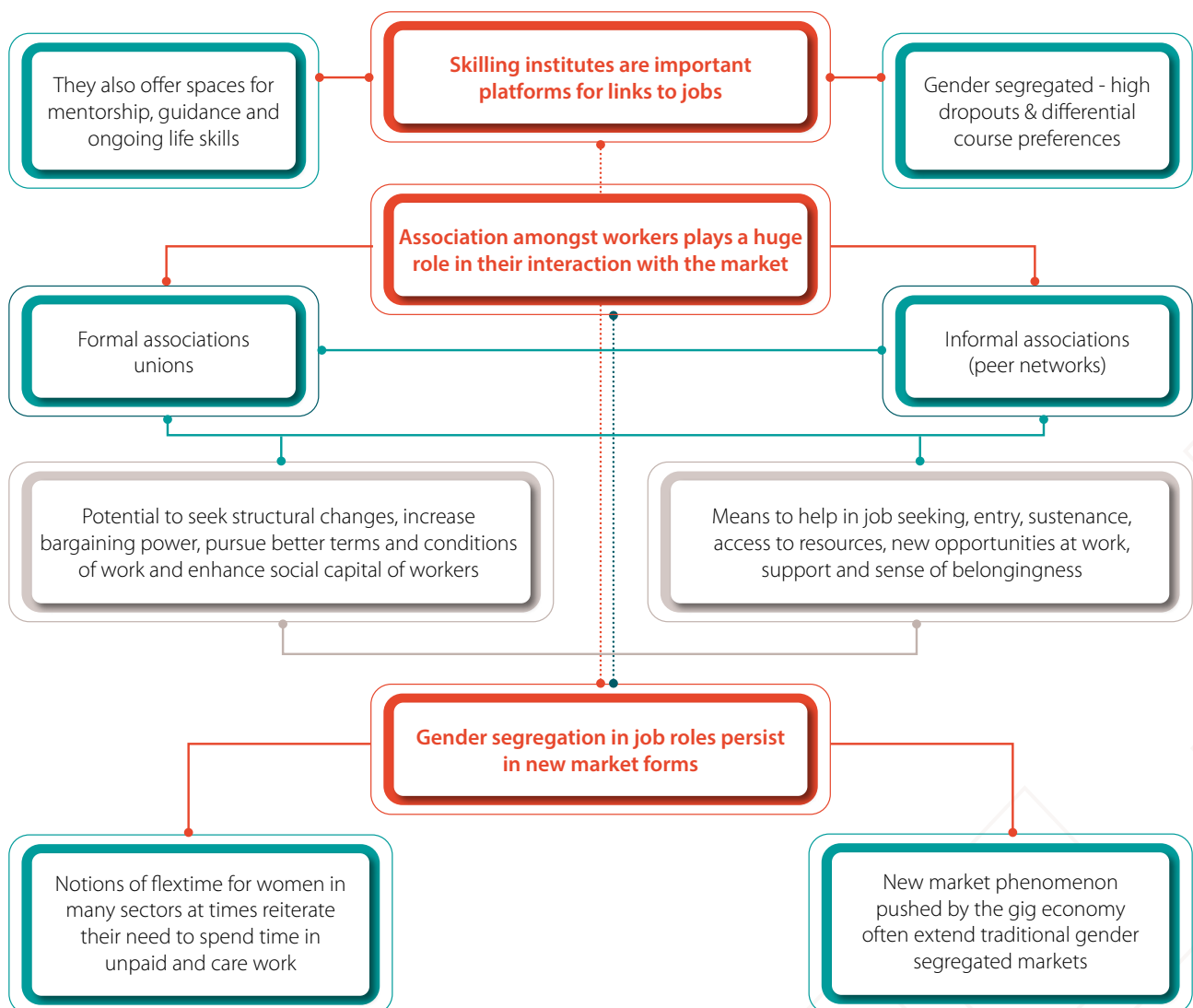
²¹ The gig economy – also known as the platform, sharing or collaborative economy – is expanding quickly, as digital platforms that bring together workers and the purchasers of their services continue to emerge and grow globally (Hunt & Samman, 2019)

²² On-demand work refers to tasks that are carried out locally, with the purchaser and the provider in physical proximity. These tasks are generally organized via mobile platforms, by companies that set the terms of service (including fees and minimum service quality standards) (Hunt & Samman, 2019)


workers for different services. These gender-specific career paths owing to the discriminatory conditions prevalent in the market and in industries, for example, women's role in hospitality where they are designated housekeeping. The conditions of flexible work and high income, on the hand, is meeting the demand of women workers as informed by the key informants. *"Most women prefer joining salon and spa services. Stereotypes affect the kind of job that people select and/or are already trained for. It is expected from customers too. It is assumed that part time jobs like paid domestic help will be fulfilled by women whereas deep cleaning and car cleaning by men, mainly because the latter involves machinery."- KII with an employer.*

Flexitime (Chung & van der Lippe, 2018) at work has allowed women to continue their jobs and to balance their domestic chores and responsibilities at the same time. Flexibility has acquired new dimensions that can be related to time, terms of employment, work available and so on which has benefitted women. Women voiced this as having increased control of their labor and time. However, the flexibility demanded by employees must be read critically in view of employer-driven flexibility and greater demand for contractual labor which may imply surrendering or lowering of benefits (Das, Deb Kusum, Choudhury & Singh, 2015). It must also be interrogated for its perpetuation of gendered work options for women which confine them to their homes.

SNAPSHOT OF FINDINGS FROM MARKET DOMAIN



 The market is opening in diverse ways. Digital platform is one of the new interfaces in urban Delhi which is attracting workers from different social class. However, there is little evidence that the existing gendered perception of market is not replicated on this platform, concretizing the roles further.

 The utilization of flextime benefits for women is a double-edged sword. It permits women to control their time and labor in different duties she is bound by, mainly because of lack of market and state from creating provisions for various kinds of care giving.

 With increase in privatization of market and jobs, it is important to look at the global value chain that has been found to perpetuate labor-intensive roles for women.

3.3 ENABLERS AND BARRIERS: STATE AND POLICY RELATED

The policy response by the government in addressing the decline in women's labor force participation has lately been geared towards the promotion of skill development and entrepreneurship initiatives. Given the demographic dividend in India, along with the skill mismatch, feminist economists argue that instead of focusing on skill development there is a need for macroeconomic development strategies focused on good quality employment generation for the youth. Skill development may be a part of the process; however not the only path to address the issue of joblessness and acute decline in women's work force participation (Ghosh, 2015). In the skill training discourse both, technical skills and life skills, are essential as part of the curriculum. Life skills training in NTL programs by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) has played a role in enabling women to critique gender norms, negotiate better sharing of work within households and better conditions at work.

The capacity of skilling by schemes and policies in the ambit of Skill India initiative launched in 2015 (British Council, 2016) is massive²³ (Gothoskar, 2016). The gap in implementation, although, is also wide as schemes and policies often do not have components of enabling

environment in terms of budgets and infrastructural provisioning along with gender concerns inbuilt in them. Some policy measures address the need for creches, working women's hostels, maternity benefit, provisions to address sexual harassment at workplace in principle, however, in their design or operationalization, these do not have universal coverage.

Following are some of the emerging trends in terms of policy discourse, pointing towards some gaps and demands in policy design:

1. Skill policy is not adequately gender-responsive

The Skill India initiative included specific proposals for increasing both women's participation in economic activities as well as increasing employability of women. Skilling has encouraged entrepreneurship among women but mostly in stereotypical occupations rather than challenging occupation gender norms (Thakur & Mitra, 2019). The National Policy for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship 2015 (Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, 2015) mentions women in two specific areas: as part of the youth cohort, and as entrepreneurs which is not truly responsive to the continuum of needs women may have at different stages of their educational, skilling/ training and professional lives. The policy mentions mainstreaming gender roles by skilling women in non-traditional roles and increasing gender sensitivity in the workplace. It does not clarify the concept of non-traditional or roles encompassing it. The policy mandates encouragement of women entrepreneurs through appropriate incentives for women-owned businesses under the public procurement process.

The profile of trainees who sought training at Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) endorsed some of the findings from the household level. The profile of trainees who joined ITI, when analyzed by their employment status revealed that the high proportion of unemployed trainees who joined the ITI aspired primarily for any salaried job and much less for wage or self-employment opportunities. This was followed by a higher proportion of unemployed trainees who cited their desire for public sector job as a reason for joining ITIs (CENPAP, 2012, p. 15). The undesirability

of self-employment was further exemplified by only 6.7 percent of pass-outs reported engaged in self-employment without any significant increase in the last few years (Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship, 2018). Most of the trainees joined the ITIs with an intent to get salaried jobs and most of the pass-outs who are employed after their training are in the category of salaried jobs, both private and public.

There is a stark difference between males and females who enroll in the ITIs – 71 percent male and 20.3 percent female. The percentage of female students who enrolled and graduated was 72.6 percent (as compared to 71.8 percent for males). Analysis of gender differences in employment indicates a difference – 58 percent males and 50.7 percent females as employed (Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship, 2018). Therefore, the inequalities are higher at the entry level for females than their male counterparts for skilling and training. Once linked with opportunities, the proportionate number of males and females who pass out and enter the market is not so different. Therefore, there is a need to assess externalities such as gender of mobilizers or trainers at the ITIs, classroom composition of male and female trainees and counselling of parents and trainees to go over preexisting biases regarding courses offered. These measures have been successful in some of the training institutes and members of NTL network.



There is a clear demand from salaried and public sector job opportunities by both men and women and low uptake of self-employment opportunities.



Mobilization of women to enter the skilling and training roles may improve her chance of participating in the market. Efforts for this must be improved.

2. Lack of thrust on education as a primary skilling process

Since education is the most structural skilling process there is, so to speak, with increasing privatization, who can access what kind of education requires attention. As one of the key informant, working in the arena of skilling of adolescents and youth, pointed out, *“If you*

are looking at young people for job in retail sector who are coming out of government schools, they are often compared and competing with people who are coming out of private school. They are going to be competitive in terms of language, exposure, communication skills, computer knowledge so on. That is sort of 15-19-year-olds we must be mindful of when providing them skills. This is linked to expanding aspiration, expanding opportunities level and moving from exposure to an ability that’s really moving down the path of realistic work skill acquisition”.

This can be better situated through a study of class, caste and religious differences (Azad Foundation, 2016). Structural changes in the education system are needed to fully harness the potential of skilling initiatives. Several surveys such as the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) comment on children’s foundational skills which have long ranging repercussions for acquiring skills and training later in life, to quote from ASER 2018, *“However, even in 2018, only a quarter of all children in Std III are at ‘grade level’. This means that the majority of children need immediate help in acquiring foundational skills in literacy and numeracy”.* Moreover, this varies regionally along with other socio-demographic indicators, but trends stabilize at national levels with age, *“Basic math levels remain low. In Std VIII, more than half of all children are still struggling with division”.* The report further states, *“many children completing Std VIII are unprepared for higher studies or for the labor market. Preparation for school, work, and life is needed by this stage.”* Given a weak educational foundation compounded by gender differentials in enrolment, attendance as well as learning performance, skilling options shrink manifold already by the time women complete secondary education (Pratham, 2017).

3. Lack of convergence across sectors and departments

The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) is the nodal Ministry for Skill Development. However, in addition to MSDE, there are 17 other Ministries/Departments which are conducting vocational training towards skill development. Nine other Ministries conduct short term training courses. The Report on the Committee for Rationalization & Optimization of Skills Sector Councils (Prasad, 2016) highlights the lack of convergence in the skill

ecosystem and recommends greater realignment of the same. Moreover, beyond the mainstream skills discourse, several other departments are involved in creating an enabling environment for women's participation in paid work and in public life at large. These efforts do not have a cohesive or coherent implementation, monitoring and accountability mechanism.

4. Implementation barriers and low budgetary allocations

Conditionalities within legal frameworks (e.g. two-child norm in Maternity Benefit Act) and in schemes (for example, income-level eligibility for Working Women's Hostel Scheme, which further limits women's stay to three years only) creates hindrance in women accessing the benefits from these policies and schemes. Bureaucratic procedures, the burden of documentation of proof to access schemes, and implicit gender biases (for example, the clause on "false complaints" in the law against sexual harassment) create further barriers for women. Where enabling provisions exist, they are benefiting more men; for instance, under the Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY) which has a provision of travel allowance to mobilize trainees in rural locations, and benefits men since it is assumed they can relocate to places away from home, which is not the same for women.

Budgetary allocations for several enabling schemes have remained consistently low in 2018-19; such as of the National Creche Scheme and Working Women's Hostel (Thakur & Mitra, 2019) The cost of mobilization reported by NGOs is often quite high at Rs. 5700 per capita, while the per capita costs parked under the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) is less than one-tenth of this amount at Rs.500 only (Gothoskar, 2016). The PMKVY also has provisions of conveyance allowance for non-residential training for women candidates and persons with disabilities but there is no data available regarding its implementation. The state and markets need to turn their attention to more basic amenities that often are overlooked but can

bring a considerable degree of difference to women's agency at workplace.

"Some of the 'disablers' for women workers in urban centers are the lack of social security benefits and other facilities. They are usually not on the rolls of the main company but work through a subcontracted agency. They often face issues of late salary, absence of Provident Fund etc., for which the main company bears no responsibility. We sometime do advocacy work with these agencies and companies to push for social security, on time salary, sanitation facilities etc."- Key Informant Interview working with organization working with migrant workers

The provision of hostels and enabling schemes like transport facility, sanitation facilities, conveyance allowance can safeguard or at the very least ease women's fear of everyday violence that restricts women's mobility and choices. The narratives of women pointed towards some latent fear of violence and harassment when they leave their homes for paid work outside. Women traverse these spaces by using subversive techniques like covering themselves or wear visible signs of marriage (e.g. "sindoor") to ward off offenders in public spaces and in their transit to work. However, they are also clear in their articulation of wanting to be out in the public sphere and in employment; illustrated through phrases like: "we have to overcome it" and "become strong". The fear of impending violence also draws certain kinds of responses from co-workers and employers, especially in relation to work timings, "appropriateness" of tasks for women, gender composition of workplace, and infrastructural facilities like washrooms and safe transportation.²⁴




"... firstly, men can meet clients any time even at night and it is not always a comfortable environment so that one can send a saleswoman at night, that's why it is difficult for them. Secondly, we do not have a comfortable transport system, often we must travel in sharing (in bus and auto rickshaw) which male staff can manage easily. On the contrary, women can't travel in such conditions, for example, if a woman enters a crowded bus, the surrounding people behave in a manner that she will never think traveling in a

²⁴ In the NTL Policy Report, we came across some good practices on safe transportation, such as those led by the non-governmental organization Akshara and by Asia Development Bank (ADB) in Mumbai.

crowded bus ever again. I think women can do this job if they get fixed working hours like morning 10 am to 7 pm. So, there are the things one needs to face while on field and these are the reasons why girls are less in sales jobs.” - Male co-worker employed as a Senior Salesperson

This narrative is driven by a protectionist standpoint. The perceptions of women's safety impose constraints on women and their lives in public spaces and in paid work. This marginalizes unpacking of structural or normative underpinnings of nature of violence experienced by women, whether at home, or in public, or at the workplace.

Through our policy report we find that while there exists a national law specifically for preventing and addressing violence and harassment at work, measures like the Internal Complaint Committee (ICC) at the workplace are often not trained to be gender-sensitive and, in some cases, discriminate against women workers if they are employed contractually or as part-time employees. These current state of weak implementation of the policies must be strengthened for women workers to not live in fear and silence of workplace harassment, and structural inabilities of the redressal system should be in place.

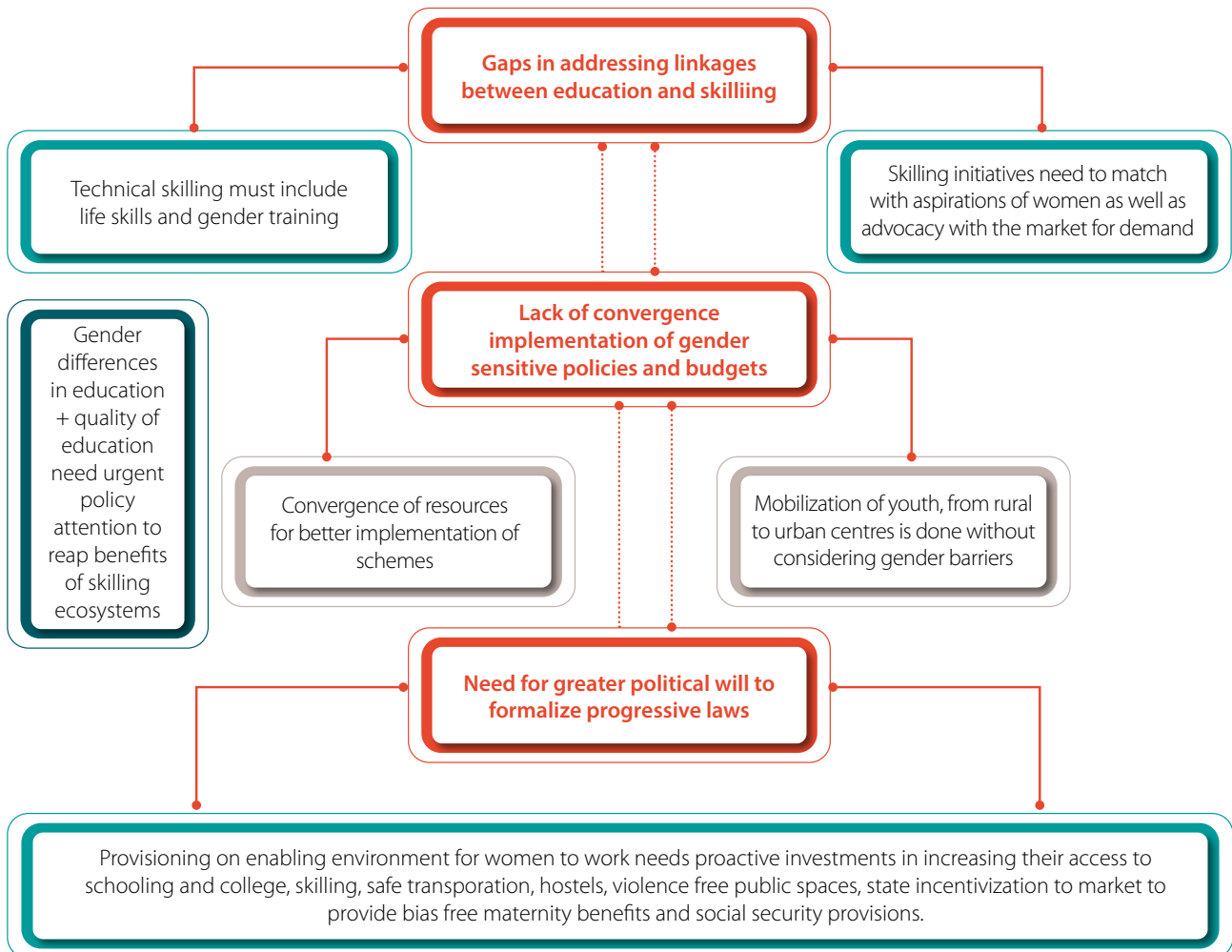
-  **Convergence of several departments working towards skill development can increase the efficiency of resources invested in skilling the youth of India.**
-  **The conditions of work for working women especially considering the migrant workers in urban centers also includes fundamental provisions like hostel, transport from the point of view of safety and freedom to work outside of the domestic sphere. These require a nexus of effort by state and market that can shift the burden away from household where this currently resides.**
-  **Women are not passive recipients of violence or harassment; they navigate it with tactics and strategies that make their experiences and perceptions of public spaces and working starkly different than men.**

5. Political will to formalize progressive policies

The National Policy for Women (2016 draft prepared by the Ministry of Women and Child, Government of India) recommends policy directives to be in place by providing critical analysis of the situation of women workers in the economy with specific reference to women's unpaid care work, gender wage gap, effective implementation of specific policies, need for child care, creches and addressing violence at the workplace. The framework contextualizes inter-relationships of women within family, community workplace/market and governance. For creating an enabling environment, the policy talks on working women's hostels, drinking water, infrastructure in terms of lighting and safety linked to travel to and from work. The policy mentions specificities related to conditions of work and terms of employment for women. Lastly, the policy points to the need for redistribution of gender roles across different sectors in India. However progressive policies such as these are often in draft stage and are not formalized.

To conclude, the above findings, present continuity between domains spanning across a range of conditions that the women workers operate in, from the starting point of this study, where we committed ourselves to understand "non-traditionality" of women's work as transformative work, the following section is the crux of takeaways from different sectors and roles. It can help formulate some principles that can be used by policymakers, practitioners, researchers and working women to overcome the barriers that compartmentalize women's work as low paid, low productivity and harsh conditions. As discussed, women's work has gradation that emerges from not their economic roles alone but from a combination of conditions that underscore the three broad domains of our framework. Considering this, each woman worker occupies a unique position. There are examples of different shifts in all the domains to transform the experience of work for women and enable her to make choices that lead her to it in whatever role or sector she chooses to work in. The next section summarizes and presents the nucleus of transformative work in a way it has emerged in this study.

SNAPSHOT OF FINDINGS STATE AND POLICY DOMAINS





SECTION 4: Way Forward

The earlier sections discussed in detail the multiple threads of enablers and barriers that women deal with in order to enter the labor force and continue working. We see that gendered expectations of marriage, childbearing and childcare, unpaid household work and care work all remain important mediators for the kind of roles and sectors women can enter for work and sustain themselves, in the long term. We also see how individual motivators play an important role in navigating structural issues of market segregation based on gender roles, policy lacunae in encouraging equitable participation of women in economic activities as well as normative barriers at the household level. There is also an inevitable relationship between the state and the market that continues to maintain this status quo.

Reflecting on the questions we started with, we were able to unpack multiple layers and dimensions of the idea that is embodied by NTL as an approach, process as well as an outcome for women to move into non-normative ways of participating in the economy and in

turn, contributing to their own and their families' social lives. In identifying specific enablers and barriers, we find a range of issues that women face and find ways around, from participants' own narratives and lived experiences; many of which are also corroborated by existing literature.

Three important reflections that emerge from the study are as follows:

- The world of work for women is complex, fluid and not understood or organized in the binary of TL and NTL sectors or occupations. It is highly determined by existing gender norms that are reflected across the three pillars of social organization- households, markets and the state. From any perspective that we adopt to view non-traditionality, it will not be an exaggeration to observe that all the barriers are enhanced when women try to move into these domains of work. Similarly, enablers in the form of social sanctions are far and few when we consider non-traditional

domains of work. Again, it is important to stress here that "non-traditionality" is a highly dynamic concept that differs from one individual to another, highly sensitive to their unique positionality in socio-economic hierarchies and household level vulnerabilities.

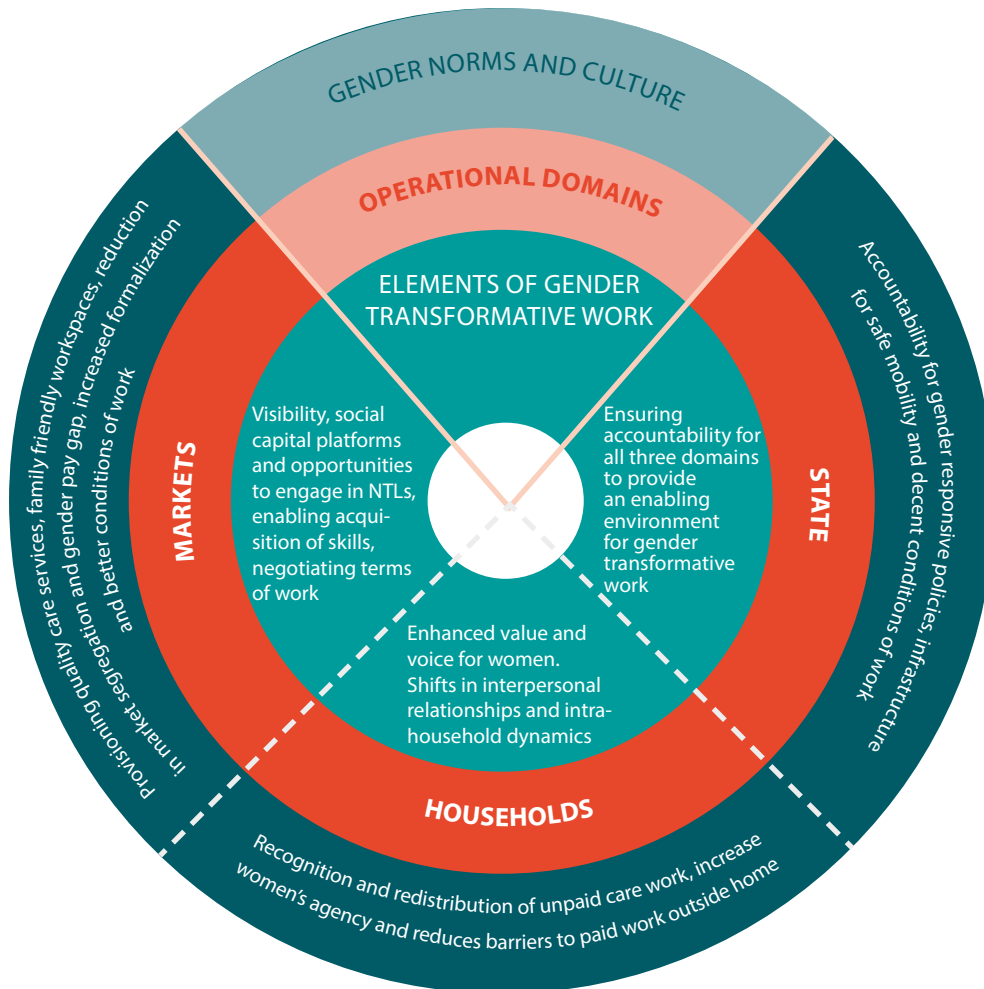
- Enablers and barriers for women irrespective of the sectors remain similar (as narrated above) and are determined by structural forces, which emanate from norms and transcend to gendered state-controlled policies, schemes and budgetary allocations. Creation of an enabling environment, as such, is limited as per the capacities of these structures. This includes obvious considerations such as policies for encouraging women's skilling and training in certain trades, quotas for recruitment and promotions across sectors, promoting women's leadership and so on; but also includes addressing underlying considerations of safety in public spaces and availability of publicly funded, quality education at school and college levels, safe accommodation facilities for girls to continue education/training/work where needed, meaningful incentivization of continuing education coupled with delaying the age of marriage, early sensitization of men for reducing the burden of unpaid and care work on women and so on.
- A crucial component of this ecosystem is influenced by the markets. As markets provide the platform for convergence of women's agency, household level determinants of women's choice and decision-making, policy implementation, presentation of economic trends, and formation of linkages between economic and broader

development outcomes, it is not surprising that gender segregation is highly visible in existing market structures. Markets comprise both state and non-state actors and hence, are in a strong position to provide synergistic responses to enable implementation and uptake of progressive policy measures, enable women to absorb demand generation in newer sectors and negotiate with normative barriers at the household level. A sizeable market share in India is informal²⁵ in nature and largely comprises women without much accountability for service and social protections. In this respect, markets especially sectors (both public and private) that thrive on informal supply chains must make provisions to extend fair wages, decent working conditions and job security beyond the purview of formal enterprises, especially for women as they are more vulnerable to social and economic risks. This also applies to access to credit, technology, marketing and other support services.

Based on this, we propose the following framework to lay out the problem statement of gender segregation in the economy with a wider context of gender norms and culture and across households, markets and the state. In addition, we recognize key elements discussed above in order to further nuance the understanding of the world of work for women, especially considering the approach of non-traditional livelihoods, which was the key question this study sought to address. We propose this framework to enable further understanding of work to achieve a gender transformative potential in women's lives, of which non-traditional livelihoods is a key element.

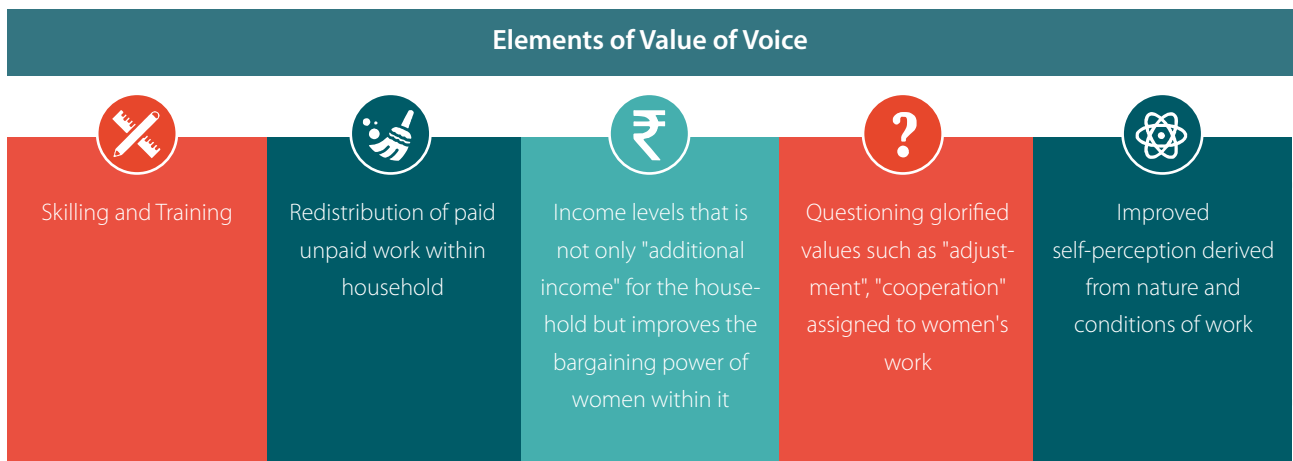
²⁵ The term "informal economy" refers to all economic activities by workers and economic units that are – in law or in practice – not covered or insufficiently covered by formal arrangements. Their activities are not included in the law, which means that they are operating outside the formal reach of the law; or they are not covered in practice, which means that – although they are operating within the formal reach of the law, the law is not applied or not enforced; or the law discourages compliance because it is inappropriate, burdensome, or imposes excessive costs- International Labor Organization, 2002. In this study we have not engaged with informal economy, but it is crucial to consider with respect to the Indian scenario.

Figure 6: A Framework for Gender Transformative Work



This framework encapsulates newer perspectives on the lives of women who aspire to work and are already working which emerge from our study. Most significant elements which we highlight in order to achieve a world of gender transformative work for women are as follows:

- WHAT are women's own articulations of what they attach **value** to and draw value from? And hence, use it to enhance their agency within and outside the household is critical to unpack in order to distil concepts around what constitutes non-traditionality and how to embed these elements into existing



program and policy efforts. Given that women operate within a patriarchal normative structure, changes within this space on account of their working status and enhanced agency is extremely important to document in their own voices.

- HOW is **visibility** in different forms and shades owing to certain kinds of work or conditions of work allowing women the space for various changes? This space may allow them to negotiate, assert and demand decision making on important matters concerning their lives. This also enables them to

Elements of Visibility and Social Capital



Improved mobilization of women to join skilling and training institutes



Re-examining gendered curricula at skilling and training



Encourage networks of formal and informal association amongst workers for accountability from employers and better working conditions standards



Flexible working can be implemented as a positive workplace practice by eliminating the gender discrepancies inherent in it

form social capital by way of building support groups and networks.

- WHO is **accountable** for reducing structural barriers for women to be able to work also emerges in multiple dimensions? A lot of work currently fixes the ownership of change on women but perhaps the discourse needs to shift to focus on the powers

that be within households, state and market need to be seen as duty-bearers. This may manifest itself as support in household negotiations, ensuring better conditions of work as an employer, or promoting gender-transformative policy design, implementation, measurement of outcomes and meaningful convergence by the state.

Elements of Accountability of Duty Bearers



Women's mobilization into skilling and training must consider externalities such as existing biases that influence preferences for trade, gender of trainers. They must borrow existing best practices from efforts by non-governmental organizations



Overhaul of structural issues in the wider education system to harness the potential of skills initiatives



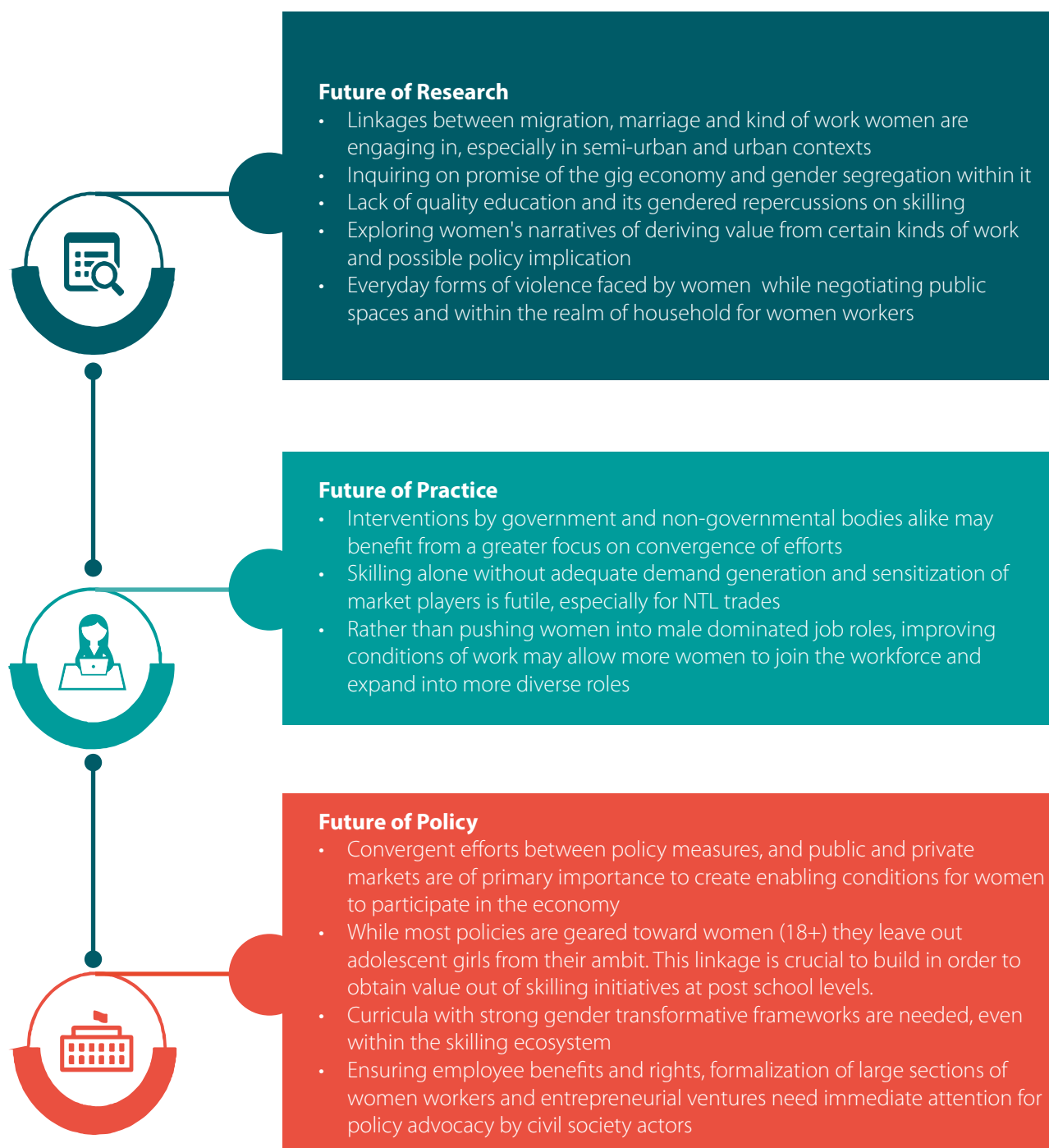
Coherence, coordination and convergence between departments and schemes offering skill development for effective results



Creating basic amenities and infrastructures like hostels, transport to ensure safety of women workers which is a looming impediment to access to public sphere and hence, work

Based on the above discussion, we make some key recommendations:

Figure 7: Key Recommendations



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ANNEXURES

ANNEXURE 1: DETAILED METHODOLOGY

1. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

- Undertook synthesis of academic and programmatic literature and mapping of debates in popular discourse around the question of women's work in India. The focus was on understanding the current trends on livelihoods of women and the factors that impact this decision. For the purpose of this review a tripartite lens of household, market and state has been used which often shape women's participation in the workforce.
- Analyzed peer reviewed journal articles, book chapters, research reports produced by practitioners' in civil society, newspaper features, and featured articles published after 2013, barring a few programmatic reports that suggested themselves strongly to the topic during the course of the study. There was a twofold reason to begin review of literature 2013 onwards. First, 2011-12 was the last round of NSSO data available when the study began. Secondly, the definition of "work" was revised from merely including market-oriented economic output to focus on work that contributed to the well-being of population (children, chronically ill, elders), whether paid or unpaid. (ILO, 2013).

2. REVIEW OF POLICY AND INITIATIVES

- Mapping of policies, schemes and initiatives was specifically focused within the skills ecosystem discourse to understand women's entry and sustenance in the workplaces. The policies, schemes and reports analyzed as part of this process is attached in **Annexure 2**.
- The analysis of policies, schemes and initiatives is focused on: gendered assumptions in design of policies; provisions for recruitment and sustenance of women workers.

3. TRENDS ANALYSIS

- As part of this study and in consultation with TAG, ICRW commissioned a scoping paper "Unpacking Trends in Female Employment in India Scoping Paper for ICRW's Study on Unpacking Non-traditional Livelihoods of Women" undertaken by Dipa Sinha, Professor, Ambedkar University.
- It includes the longitudinal trends of women's participation in the economy over three labor Employment and Unemployment (EUS) survey by National Sample Survey (NSSO). The paper also presented a discussion on how sectors can be defined as

"traditional" or "non-traditional" as far as women's livelihoods are concerned for the purposes of the study that is being conducted by ICRW. Moreover, it made recommendations for the sample selection for the qualitative primary research phase of the study which involves primary data collection hence contributing significantly to progress of the study. Some of the findings from the paper are included in **Annexure 3**.

- The paper proposed the following sampling strategy which was used in the study undertaken:
 - Women's participation in certain sectors in the three labor survey rounds
 - Roles within sectors which are traditional (Anganwadi workers) and non-traditional (corporate managers)
 - Roles in which participation of women is rising (all the four occupations listed below), irrespective of being traditional and non-traditional currently

Table 2: List of Sector and Examples of Occupations of Participants in the Study

SECTORS	OCCUPATIONS
Health	Frontline Health Workers (For example, Anganwadi workers at urban Anganwadi centers)
Manufacturing	Corporate Managers (For example, outsourcing or product manager at any apparel manufacturing enterprise)
Retail trade	Models, Salespersons and demonstrators (For example, salesperson on shop floor of a retail store like clothes, gadgets, electronics and so on)
Information and communication	Physical, Mathematical and Engineering Science Professionals (For example, software developer or tester in any Information Technology company or in any IT department of private or public company)

PRIMARY QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

4.1 Selection of participants

- The selection of participants in the study was done using a purposive sampling approach following the recommendations from the trends analysis.

- The site for the primary research was National Capital Region (NCR),²⁶ both urban and semi-urban areas. The study limited its scope to NCR given the nature of the study which focused on understanding the attitude of workers, employers and state-run bodies. It was prudent to understand this in a limited demographic and geographical location in light of the duration of the study.

4.2 Training and data collection

- The study protocol was reviewed and approved by ICRW's Institutional Review Board and Sigma Research and Consulting's ethical review board.
- The qualitative data collection was led by a small team of experienced qualitative researchers from ICRW, who are proficient in Hindi language.
- IDs and KIs were undertaken by one researcher with one note taker.
- All tools were developed in line with the key areas of interest and pretested before starting of the data collection.
- The details shared in **Annexure 4** about different primary research participants is with due consideration to the consent processes.

5. ANALYSIS, SYNTHESIS AND CONSULTATIONS

In the last phase of the study, we analyzed all the primary data collected as well as review of literature and policy, schemes and initiatives, using a grounded theory approach for the analysis. All the qualitative activities were transcribed and translated into English prior to analysis

- Coding was conducted for all the transcripts.
- As a first step, the coding process included two independent coders going through 10 percent of all transcripts to arrive at a preliminary set of codes that was discussed and agreed upon by all members of the research team and to be used as a framework for coding the rest of the documents.
- We generated about 119 raw codes to build into code "nodes" that allowed organization of the data and finally arranged these into themes or "families" to draw out the most important learnings.
- The code families generated in the process are attached as **Annexure 5**.

²⁶ National Capital Region is a unique example of interstate regional planning for development of a region with National Capital Territory Delhi as its core. It also falls in the territorial jurisdiction of participating States of Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and NCT-Delhi. URL: http://ncrb.nic.in/pdf_files/Annual%20Report%202014-15.pdf

ANNEXURE 2: LIST OF POLICIES, SCHEMES, INITIATIVES INCLUDED IN THE POLICY REPORT

Table 3: List of Policies on Skilling and Enabling Women to Work in India

POLICIES
National Policy for Women 2016 Articulating a Vision for Empowerment of Women- Draft
National Policy on Skill Development and Entrepreneurship 2015
National Strategy for New India @75 by NITI Aayog
Labor Code on Social Security and Women's Economic Empowerment
Maternity Benefit Act (Amendment), 2017
The Sexual Harassment at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013
Early Child Development Policy

Table 4: List of Government Schemes for Skilling and Enabling Women to Work in India

SCHEMES
Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY)
National Urban Livelihood Mission and Skills Training
Working Women's Hostel Scheme
Rajiv Gandhi National Crèche Scheme for the Children of Working Mothers
Support to Training and Employment Program for Women

Table 5: List of Reports on Skilling and Enabling Women to Work in India

REPORTS
Report of the Committee for Rationalization & Optimization of the Functioning of the Sector Skill Councils
INDIA STUDY - Financing Options for Skills for Work of Marginalised Women: A Research Project of ASPBAE and Azad Foundation, India – 2017
Overcoming India's skill challenge: Transforming India into a High-Performance Nation- Accenture and NSDC report, 2013
Overview of skill development in India – ASSOCHAM India, Skill India and TISS, August 2017
An Exploratory Review of Skills-building Initiatives in India and Their Relation to Women's and Girls' Empowerment- Sujata Gothoskar
Fair Wear Foundation India Country Study - Manufacturing in three states and violence, 2019)

Table 6: List of Initiatives for Enabling Women to Work by Private Sector, NGOs and Civil Society Organizations

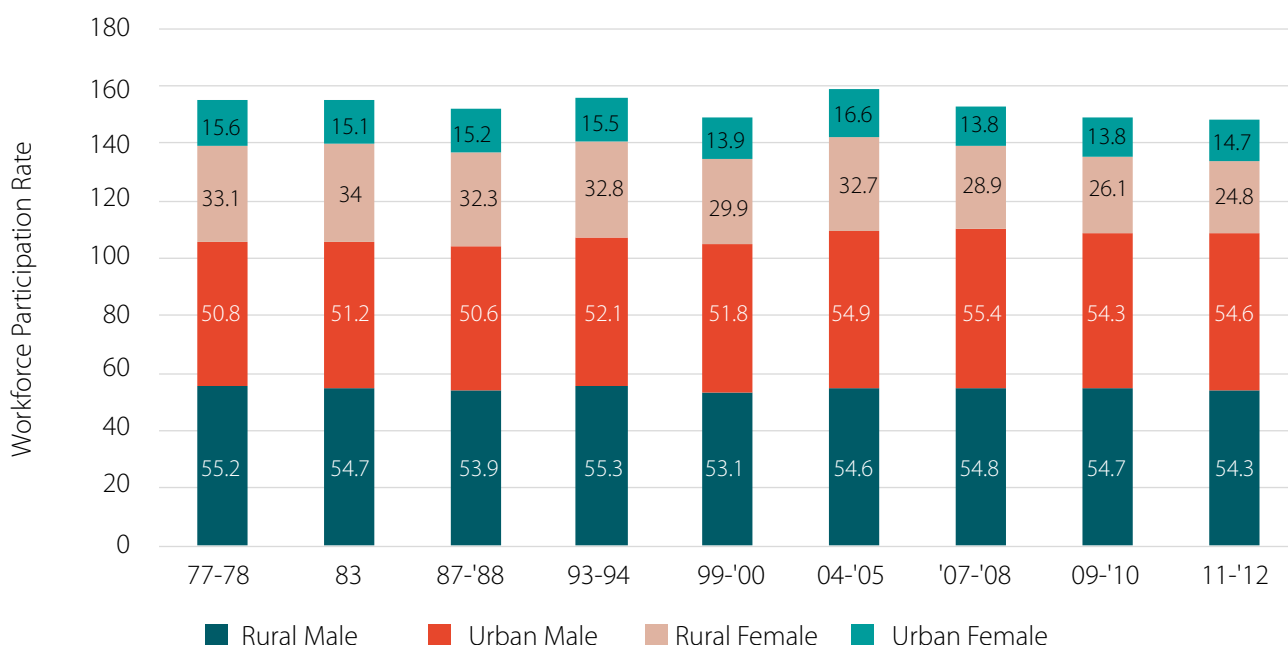
Initiatives (NGOs and civil society organizations)	Initiatives (Private sector)
Archana Women's Centre	Asian Development Bank and Mumbai Metro
Mobile Creche	Coca Cola
Dalit Shakti Kendra	Brickwork Foundation
Barefoot College	Tech Mahindra
Pratham Institute	CENTRUM Trust
Azad Foundation Network Partners	Edu Bridge
Mahila Housing Trust Self Employed Women's Association	Gram Tarang
Feminist Approach to Technology	Accenture
Akshara Centre	DISHA
Sadbhavana Trust	My Quest
	Ernst and Young STEM Tribe
	Cyber Shikshaa

ANNEXURE 3: KEY FINDINGS FROM TRENDS ANALYSIS

All findings are from the trends analysis exercise undertaken for the scoping paper (Sinha, 2019).

A. Workforce participation rates

Figure 8: Workforce Participation Rates, 1977 to 2012 (Authors' Wstimates from the NSS Unit-Level Data, 68th Round (EUS))



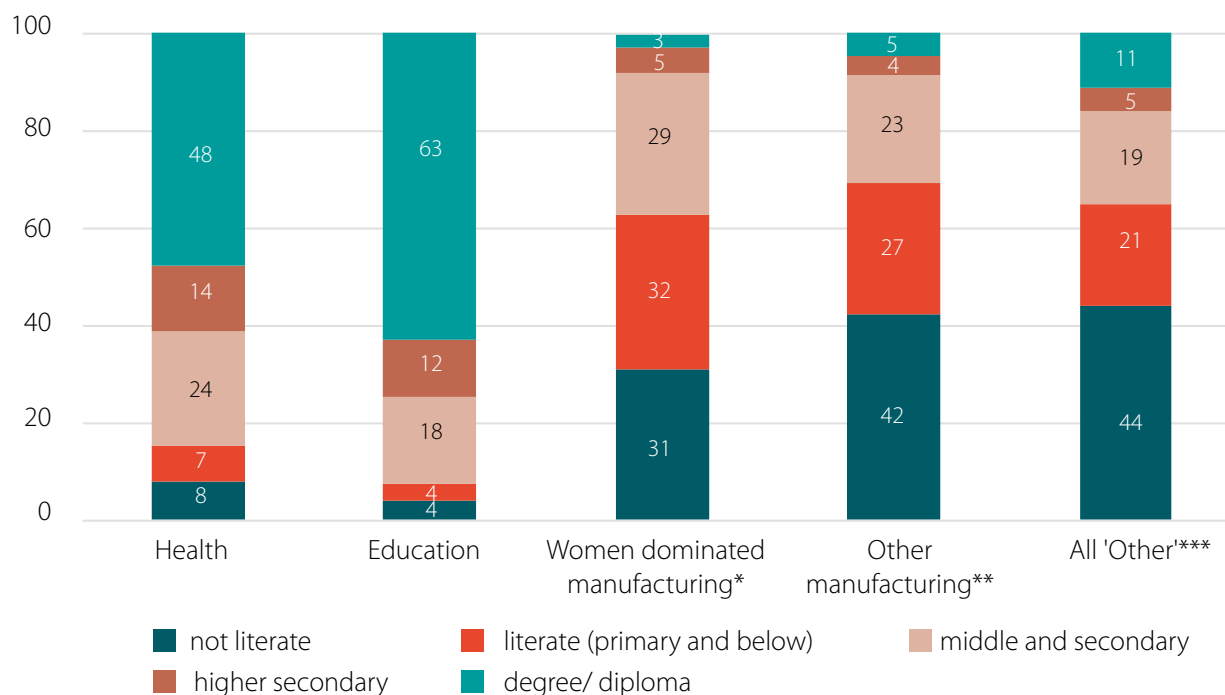
B. Average female workforce participation of women in the 5 women-concentrated sectors.

Table 7: Sectors with more than Average Female Employment (Women-Concentrated)

Sectors with more than average female employment (TL)	% female within sector
Domestic work	66.6
Education	43.3
Human health and social work activities	42.6
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	35.5
Manufacturing	29.4

C. Education levels amongst women workers in women-concentrated sectors

Figure 9: Education Levels Amongst Female Workers in Various Sectors (Source: Authors' Estimates from the NSS Unit-Level Data, 68th Round (EUS))



- In education and health sectors, a large proportion of women are literate and even educated at the graduate and higher levels. In manufacturing however, both in the women-concentrated sectors as well as the other sectors a large proportion of women are illiterate.

D. Workforce participation rate of women, their marital status and nature of work²⁷

Figure 10: Workforce Participation Rates of Women in Age Group 15 to 60 Years in Concurrency with their Marital Status (Authors' Estimates from the NSS Unit-Level Data, 68th Round (EUS))

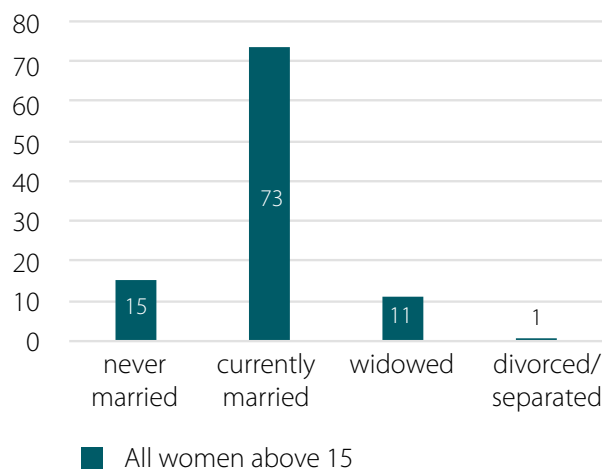
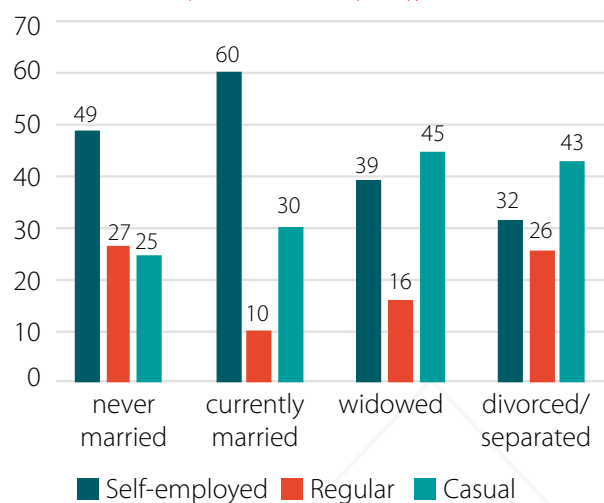
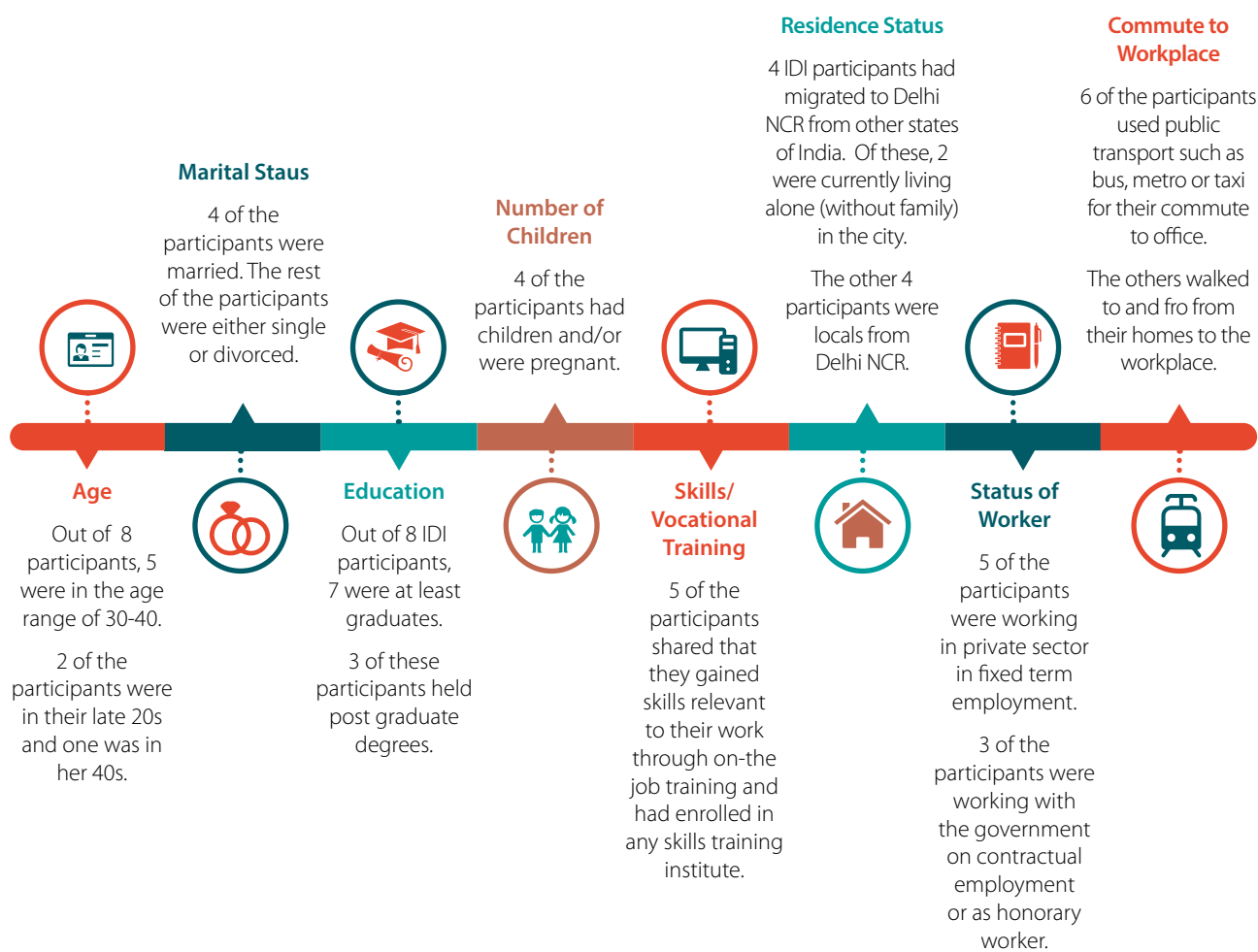


Figure 11: Nature of Employment as per Marital Status of Women (Authors' Estimates from the NSS Unit-Level Data, 68th Round (EUS))



²⁷ a. Self Employed: Persons who operate their own farm or non-farm enterprises or are engaged independently in a profession or trade on own-account or with one or a few partners are considered as self-employed.
 b. Regular: Persons working in others farm or non-farm enterprises (both household and non-household) and getting in return salary or wages on a regular basis (and not on the basis of daily or periodic renewal of work contract) are the regular salaried/wage employees.
 c. Casual: A person casually engaged in others farm or non-farm enterprises (both household and non-household) and getting in return wage according to the terms of the daily or periodic work contract is a casual wage labor.

ANNEXURE 4: PROFILE OF IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS IN THE STUDY



ANNEXURE 5: CODE FAMILIES

A total of 119 codes emerged during analysis, which we categorized into 15 families. The code families were agreed upon by the researchers engaged in analysis and finalized upon agreement of at least 2 team members.

Code Families	Number of Codes
Perceptions around women and work	7
Research Participants: Life and Employment details	13
Way forward- Areas for Further Research	2
Barriers: At the Workplace	23
Barriers: At the household level	14
Barriers: Fear of Violence	14
Influencers for work (financial support; history of working in the family)	2
Enablers: At workplace	8
Enablers: At household level	9
Structural Enablers	12
Challenges (Infrastructure and Policy level)	5
Suggestions from participants on creating an enabling environment for women	2
Non-Traditional Livelihoods and Traditional Livelihoods	1
Responses to Harassment Cases: Workplace, community and individual level	6
Values	1



Photo

Ganga Ben Vanita leads a team of male labourers in the renovation of an apartment. Previously a construction laborer with unsteady, daily work, she attended a skills training program offered by SEWA. Now, as a contractor, Ganga earns INR 600-700 per day, double her previous salary.
Credit: Paula Bronstein/Getty Images/Images of Empowerment



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