

Institutionalising a Global Network of Training Programmes and Skills Development: Creation of a Women-Friendly Policy and Institutional Framework for Skills Development

by

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I Introduction

The past two and a half decades of growth and development have had significant impact on women's participation in the labour market. Rapid industrialisation, higher educational attainment, declining fertility rates, and the changing attitudes towards women's participation in employment have all accounted for the rise of women in paid employment. But education and training remains the dominant factor influencing women's entry into the labour market, as well as on the quality and tenure of employment. The higher the level of education, the higher the quality and the longer the tenure of employment. The rise in female paid workforce has, however, not been matched by an increase in their quality of employment. There is still an unequal share of women in low-skilled low-paying jobs with little or no prospects for career advancement. They are also more easily fired when compared to their male counterparts.

Education and employment has improved women's wellbeing through access to income and greater bargaining position within the household, but has done less to empower women in the labour market. Because of their weaker position in the labour market, many continue to face disadvantages with respect to hiring, remuneration, security of employment, training opportunities and promotional prospects in contrast to males. It is feared that women's disadvantages in the labour market may deteriorate further with the process of globalisation and technological advancements. The current wave of liberalisation and deregulation, and the internationalisation of product and factor markets, have important implications on the labour market. All workers are affected by globalisation, but women, by virtue of their unique labour market features, will be more affected by the forces of change.

This paper surveys some of the emerging global trends that have important implications on women's labour market participation and skills development, and proposes the creation of a more women-friendly policy and institutional framework for skills development- The paper briefly introduces the emerging trends in female labour force participation, employment and remuneration, and discusses the issues and challenges confronting women and brought on by globalisation and technological changes. It next examines the gender differences in human resource needs and seeks

to address their unique needs through more responsive policies and institutions to enhance women's economic and social opportunities to invest in skills development. Finally, the paper examines how ICT can be used to expand and improve women's skills.

II Emerging Global Trends and Implications on the Labour Market and Skills Development for Women

The major forces of change that will impact on employment and skills development include liberalisation, globalization, as well as technological advancements, all of which are highly interrelated. The process of liberalisation began at the end of the 1970s in most developed economies, with the shift from state-provided welfare towards pay-as-you-go social services. Public provision of basic utilities at subsidised rates has been replaced with privatised provision at economic prices. Other aspects of the shift to more market-based practices include the shift towards greater labour market flexibility at the expense of labour protection, and tax systems that aimed at correcting inequalities now aim to promote incentives and efficiency. Many of the developing economies also began to liberalise their economies in the mid-1980s. Generally, there was a shift away from state intervention in trade, industrial and social policies towards more market-oriented practices. Another wave of liberalisation took place when the former socialist economies gradually began opening up. Though this group of economies, long known as the transition economies, remain less integrated into the global economy, they, too, encounter similar problems of adjustments.

The liberalisation process has reduced restrictions on cross-border flows in trade, capital, technology and, to some extent, labour, increasing their international movements. With the advancements in information and communications technology and reduced transport costs, liberalisation has enhanced the process of globalisation, demanding greater efficiency and flexibility among nations, firms and individuals. Economies are responding to these dynamic forces by undertaking rapid structural adjustments and economic reforms in order to remain internationally competitive. Generally, there is a trend towards greater reliance on market forces, with the state playing a more supportive and facilitative role. All workers are affected by these transformations, but female workers are more vulnerable to the adjustment processes because of the inferior level, structure and conditions of women's employment. The following highlights the level and nature of gender differentials in labour market participation that have important implications for women's access to education and training in an increasingly globalising economy.

Key features of women's labour market participation

Women have benefited from growth and development over the last four decades, as reflected in their increasing labour force participation rates. On the average, it has risen from about 36 per cent in the 1950s and 1960s to about 48 per cent in the 1980s and 1990s (Table 1). Only part of the increase is attributed to better statistical

approaches to measuring women's work (Tzannatos, 1999). In other words, more women have taken up paid employment. The increase in the number of female workers has, however, not been matched by improvements in their quality of employment.

Table 1

Regions	1950s and 1960s		1980 and 1999s	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
East & South Africa	92.3	35.3	89.7	44.8
west Africa	91.3	60.7	89.7	57.1
East Asia & Pacific	92.6	35.4	88.9	50.9
South Asia	94.4	39	91.3	29.2
East & Central Europe	93.5	61.9	90.4	76
Rest of Europe	95	36.6	90.4	53.5
Middle East	93.3	11.7	91.5	22.8
North Africa	92.5	n.a	91.1	14.1
Americas	94.1	32.7	89.9	46.8
Total (countries)	93.7	35.9	90.1	47.9

Labour market segregation

Empirical evidence suggests that male-female labour market segregation (both sectoral and occupational) has declined, but it is still far from satisfactory (Horton, 1999). With industrialization and improving education, women are moving out of agriculture and into manufacturing and the services. While this is an encouraging trend, they are concentrated in lower skilled-lower paying jobs. For instance, an increased number of women are now employed in manufacturing earning higher and stable incomes, but they are largely concentrated in export-industries such as electronics, textiles and footwear industries. Nearly two-thirds of women in manufacturing are employed as production operators or manual workers in these industries. Even in the service sector, women are concentrated in clerical, sales and services jobs that are traditionally regarded as female occupations (Table 2). Women are also severely under-represented in the administrative and managerial categories. They are, however, better represented in professional and technical categories. But, again, these consists mostly teachers, nurses and other professions that are, again, viewed as female occupations.

One of the principal factors behind the segregated labour market is the strong gendering of education. Women generally tend to opt for courses that prepare them for female occupations. Though more women are opting for male-oriented courses in the science and technical fields, there is still a huge discrepancy in the vocational and technical programmes in most economies (Asia Pacific Research Institute, 1998)

With increasing industrialisation women have moved out of agriculture and into the more formal manufacturing and services sectors. But their movement, as compared to men, is much slower, resulting in the feminization of the agriculture sector (Table 3). The process of industrialization has offered more opportunities for men than women in higher-wage off-farm activities (Mehra & Gammage, 1999). It has been well

Table 2

	Professional & Technical		Administrative & Managerial		Clerical & Service Workers		Sales Workers		Production & Transport Workers & Labourers	
	1980	1990	1980	1990	1980	1990	1980	1990	1980	1990
Developed regions										
Eastern Europe	57	56	22	33	64	73	69	66	25	27
Western Europe	42	50	12	18	62	63	48	48	15	16
Other developed	46	44	16	32	65	69	43	41	17	22
Africa										
Northern Africa	24	29	7	9	18	22	3	10	11	10
Sub-Saharan Africa	30	36	8	15	29	37	43	52	13	20
Latin American & Caribbean										
Latin American	47	49	15	23	52	59	39	47	14	17
Caribbean	51	52	22	29	62	62	57	59	18	21
East and Pacific										
Eastern Asia	35	43	7	11	41	48	40	42	32	30
Southeast Asia	42	48	13	1	40	48	45	53	25	21
Southern Asia	30	32	8	6	15	20	8	8	26	16
Western Asia	30	37	4	7	19	29	6	12	4	7
Oceania	38	41	10	18	42	52	37	53	6	17

documented that women farmers often access credit, farm equipment and technical know-how. Public policy programmes must address the needs of this category of female workers in order to enhance their skills and productivity.

Wage differentials

There is also sufficient empirical evidence to suggest that gender differentials in remuneration are narrowing, Notwithstanding these improvements, there remains a persistent wage gap that human capital investment alone may be insufficient to close. Ever in similar jobs, women are paid less for doing comparable work (Tzannatos, 1999). These other factors stem from women's multiple roles in society and discriminatory practices against women, and the failure of public policies to address these issues. Women's wages on the average is about two-third of men's wages and no more than one-fifth of the world's wages accrue to women partly because they are mostly employed in low paying jobs, low-level positions or more likely to be employed as part-time workers.

Table 3

Women as a Percentage of the Labour Force in Each Sector

	1970			1980			1990		
	Agr	Mfg	Serv	Agr	Mfg	Serv	Agr	Mfg	Serv
Sub-Saharan Africa	30	18	28	36	28	30	37	28	36
North Africa	5	11	9	10	25	15	20	23	17
Asia									
South Asia	17	12	9	20	18	11	32	41	15
East & Southeast	34	41	33	37	42	35	34	44	41
Asia	na	na	na	46	44	35	47	43	38
China	12	29	43	15	29	44	16	36	48
Latin America & the Caribbean									
Middle East	12	12	12	14	12	16	12	10	17
Newly Independent States	50	38	47	49	43	53	45	43	56
OECD	25	27	40	31	28	45	33	29	48

Wage differences also arise as industries shift towards high-technology and higher-skilled work processes where the share of women workers is declining.

While it's naïve to think that investment in human capital alone may be sufficient to close or narrow the wage gap, it is important to emphasize that education and training enhances women's income levels. Unless policy attention is given to reducing or ever eliminating the male-female gap, women could be made worse off by the global forces of change. The following examine how women are affected by the process of

globalisation and technological advancement, and the implication for women's investment in training.

Implications of technological changes on female workers

As economies move up the production ladder, old jobs are lost and new jobs are created. Though there is anecdotal evidence that new technologies do not necessarily lead to higher skills and may result in deskilling or job impoverishment, by and large economic restructuring is often accompanied by increasing demand for new and higher skill levels as technological upgrading takes place. Technological developments in information and communication suggest a growing demand for computer-related technical skills and a gradual decline in demand for the traditional labour-intensive work processes that engage women for their manual dexterity and stamina for routine and repetitive work.

Women are more vulnerable to industrial restructuring since they are concentrated in jobs that require low skills, with little or no employment security. For instance, Korea's industrial restructuring experience shows that, as production processes became more technologised, more specialised skills were required, resulting in increased demand for male workers and a reduced demand for female workers (Kim and Kim, 1995). Similar experiences were recorded in Mexico, Spain and Singapore (Mehra and Gammage, 1999). Industrial restructuring involving a shift to higher technology processes has important implications on women's access to training and retraining, and in job placement. If women's access to training is not improved the male-female skills gap will further widen, and there is the danger that females will be gradually replaced by more qualified males or even migrant labour,

Research on working conditions of female production operators has shown that the majority aspire to move up the career ladder to hold better-paying jobs, and that factory jobs were selected as the last resort (Arifin & Ungku Aziz, 1994). Training for production workers, especially in the electronics and garments industries, is mostly in-plant, on-the-job and of a short duration. Such highly specific skills acquired through training are often non-transferable and there is little or no technology transfer. Hence, these women do not have any marketable skills to take away in the event of being retrenched. Most governments do provide some form of incentives for workers, and since production operators do have some basic education, employers should be encouraged to train these workers in marketable skills so that they can find suitable jobs in new growth areas.

Implications of increasing labour market flexibility on women

Typically, more women than men are casually employed, such as in part-time, temporary and home-based and subcontracting tasks, resulting in greater employment flexibility and insecurity. The process of globalisation has further worsened the terms of conditions of their employment. Empirical evidence suggests that in some sectors of the economy, the trend has been towards greater informalisation and semi-formalization of production activities and employment practices. Standing (1999)

argues that this is particularly evident since the late 1980s and 1990s when industries increasingly globalised their operations to remain competitive. When firms go global, wage and labour costs become important determinants of location and mode of production. In cases where the profit margin is protected by reducing labour cost, extending hours and reducing formal workers, women predominate. Employers tend to rely more on temporary workers and reducing the number of permanent workers. Hence, in many of the high-growth Asian economies driven by manufacturing, female share of employment has risen rapidly, but the quality of employment vis-a-vis men remains inferior.

The trend towards increased outsourcing of production or home-based work has also involved more females than males, in both developed and developing economies. Empirical evidence shows that women account for as much as 95 per cent of home-based workers in Greece, Ireland, Italy and the Netherlands. In the Philippines, 82 per cent of the 500,000 homeworkers that produced garments for the textile industry were women (Mehra & Gammage, 1999). With such outsourcing of production, employers are able to cut their costs by paying piece rates and avoid labour regulations that apply to factories. Home-based workers also do not enjoy any employment benefits, including opportunities to improve their skills.

Women also predominate the informal sector, both in the rural and urban areas. The informal sector includes activities such as small-scale farming and cottage industries in the rural areas and petty trading and small-scale manufacturing in urban areas. Even though the female workers in the informal sector are paid, they receive low wages and the working conditions are poor. There are also women in the informal sector who are self-employed with scope for improvements.

Generally, employment in the informal sector expands during recessions or periods of structural adjustments, and contracts during high growth periods. But in the case of women, informal employment generally reflects a lack of occupational mobility due to low education and poor skills; poverty that limits women's access to product and factor markets; of the informalisation of labour arising from globalisation and employer's strategy to cut labour costs. Hence, public policies and programmes to enhance education and skills must reach out to the different categories of women employed in the informal sector.

Implications of increasing international migration on female workers

The globalisation process involves not only greater cross-border flows of capital and goods and services, but also labour movements. Recent international migration trends show increased movement of workers from labour surplus nations to labour deficit nations. The use of foreign workers intensifies labour market flexibility since foreign workers are usually employed on a contractual basis and issued with temporary work permits which are often renewed on an annual basis. The employment contract of illegal workers is even more precarious as the employment contract may be on a daily basis.

The easy availability of cheaper foreign labour leads to further labour market segmentation and labour market flexibility. The inflow of cheap foreign workers lowers domestic wages or eases the pressure on upward wage movements, and delay the process of industrial upgrading. Hence, efforts to improve the skills of existing workers seldom take place. Instead, it encourages employers to replace older workers who command higher wages with new and cheaper foreign workers (Kanapathy, 1999). Though there may be laws to deter such unscrupulous practices, in reality it is difficult to implement such regulation. Women are more vulnerable to being replaced by cheaper foreign labour since they are concentrated in jobs that require low skills levels.

Implications at privatisation/marketisation of education

There has also been an increasing trend towards privatisation or marketisation of social services such as education, health and public utilities. In the latter half of the 1980s, education in many countries, including at some of the former socialist economies, was gradually marketised, especially at the tertiary level. The marketisation of education increases the cost of education and reduces its accessibility among the less privileged. This trend has been motivated by strong pressure to trim public spending and to meet the growing demand for skilled workers (Kanapatby, 1998). With marketisation, education is now seen as a consumer item with a market price and less of a public good. In other words, those who wish to benefit from it have to contribute. Though basic education will continue to be provided by the state, there is a gradual trend towards reducing state provision of higher education. This has important equity implications and women, by virtue of their unequal access to education and training as compared to males, will be more affected by the privatisation of higher education and training. Policy attention must be given to enhancing opportunities for women's access to higher education by increasing and expanding the scope of financial support for women to invest in education, and training.

III. Policy and Institutional Barriers Affecting Women in Skills Development

The policy and institutional barriers that affect women's skills development differ in developed and developing economies. In developed economies, inequitable access to quality care (includes childcare, old-age care, care for the disabled and sick) facilities and poor dissemination of information on training opportunities available feature as key barriers affecting women's access to training (Asia Pacific Research Institute, 1998). On the other hand, the more crucial problems affecting women in developing countries include the general lack of adequate, appropriate and affordable training programmes. The following examines policy and institutional barriers associated with both accessibility and availability of skills development opportunities for women.

Failure of public policies to respond to women's needs

Public policies generally fail to recognize women's role in reproduction and household chores as economic activities. The number of hours spent on domestic responsibilities by women has changed little over time. Child bearing and family obligations affect women's employment choices and duration in the labour market, especially with the shift from extended to nuclear families. Many women are forced to leave the labour market after marriage or defer having children because public policies fail to provide quality and affordable care facilities. In contrast, men remain in the labour market through prime age and continue to acquire skills and training and move up the career ladder. Women's shorter duration in the labour market reduces their experience and skills and lessens their opportunities for career advancements and incentives to invest in human capital.

The average age for women at work has been increasing and there is also an increase in the average years of service in the work place, with increasing educational attainment of women and changing perception of society with respect to women's work. Nonetheless, the incidence of women leaving their jobs after marriage and childbirth is still high. The incidence of women moving in and out of employment is higher in developed economies as compared to developing economies. In developing economies, women who drop out of the labour market seldom re-enter because of limited opportunities for training, as well as difficulties in finding suitable employment after a long break. It has been argued that women's labour force participation in developed economies shows peaks of attachment before and after childbearing/childrearing. One of the underlying reasons is the superior training infrastructure for further education and training. The longer a woman remains out of the workforce, the more difficult it is for her to secure new employment. However; the chances of re-employment increase with additional training and, therefore, older women who want to go back into employment should have the opportunity to improve their skills and increase their marketability.

Training programmes unsuited to women's needs

Though investment in human capital has been prioritized, women's HRD needs are seldom given attention. Women's participation in training is limited compared to males since the training programmes seldom fulfil women's unique needs. The training programmes are often men-oriented, demand high fees, impose stringent conditions such as prior working experience at management level, and offered at unsuitable times (Asia Pacific Research Institute. 1993). In order to encourage women to invest in training, courses must be made more gender-sensitive, flexible and affordable.

Poor information on training opportunities

In many developed as well as developing countries, women who seek training are often unaware of the various training programmes carried out by public agencies. The programmes are often fragmented and ad hoc, and there is no single agency that disseminates information about the different forms and levels of training opportunities available. Some agencies limit their information dissemination to their own members

even if the courses are open to a wider group of women. Even if information is available, it is seldom detailed and women are unsure if they qualify to participate in them.

Lack of appropriate training opportunities

A woman's HRD needs varies during her life cycle. In the years prior to marriage, women have more time and resources to participate in skills training. But once they are married and have children, their opportunities lessen. But later in their working life cycle, when their children are much older, they might want to further their career. However, opportunities to invest in skills development during their career breaks are limited for older working women in many of the low- and middle-income countries.

Many developing economies have yet to establish well-developed training facilities in which women can participate, as compared to developed countries that operate sophisticated training networks for adult learning which are largely used by women. Though there are numerous state-assisted training programmes in developing economies aimed at providing basic education, employability skills and personal development, they are often targeted at a small group of women to meet their immediate needs. Such training is limited, unstructured and seldom lead to accreditation.

IV. Creating Social and Economic Opportunities for Women to Participate in HRD Programmes

The means to enhance women's skill acquisition lies not merely in improving and expanding the availability of training opportunities but, more importantly, in changing the conditions affecting women's access to training through state, employers and societal policies and attitudes towards women's employment and household and family responsibilities. Such changes can be effected through public policies that treat women's role in reproduction and unpaid activities as recognized economic activities. The following examines policies and programmes to enhance women's social and economic opportunities to investment in human capital and to improve their labour market outcomes.

Appropriate labour employment and training policies

There is a need to implement equity-promoting legislation that ensures equal wages for men and women and equal opportunities for hiring, training and promotion. The following outlines some major labour, employment and training policies that ensure the equal treatment of women.

- Discrimination against women during recruitment, hiring, assignment and promotion or training opportunities must be removed not only through

legislation, but by taking appropriate measures to enforce such legislation. Labour legislation to ensure equal access to training must be specific and not couched in general terms, which tend to encourage employers to avoid implementing such labour laws. For instance, Chinese Taipei passed a very specific bill in 1994 on "Measures of Employment Promotion for Women" which ensures protection of women's legal rights for training and promotion and increase the stability of women's employment. This law had a significant effect on the number of women executives receiving training. Firms that violate such labour law must be sufficiently penalized and their actions exposed. Japan's anti-discrimination law, for instance, has a provision for the creation of a system to publicise the names of companies that violate laws against discrimination.

- One of the key features of the labour market participation of women is the growth of part-time and temporary employment. As noted earlier, part-time and temporary employment has less benefits, including training benefits, and less employment security. Legislation must ensure that such workers enjoy statutory benefits including equal access to training.
- Labour policies should encourage the adoption of a career break scheme, whereby an employee negotiates a fixed number of years of absence from work to undertake training or attend to family commitments, while guaranteeing employment at the end of the period. There are several advantages to the employer such as reducing the loss of experienced workers and the availability of a pool of relief workers, in instances where provisions are made for temporary employment during the break.
- Employers should be encouraged to allocate a fair share of training expenses for women employees. To begin with, all public-assisted training programmes must be directed to allocate a fixed percentage for training of women. In cases where fiscal incentives are granted for training, the tax rebates can be tied to women's training expenditure, such as double deduction tax allowances on women training expenditure.
- To encourage working women to participate in training, they must be provided with lifelong learning tax credits.

Institutionalise social support systems

Obstacles faced by women in employment and access to training very often relate to their social roles. Even if there are opportunities for skills training, women seldom have the time to undergo training, especially if it is carried out during vacations or after office hours. Women must have fair and equitable access to flexible, affordable and quality care options so that they can have equal opportunities to participate in the labour market and undergo training. Non- working women who wish to undergo training should also have access to subsidized care facilities

In many countries. the financing of care facilities is almost entirely borne by the employer, while in others fiscal incentives in form of tax deductions are given. Only in

very few instances is it subsidised by the state. The provision of care facilities must be institutionalised through increased involvement of the state in the provision of such services. The financing of childcare facilities, including the training of personnel and care workers, should be borne from federal revenues and shared with the employer and the state. This would reduce costs of hiring women with young children. Women's access to quality and cost-effective childcare can be improved through appropriate legislation, funding mechanisms and training of care workers.

Innovative Working Arrangements

With developments in information and communications technology, teleworking has emerged as a new form of working arrangement that is more suited to the needs of specific groups of people such as senior citizens, women and those with disabilities. However, its acceptance and use is limited, even though its merits are apparent. Teleworking reduces commuting time, improves productivity, creates new job opportunities and reduces environmental pollution'. It is particularly suited to women as they can achieve flexible use of their time. Teleworking enables women to reconcile their paid work and family responsibilities.

Despite the merits of teleworking, it is still a new concept and not easily accepted by employers. Therefore, there is a need to give it greater publicity. Government agencies, women's organisations and trade unions can undertake to promote the concept of teleworking among employers. There is a need to review labour laws so that the employment benefits and working conditions are not compromised when employees work from home.

Information dissemination on opportunities available

Creating skills development programmes for women alone is insufficient to ensure accessibility. Training programmes for women must be highly visible so that women are aware of such programmes. At present, though there are several agencies providing training and other forms of assistance for women, the delivery of information on assistance programmes remains fragmented and ineffective. The setting up of a one-stop centre such as the Electronic Marketplace for Training and Education Resources in the United States should be explored. Basic knowledge and relevant information with respect to training programmes and business management such as type of courses being offered, career opportunities and funding mechanisms should be publicised extensively to all target groups so that women who need such information can easily access them. Such information should be made available to schools, local community organisations, local employment agencies, women's organisations and trade unions.

While information technology is increasingly used to deliver information, not all women have access to the technology or are able to use such technology with ease. Local information dissemination centres such as community halls, schools and women's organisations should be equipped with computers and women should be taught how to use the computer to access information. But before giving training to women on how

to use the facilities, they must be informed of the usefulness of the facilities, such as how it can assist them in their individual pursuits.

Institutionalise Women-friendly Skills Development Systems

There is an increasing awareness that education and training should be a lifelong process to cope with structural adjustments, emerging skill shortages and new technologies. However, unlike developed countries like Australia, Canada and the United States which have a longer history of adult education and better lifelong learning opportunities, many of the developing economies have yet to develop training programmes that reach out to the majority of the society. The limited opportunities available seldom cater to the different needs of women. Women have a higher tendency to take breaks in their careers and they share a greater burden of the domestic responsibilities. Their training needs also vary during their life cycle. Because of their unique demands, they need greater flexibility in training in terms of course structure, content, timing, financing and entry requirements. These underlying factors must be acknowledged when designing skills training programmes for women.

As noted earlier, the barriers women encounter varies between developed and developing economies and no single solution is applicable to all. However, a survey of best practices in women's skills development adopted in both developed and developing economies point to some key elements that are crucial in encouraging women to invest in education and training. The following highlights some of the underlying principles and approaches to institutionalise women-friendly skills development programmes.

Key features of women-friendly training programmes

- Training must be gender sensitive and cater to the needs of different groups of women. The target groups include: housewives who wish to re-enter the labour market; school leavers who wish to acquire specific vocational and technical skills; working women who need to re-skill themselves as a result of changes in the work place; women who wish to start or expand their own business; and women in agriculture who wish to acquire new skills about new production techniques or management practices.
- Costs of training must be affordable.
- Training programmes must be accompanied with counselling, guidance, and even mentoring.
- Training programmes must adopt the practice of assessment and recognition of prior learning adopted in some of the developed economies so that women, especially those who wish to re-enter the labour market who have skills are recognised and they can enter accredited training at an appropriate level.
- Assistance in seeking necessary financial assistance should be available.
- Training programmes must be flexible and include both lateral and vertical skills upgrading. In other words, courses must be modular and allow women to

acquire credits at their own pace and they must be of short duration. Courses of a longer duration tend to discourage women because of lower confidence levels among the less qualified, higher costs and higher risks of failure.

Implementation Process of Women-friendly Training Programmes

The institutionalisation of a women-friendly training system does not necessarily involve the creation of new agencies or training facilities, but can build upon existing institutions. Existing institutions for human resource development and the women's organisations can be deployed through a framework of collaborative partnerships. These two agencies are well-positioned to take the lead by forging training networks with relevant agencies. For instance, public agencies responsible for human resource development can collaborate with women's organisations and public and private training providers to develop and deliver courses for women's personal development, employability and entrepreneurship development. The local HRD agencies can provide the policy and institutional support, while the women's organisations can help to identify target groups and course curriculum and delivery can be undertaken with expert help from independent trainers, at local, regional and global levels. They can also network with international development and financial institutions to expand their sources of expertise and financial assistance. Courses developed must be on a need basis and should include both lateral and vertical upskilling. The courses should be short and modular to ensure flexibility and it must be sufficiently publicised.

These agencies can also tie up with financial institutions to provide subsidised loans to female course participants to enhance their accessibility. For those who wish to start a business, assistance must be given to raise sufficient funds through the provision of information on sources of funds as well as skills on writing up project proposals. Training programmes should include training in emerging skills that are marketable and that can be accredited. The skills development programmes must also include the provision of basic counselling such as assessment of prior learning and experience, a suitable career path, job prospects and business development networks. The training providers can link up with other agencies that have the expertise in these areas to provide the necessary input.

Best Practices of Successful Partnership via Global Networking

The Women's World Banking (WWB), with its headquarters in New York, has networked with developed and developing economies such as Japan and Malaysia to encourage women to invest in human capital by providing both training and financial assistance. For instance, the WWB affiliate in Japan known as the World Women's Bank of Japan runs a business school for Women in Japan to support women who wish to run their own business. It has also tied-up with a credit union to establish a financing system known as Citizen's Bank. A parallel scheme is run in Malaysia by its Malaysian Affiliate, Wintrac Sdn. Bhd. which is a co-founder of the Women's Institute of Management (WIM). WIM runs numerous training programmes and other forms of assistance for women entrepreneurs and women leaders.

WIM provides counselling and consulting services and disseminates relevant information to its members. It also conducts training programmes, seminars and workshops on motivation, leadership and entrepreneur development. It operates an online network called WIMNET for businesswomen. WIMNET provides database search facilities via the Internet to businesswomen around the world. It enables networking and the identification of potential business partners. It has produced several training manuals and has signed memorandums of understanding with universities and colleges overseas to run a MBA programme which will be friendly to the time constraints of working women executives, but open to both males and females, It has also entered into a MOU with a local technology training institute to run courses for women on how to operate a business through the Internet. Though it is based in Malaysia, its programmes reach out to the whole of ASEAN. It recently organised a regional training programme for women leaders in ASEAN with funding from a UN agency.

V. Approaches to Women's Skills Development in the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Era

The development of ICT has altered very drastically the delivery of adult learning. It makes education and training easier, faster, cheaper and more flexible, and is able to reach out to those in remote areas. With ICT, skills development need not be space or time bound and, hence, it is well-suited to the development of more women-friendly skills training and business operations. The ICT can be used in numerous ways to advance women's skills development, such as:

- Provide flexible modes of training, including distance training
- Provide more affordable and quality training by sourcing expertise globally.
- Create a global network of information related to training opportunities, financial aid, advice and guidance.
- Provide training at home and reduce time demands on women
- Overcome isolation imposed by geography, culture or social attitudes by being able to interact online with others who have similar interests.

However, the use of ICT to train women is currently hampered by women's limited access to such technology. The limited access stems from women's lower level of education, language barriers, lack of opportunities to expose to advanced technology and lack of training on how to utilise the new technology.

Generally more men have access to ICT as compared to women. For instance, globally, the number of women surfing the Internet stood at 96.9 million compared to 116.9 million male Internet users, or about 45 per cent. Women in developed economies have better access to IT than those in developing economies. Females accounted for about 51 per cent of Internet users in the United States whereas in West Asia the figure was low at about 15 per cent. The figure for Asia Pacific is around 40 per cent. Studies show that women, especially those in developed economies, are emerging as a main force in Internet usage. These women use the Internet to make online transactions

such as retail purchases, seek information of health-related issues, as well as undertake investment.

Table 4
Internet usage by Region and Gender

Region	Male		Female	
	Million	%	Million	%
Asia Pacific	27.6	60.1	18.3	39.9
Europe	29.7	60	19.8	40
West Asia	1.1	85.3	0.19	14.7
North America	53.6	48.6	56.6	51.4
South America	2.7	71.1	1.1	28.9
Africa	1.6	71.4	0.64	28.6
Total	116.9	54.8	96.6	45.2

source: *Business Times*, April 29, 2000

The following highlights how ICT can be used to improve and expand women's skills.

Develop more women-friendly online training programmes

More women-friendly online training programmes should be developed through partnerships between state agencies, women's organisations, public and private training providers and the international development and financial institutions as highlighted earlier. The strategic partnership should involve joint planning, curriculum development, shared resources and more efficient outreach. These training programmes should be structured in a more efficient outreach, in terms of course content and delivery mode so that it poses little conflict with women's household responsibilities. Such women-friendly programmes provide gateways to further learning for women. However, to sustain and foster the expansion of such programmes, the partnership must be mutually beneficial and must meet the needs of women. In other words there must be demand for such programmes.

Develop a one-stop electronic marketplace for training and education

A one stop electronic marketplace for training and education should be established in all member economies to provide greater accessibility of information on training to individuals, employers as well as training providers. The one-stop centre should provide a detailed database on education and training programmes, training providers and consumer services. Training providers should be able to list their products and services easily. It should also include information on skills in demand, the skills and qualifications necessary, the costs of training and the types of financial assistance available. The one-stop centre should be user-friendly and interactive.

Develop portals related to Women's Issues and Concerns

Women's organisations should develop portals that carry information on issues that concern women and these can be linked with their counterparts in the rest of the world. This could lead to a rich source of information and women can learn from one, another's experiences online. There is already a large pool of information online, but women's access may be restricted due to computer illiteracy as well as language barriers. Development of portals for women must, thus, be accompanied by efforts to promote computer literacy amongst women. The promotion of computer literacy must parallel efforts at the national level to build portals in the national language. In many of the developing economies, the majority of women are not proficient in English, and this adds as a deterrent to encouraging women to seek knowledge and information via the Internet.

Promote e-commerce amongst women

Women entrepreneurs operating small and medium scale enterprises should be exposed to and trained in e-commerce. The majority of women who run small businesses produce products or services, or the domestic market as information and access to foreign markets is limited. Learning about potential markets and marketing their products overseas is time consuming and costly for small businesses run by women. Women operating small businesses should be exposed to the potential of e-marketing and e-retailing. For instance, women who produce handicrafts or even those who engage in farming should be exposed to the concept of Internet transactions. They can market their products, source their components as well as distribute and determine their own prices without going through middlemen.

Women in business generally wish to keep their operations small and manageable to enable them to balance their multiple roles in society. Business expansion implies more time and effort and all the risks associated with expansion. With e-commerce, business can be expanded with less capital outlay, less manpower and, hence, less risks. Women can continue to operate from their homes.

VI. Conclusion

Despite rising female labour market participation, it appears that female workers have poorer labour market outcomes compared to their male counterparts. In general, more women are employed in agriculture, women's employment in manufacturing is skewed towards low-paying, low-skilled, dead-end jobs and the low-wage informal sector is predominated by women. They are also easily displaced when work becomes more skilled and technologised. Their wages are generally lower and working conditions poorer with less bargaining power than men. It is feared that the employment disparities between men and women may worsen with the process of globalisation and technological advancements. The underlying factors for the male-female occupational and wage disparities include lower investment in women's human capital and the social and institutional norms that assign greater emphasis on women's reproductive responsibilities. It is vital to address the underlying factors behind women's poorer labour market participation.

There is a need to enhance women's investment in human capital, both basic schooling and job-specific skills development to improve their access to paid employment and to occupational mobility. Though it is increasingly recognised that education does not necessarily empower women, it is also true that education increases their labour force participation as well their quality of employment and enable them to compete more effectively with men. Women's enhanced access to paid employment provides them with a degree of economic independence. Economic independence increases women's welfare by giving them more options and lead to a better quality of life. Hence, the importance of skills development in improving women's personal, family and social life cannot be underestimated.

The development of ICT has revolutionised the learning process. Its many advantages enable the development of women-friendly training systems. An extensive network of training opportunities can be built through strategic partnerships between the public agencies, women's organisations, public and private trainers and international development and financial institutions. These training networks are more cost-effective and efficient way to promote women skills development at various levels since they do not involve huge capital outlay. They can be built upon existing facilities through shared information experiences, facilities and resources to promote women's skills acquisitions at local, regional and global levels.

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