

**Women Empowerment through Skills Development:
The Role of RUDSETIs**

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ABSTRACT

It is said in Manu Samhita (Chapter II, Para 145) Upadhyayan-dasacaryaacarayanamsatam pita; Sahasramtupitrmatagauraveratiricyate, which means that - "A Guru who teaches Veda is 10 times superior to an ordinary teacher and the father is 100 times more than a teacher, but the Mother is 1000 times more superior to the father." This vividly speaks how our ancient saints and culture held a woman in high esteem and recognized her not merely a mother but as a superior scholarly Institution. Unarguably, women are the nuclei of families; more so in rural India. They are not just confined to household chores but they play a very important role in grooming the children and shaping their future, upholding and preserving our traditions and culture. While everything about women in the past and in history is dark and dismal, women of late are seen in the forefront both in economic and social activities. Several NGOs, Voluntary Organizations, Training Establishments such as Rural Development and Self-Employment Training Institutions (RUDSETIs) have been conducting customized and innovative skill-building training programs, Entrepreneurship Development programs (EDPs) which contribute to economic empowerment of women through self-employment. This paper studies various types of EDPs conducted at one of the RUDSETIs in Andhra Pradesh, India which have been contributing to the skill and economic development of women and their empowerment vis-à-vis the skill development initiatives taken up by the Government of India to make India a global reservoir of skilled youth in the years to follow.

Keywords: *Entrepreneurship Development, Inclusive Growth, Skill Development, Women Empowerment.*

I. Introduction

"There is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women" – Kofi Annan

"Women are the largest untapped reservoir of talent in the world; When women participate in the economy, everyone benefits" – Hillary Clinton

Economic empowerment is the capacity of women and men to participate in, contribute to and benefit from growth processes in ways which recognise the value of their contributions, respect their dignity and make it possible to negotiate a fairer distribution of the benefits of growth. Economic empowerment increases women's access to economic resources and opportunities including jobs, financial services, property and other productive assets, skills development and market information.

Women's economic participation and empowerment are fundamental to strengthening women's rights and enabling women to have control over their lives and exert influence in society. It is about creating just and equitable societies. Women often face discrimination and persistent gender inequalities, with some women experiencing multiple discrimination and exclusion because of factors such as ethnicity or caste. The economic empowerment of women is a prerequisite for sustainable development, pro-poor growth and the achievement of all the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Gender equality and empowered women are catalysts for multiplying development efforts. Investments in gender equality yield the highest returns of all development investments. Women usually invest a higher proportion of their earnings in their families and communities than men. A study in Brazil showed that the likelihood of a child's survival increased by 20% when the mother controlled household income. Women are in some contexts bearing the costs of recovering from the crisis, with the loss of jobs, poor working conditions and increasing precariousness. Increasing the role of women in the economy is part of the solution to the financial and economic crises and critical for economic resilience and growth.

Education and training are essential components of any strategy to improve farm and non-farm productivity and rural incomes. Learning about business skills, as well as life skills such as health management, decision-making, self-confidence, or conflict management among various other things like new products and markets, can make a big difference for many of the rural poor, particularly the women folk. Women often have different training needs than men since they are more likely to work as contributing family workers, subsistence farmers, home-based micro-entrepreneurs, or low-paid seasonal labourers, in addition to handling their domestic work and care responsibilities. Skills development is a key to improving household productivity, employability and income-earning opportunities for women and also for enhancing food security and promoting environmentally sustainable rural development and livelihoods.

II. Need for the Study

Women, in a country like India, are just seen as someone to look after the home and bear children and thus the treatment they get is below par with their male counterparts. In other words, they are treated as second-class citizens. While the men folk are involved in agriculture or unemployment, the women and girls are mostly involved in household chores, does not have any say in the family affairs. Excluded from receiving higher education and entirely dependent on their male counterparts, they have to bear the brunt of most of the evils like dowry, domestic violence etc. Being a masculine society, women and girls are not allowed to step out of their houses which lead to lower educational status, low confidence to face the world. In view of the financial constraints that a family faces, empowering them through skill-building programs would give them more avenues to earn their living and become in the process self-reliant. Such programs will also help them to raise their voice against the ill treatment accorded to them within the family or outside. All these clearly indicate that there is an imperative need to find out some alternative ways as mentioned above to tackle this burning problem; "*Self Employment through skills-building*" seems to be one of the effective ways. It implies that women, with inherent talents and having inner urge to fine-tune them to make them sources of their livelihood, indeed need some encouragement and help from various agencies working for the very cause.

III. Review of Literature

Esther Duflo (2011) observed that women's empowerment and economic development are closely related: in one direction, development alone can play a major role in driving down inequality

between men and women; in the other direction, empowering women may benefit development. Does this imply that pushing just one of these two levers would set a virtuous circle in motion?

Asharani and Sriramappa (2014) in their study have observed that women are very good entrepreneurs and prefer to choose entrepreneurship as they can maintain work life balance. Educated women are involved in entrepreneurial activities in urban areas. Family support is found to be essential for successful entrepreneurship. The RUDSETIs and SHGs movement, banking facilities and skill awareness programs are helping in promoting women entrepreneurs.

Palaneeswari and Sasikala (2012) have observed that a change has to be brought about not only in the status of women but in the attitude of the society towards them. Priority has therefore necessarily to be given to changing image of women, from a passive onlooker and recipient, to that of a positive doer and achiever. Basically, the rural women are having basic indigenous knowledge, skill, potential and resources to establish and manage enterprise. But now, what is the need is to create awareness among the rural women who are job seekers about the employment market situation, to motivate them to take-up self-employment ventures, to assist them in obtaining necessary inputs required for setting of self-employment ventures from different sources and to provide necessary follow-up assistance to the self-employed women for sustaining them in their market.

Mohammad Badruzzaman Bhuiyan and Rubab Abdullah (2007) concluded in their study that in order to encourage women entrepreneurship, all banks and financial institutions should be asked to provide one fifth of their investment for women-owned enterprises and special training course for women entrepreneurs to improve skills.

Nitin Huria (2013) in his research paper has felt that women entrepreneurship has a bright future and the women entrepreneurs must have to take up the challenges of the new economic policy. A nation or region can only be developed if its women are given ample opportunities. Developing entrepreneurship among women will be the right approach for empowerment of women.

Manisha Raj (2014) studied that despite significant problems in a male dominated society, Indian women have found their way out for growth and empowerment either through self-help groups, NGOs, banks, government assistance and micro finance institutions or through private sectors. It was also observed that in the coming years the role of women will be of immense importance for competing with the developed world as they are main power source as well as diverse consumer group.

Prasanna Kumar (2014) stated that our need is to ascertain and assure the areas where women are still far from enjoying the minimum privileges and question of empowerment has been thrown to a very complex, integrated situation the access to resources, institution, decision making process and information etc., are the pertinent question in making the women empowered, confident, and accorded to the main stream social processes.

Mamata Bannur and Renuka Teli (2012) in their research study stated that the major factors which contributed for establishment and development of an enterprise are availability of specified skill to work on specific project (89%), self-confidence (78%), cooperation from husband/family at the time of start (63%), availability of loan (60%), favorable attitude of customers (40%) and adequate training (60%).

Sathiabama (2010), in her study highlighted the empowerment of rural women through entrepreneurship and the advantages of entrepreneurship among the rural women. She felt that the

economic empowerment of women led to development of family and community and the same is proved by a collective Micro Entrepreneurship in Tamilnadu.

IV. Scope of the Study

The present study examines the important role being played by the RUDSETI Unit at Vetapalem (now at Ongole) in Prakasam District of Andhra Pradesh in contributing to women empowerment through various EDPs and encouraging them thereby to establish their own small business enterprises by taking up self-employment with or without the financial assistance of banks and other financial institutions.

V. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study undertaken at RUDSETI, Vetapalem (now at Ongole) are -

- To examine different EDPs offered by the RUDSETI unit to the unemployed youth with special focus on women for empowering them in the process.
- To analyse the reasons behind success of these EDPs in promoting wage and self-employment among the women-trainees;
- To record the feedback from some of the alumni on the training received which contributed to their economic development;

VI. Methodology of the Study

The current study is based on the data gathered from the primary sources (interactions with the Institute and some of the alumni of the institute who established their business ventures at some important places in Prakasam District) and secondary sources such as going through the monthly and annual reports, brochures of Vetapalem Unit and various kinds of documents available in the internet. The study is made in line with the objectives specified above and on analyzing the data collected from the monthly and annual reports of the institute for the period 2009-10 to 2014-15. The analysis of the data and the conclusions drawn speak of the efforts of RUDSETI in empowering the women through their various kinds of EDPs and the unique handholding services for a period of two years during the post-training phase.

VII. Women Empowerment

Empowerment is the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. Empowerment of women means developing them as more aware individuals, who are politically active, economically productive and independent and are able to make intelligent discussion in matters that affect them. Women empowerment as a concept was defined as redistribution of social power and control of resources in favour of women. In its definition of women empowerment, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNDFW) includes factors such as (1) Acquiring knowledge and understanding of gender relations and the way in which these relations may be changed; and (2) Developing a sense of self-worth, a belief in one's ability to secure desired changes and the right to control one's life.

Empowered Women's Characteristics

Empowered women –

- define their attitude, values and behaviours in relation to their own real interest;
- respond as equals and co-operate to work towards the common good;

- not only survive the harshness of their own subjugation but also transcend it by using their talent;
- work and contribute towards the empowerment of all women; and
- define their values and formulate their beliefs themselves.

The process of empowerment has five dimensions, viz. *Cognitive, Psychological, Economic, Political and Physical*.

- i) *Cognitive dimension* refers to women having an understanding of the conditions and causes of their subordination at the micro and macro levels.
- ii) *Psychological dimension* includes the belief that women can act at personal and societal level to improve their individual realities and the society in which they live.
- iii) *Economic dimension* requires that women have access to, and control over, productive resources, thus ensuring some degree of financial autonomy.
- iv) *Political dimension* entails that women have the capability to analyse, organise and mobilize for social change; and
- v) *Physical dimension* tells about the ability to protect oneself against sexual violence to the empowerment process.

Women attain the required mental and physical strength to swim against the stream from the process of empowerment, which can be promoted by providing proper education, health and nutrition facilities. Providing information, knowledge, skills for self-employment etc., is the important parameter of women empowerment. Some of the important objectives of Women Empowerment are - to increase awareness in women for their development to use their talent optimally not only for themselves, but also for the society as a whole and to develop the skills for self-decision-making capabilities in women and to allow them to present their point of view effectively in society.

Women Empowerment in India

The Indian Constitution not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. Within the framework of a democratic polity, our laws, development policies, Plans and Programmes have aimed at women's advancement in different spheres. From the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-78) onwards there has been a marked shift in the approach to women's issues from welfare to development and then from Eighth Five Year Plan emphasis was shifted from development to empowerment. Declaring 2001 as the Year of Women's Empowerment (Swashakti), the Government of India (GoI) passed the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women which has the goal to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women.

The National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW) was launched by the GoI with the aim to strengthen overall processes that promote all-round development of women. It has the mandate to strengthen the inter-sector convergence; facilitate the process of coordinating all the women's welfare and socio-economic development programmes across ministries and departments. One of the key strategies of NMEW is - investment in skill and entrepreneurship development, microcredit, vocational training and SHG development for economic empowerment of women. This subtly conveys that mere imparting literacy would not be sufficient; the women need vocational training or skills also to be able to stand on their feet and be the earning members of the family. Women have been taking increasing interest in recent years in income generating activities, self-employment and entrepreneurship that also lead to property rights, political representation, social equality, personal

right, family development, market development, community development and at last the nation development. The various reasons for preference of self-employment to wage-employment are –

- ✓ *it provides opportunities for using one's own talent;*
- ✓ *it is possible without large resources;*
- ✓ *it enables to have independent work and economic gains;*
- ✓ *it makes a person to become a job job-creator;*
- ✓ *it gives sovereign status than a subservient role; and*
- ✓ *it provides an image of prestige and status and gives inner satisfaction*

Self-employment provides an opportunity to make the women economically empowered and they are in position to face any challenges in their lives.

VIII. About RUDSETI and its Contribution to Women Empowerment through EDPs

Rural Development and Self Employment Training Institute (RUDSETI), a unique initiative in mitigating the problem of unemployment, was taken in a small village Ujire near Dharmasthala in Karnataka way back in 1982 jointly by Sri Dharmasthala Manjunatheshwara Educational (SDME) Trust and two nationalized banks viz., Syndicate Bank and Canara Bank under the visionary leadership of Padmabhushan Dr. D. Veerendra Heggade, Dharmadhikari of Dharmasthala. The collective thinking had led to giving a shape and an institutional framework to the initiative taken-up in the form of RUDSETI in 1982, which was registered under Karnataka Societies Registration Act 1960. Encouraged by the success of Ujire experiment, RUDSETI has now established 27 units in 16 States.

RUDSETI Unit, Vetapalem: This unit in Prakasam District of Andhra Pradesh was established in 1988 in Mandal Praja Parishath Complex with the special efforts of the then District Collector. The District Administration considered some special privileges such as rent-free accommodation to RUDSETI in Vetapalem to speed up the process of establishing their Unit which continued till June 2014 by when the Unit was shifted to Ongole, the headquarters of Prakasam District.

Mission: To channelize youth power in wealth creation and empower youth to share economic progress equitably.

Objectives: (1) Identify, orient, motivate, train and handhold the rural youth to take up self-employment ventures; (2) To take up research and development activities in Entrepreneurship and Rural Development; and (3) Train village level workers to work in rural development.

Approach of RUDSETI: The broad thematic areas that fall under skill and EDPs of RUDSETIs are both farm and non-farm sector activities. The post training follow up for sustained motivation among the trainees happens to be the cutting edge of RUDSETI's approach. The effort to make them rise to peaks of their careers includes - two years follow-up through regular correspondence, individual contacts, unit visits, Village/ Taluk/ District/ Branch level meetings etc., and facilitating credit linkage with the banks for setting up of micro enterprises. The approach the RUDSETIs adopt in offering various self-employment or skill building training courses include important steps such as –

- (1) A meticulously designed selection process to identify and select only those people (youth) who have proactively learnt some basics of the skill which they want to make it as a life time business activity for their economic development;
- (2) A well-designed program schedule keeping in view the interest level and future growth opportunities for the candidate; and
- (3) Use of innovative training methodologies such as - experiential learning, group discussions and field level experience and participation methods to impart training;

- (4) Effective use of market survey and interface with successful entrepreneurs to familiarize trainee with field level situation; and
- (5) Systematic follow up and monitoring system during the post training phase in the form of escort services (handholding) to provide counseling, support and liaison.

Types of Entrepreneurship Development Programs (EDPs): RUDSETI offers around 70 types of Entrepreneurship Development Programs (EDPs) in various areas. All the programs are of short duration intervention ranging from one to six weeks. Mainly they are classified into four categories as shown below.

(I) For First Generation Entrepreneurs				
S. No.	Types-EDPs	Scope / Objective	Examples	EDPs offered at Vetapalem Unit for Women
1	Agri. EDPs	Focus: Both Agri and Allied Sectors	Comprehensive Agri & Allied Activities, Dairy Farming, Poultry, Bee Keeping, Horticulture, Plant Nursery etc.	Dairy Farming, Bee Keeping (done earlier); Mushroom Cultivation; Emu Farming Sheep Rearing
2	Product EDPs	Focus: Trained youth make a living by establishing small business enterprises. (Manufacturing)	Dress Designing (Tailoring) for Women/Men, Agarabathi making, Candle making, Pickle making, Soft Toys making, Food Processing & Bakery Products, Embroidery & Fabric Painting etc.	Dress Designing; Fruit preservation & pickle making; Leaf plate making; Bag making; Agarabathi making; Phenyl preparation; Multiproduct Manufacturing for Women; Zardosi & Maggam Work; Textile Fabric & Screen Printing; Bamboo Gift Article Making
3	Process EDPs	Focus: Involve a detailed learning process (business activities under 'Service sector')	Electric Motor rewinding & Pumpset maintenance, Beauty Parlor Management, Basic Photography & Videography, Multi Phone servicing, Domestic Electrical Appliances Repair, Two Wheeler Servicing, Computer DTP, Refrigeration & Air	Free Hand Painting; Beauty Parlour Management; Sari Rolling & Fabric Painting; Fabric Painting & Maggam Work; Zardosi Hand Embroidery

			conditioning, Computer Tally, Computer Basics etc.	
4	General EDPs	Focus: For those who are yet to decide the line of business activity to rely on for their livelihood.	Rural Entrepreneurship Development Program (REDP), EDP for Women, Prime Minister's Employment Generation Program (PMEGP-earlier PMRY-EDP) etc.	Both men and women
(II) For the Established Entrepreneurs				
1	Skill Up-gradation	To improve the skills and enhance capability of the established trainees		Offered to both men and women Example (For women): Offering embroidery / fabric painting training to those who settled under tailoring trade
2	Growth Programs	A training-cum-counseling program which helps the established trainees in achieving high goals in life and business		Offered to both men and women

Reasons for Success of EDPs in Promoting Wage and Self-Employment among the Women

Training Components: RUDSETI's technical training under a chosen skill is handled by an expert-practitioner in the respective field. The other important components of EDPs viz., motivational, managerial, financial planning (financial literacy) which account to 30% of the program-duration, are imparted by the in-house faculty (the deputed officer of the sponsor banks or the faculty member recruited by the RUDSETIs).

- **Skill Segment:** Detailed curricula for all the EDP-categories mentioned above are available at all RUDSETIs. Further, they introduce innovative programmes every year to focus on programmes having demand and enlarge their course-offerings.
- **Soft Skills (Behavioural) Segment:** Topics coming under Effective Communication skills, Self-management skills, Interpersonal skills, Team work etc., form part of this segment.
- **Business Management Segment:** Topics covered are- What is Self-employment, Difference between Self-employment and Wage-employment, Entrepreneurial competencies, Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) Analysis, Ways to get innovative business ideas, Customer Service, Selling and Marketing, Market Survey, Steps in setting up of an enterprise (flowchart), Project report preparation, '*Whom to contact for what*' during venture-launching, Management of Seven crises, Importance of Public Relations in Entrepreneurship etc.,

- **Financial Literacy Segment:** Why to save, budget, why financial planning, understanding important banking terminology, Key points to be remembered for getting bank facilities, What is interest? How moneylenders charge very high interest rates? How to be confident while communicating etc.

Alumni's Feedback on the Training Effectiveness

Ms. Sumitra, making a decent earning through a modern dress designing (Tailoring) Unit at Vetapalem, attributes her success to the timely support given by RUDSETI through its unique training methodology during the tailoring and embroidery (Skill Up-gradation program) training she received earlier.

Ms. MekalaSrilakshmi, who hails from a poor agriculture family, now runs a beauty parlour in Vetapalem and gets a decent income from it. She conveys her gratitude to RUDSETI's timely advice and support.

Similarly Ms. Chandrakala, Ms. Bhoolakshmi who run Beauty Parlours at Chirala and Ongole, Ms. Mumtaz, Ms. U Sridevi, who established their tailoring units, Ms. Venkateswaramma who has a mini dairy unit and Ms. A Sridevi who found interest in rearing '*Emu Birds*' convey their gratitude to RUDSETI's training system (a capsule containing skill, behavioural and managerial inputs), which they named it as a '*Unique Model*', which had enabled them to have good economic progress.

The success stories documented by the RUDSETI Unit and the settlement data available there speak of the services of the Unit in vivid terms.

Table No. 1: Trained between 2009-10 and 2014-15

Year	Trained	Men	Women
2009-10	492	155	337
2010-11	533	243	290
2011-12	494	252	242
2012-13	618	216	402
2013-14	468	182	286
2014-15	764	344	420



Source: Annual Reports, RUDSETI, Vetapalem

Table No. 1 and the graph above present the picture of total number of unemployed youth trained during the periods 2009-10 to 2014-15 at RUDSETI, Vetapalem and the split-up of the same under “Men and Women” categories. The table and the graphical depiction make it clear that the women outnumbered men in getting trained under various EDPs during the period under study.

Table No. 2: Settlement Picture of Trained Women (2009-10 to 2014-15)

Year	Settled (Total)	Settled Men	Women		
			Settled	Wage Employed	Self-employed
2009-10	362	160	202	13	189
2010-11	388	161	227	8	219
2011-12	400	160	240	8	232
2012-13	389	163	226	14	212
2013-14	315	113	202	41	161
2014-15	467	200	267	15	252



Source: Annual Reports, RUDSETI, Vetapalem

Table No. 2 and the graphical depiction given above speak of the settlement of women under wage and self-employment who took advantage of various EDPs offered at the RUDSETI Unit during the period under study. The table clearly establishes the fact that women outnumbered men under settlement also.

IX. Findings and Conclusions

The major findings of the study undertaken are –

- The enrolments and settlements picture at the Unit as explained in the above section establish the proactive nature of women in taking up self-employment ventures and helping their families in the process.
- Majority of the settled alumni (women), who belonged to agricultural families of low and medium income groups, were in the age group of 25 to 35 years with low to medium level of educational backgrounds;
- Majority of the women, who got enrolled at the Unit, took up - *garment making (tailoring), fabric painting, zardosi and maggam work, saree rolling, hand embroidery, beauty parlour, dairy farming etc.*
- Majority of the women who started their small business units soon after the EDP training at the Unit had some basic knowledge in the respective trades.
- Women settled through various self-employment business ventures have been able to get average income in the range of Rs. 8,000/- to Rs. 20,000/- per month.
- Some of the women were also able to generate moderate level of employment through their enterprises.
- The success profiles developed by the Unit and the interactions with some of the settled trainees confirmed that the motivational and managerial inputs taught during the RUDSETI EDPs along with skill inputs gave them the needed amount of motivation and encouragement to start and sustain the business activities.
- The settled women through their correspondence and interactions confirmed that the handholding support of the Unit for two years during the post-training phase remained as the highlight of the RUDSETI model.

Conclusions: Rich knowledge base and the skills, which act as the driving forces for the economic growth and social development of a country, are essential for translating a country's vision of inclusive growth into a reality. Creation of job opportunities and development of entrepreneurship in the rural areas is the priority of the country to ensure development of the rural economy. RUDSETIs/RSETIs have been making selfless services to the unemployed youth particularly to the women through their innovative EDPs thus trying their best to empower women through skill-building process. Looking at the importance of the role women play in the development of a nation and the current progress the country is witnessing under the said women empowerment process, one can sense that there is a long way to go in that direction. Everyone needs to understand the essence of what Swami Vivekananda said about women - *"There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on one wing."* It is therefore the responsibility of every citizen of the nation, Financial Institutions, the corporate sector, the NGOs and other stakeholders of the society to lend their supporting hand in developing gender-responsive strategies for training and entrepreneurship development that respond to rural youth especially women who are no less than men in many spheres of life and have all the credentials to become a desirable demographic dividend in the days to come when treated with respect, purity, dignity and equal rights.

X. Recommendations

Poverty and unemployment are the twin problems rural India has been facing for several decades. The percentage of unemployment among educated and qualified women is increasing on one hand and on

the other, the opportunities of self-employment for rural youth especially women have also increased significantly. Therefore, it is necessary to encourage this hitherto disregarded segment (educated un-employed women) through entrepreneurship which not only promotes self-employment among them but leads to their creating employment opportunities also to other rural people in their respective areas. Though creation of favourable atmosphere by the policy makers is essential for a healthy development of entrepreneurship, the women have to come forward proactively to help themselves and their families by observing and acting on the opportunities available around, which sets the tone for this momentum.

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