



### Re-thinking Skills

## (Why Local Knowledge are Not Skills)

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#### Abstract

With the help of skill-development, here I am trying to explore the need to investigate the attitude of the women's living in the village towards the importance of their life career and their self-development opportunities. The rural India is filled with highly skilled workers who are neither recognized nor empowered, but highly exploited. Men from villages are employed as skilled laborers in the city and nearby city. However, not many women are involved in self-development spheres. By skilled worker, here I am referring to a skilled manual worker who uses tools and machinery in a particular craft. Here, training women plays an important role in skill development. Today, it is difficult for the people in the informal sector to remain relevant as the job market demands certified skill workers for various sectors. Hence, those who do not have certified skills cannot get a Job or remain in any employment and will eventually get absorbed by the unorganized sector. Thus, by bringing the concept of training, in this paper I am trying to connect the existing knowledge of women from rural areas with skills.

**Keywords:** Communities, Development; skill-development; rural women; Tribal;

#### Introduction

This study is based on a tribal village from Bihar, one of the states of India. The purpose of this study is to be able to find out how women from rural India feel about the knowledge they have, which comes from a part of their daily routine. In Rural India, women and men have different unequal roles, responsibilities and resources. These unequal roles further develop and decide their capacity and capability to grow. Women are only seen or considered to be responsible for reproduction, household chores and well-being of the household members. The idea of investment in women is not considered to be good since, eventually women will not be going out to get employment. And, taking care of children, responsibility of domestic work, providing food and other household services are not considered to be productive activities. However, in agricultural activities, labor-hired from outside will get paid but the women from within the family engaged in agricultural activities will not get paid. Since, it is considered to be part of her responsibility of her being a part of the household. All these shows that there is a wide gap between women's unrecognized participation and their social, financial, economic power. The difference in roles and responsibilities also changes the experiences and needs. Men's agricultural work or income from migratory work may result in a cash income, whereas women producing food for family consumption isn't considered to be productive. The only difference here is that the non-cash work is not considered here. In the social sphere also, men's representation in the public eye is always considered to be important where women do not have any say in public representation.

It is not women's lack of interest, lack of training, education, credit which impacts their development, however, the structure of ideology that plays in favor of women's disadvantage. In cities, the monetary value of the household chores and taking care of domestic work is too



high. But in villages it is considered to be part of the responsibility of a specific gender and thus, treat the work as unimportant.

### **Empowerment of Women**

The women from rural areas are not a homogeneous group. They have different roles and responsibility in their agricultural lands, in employment, in community engagement activities and in household chores. Their needs and interest areas are different from each other as well. Similarly, the economic and social changes that rural areas go through do not affect all women in the same way: where it provides better opportunities to some, it also makes the life of few others more challenging (Malhotra, 22). Rural women have a strong desire to stay in village because of endogenous and exogenous factors such as, their family won't allow them to go to urban areas, their husband won't approve of them leaving the family, they themselves do not feel confident and empowered enough, unaware of the language of the urban areas, unaware of any other work than what they have done in the village etc.

Using knowledge for commercial potential in developing countries can bring economic dimension into the discussion of traditional knowledge. Since, women suffer both economically and socially and remain invisible from most of such areas in rural communities. The reason for economic invisibility was such that they are not relevant to the wage and market. The reason for social invisibility has come from institutionally and has given the status of second class citizens. Hence, self-employment results in low-wage pay.

The quantity and quality of the offered social services do not correspond to the demands of the majority of the villagers (Zulumskytė, 1). Also, it has been noticed that women get involved in the economic activities in rural areas such as in agriculture, unorganized sector as well as informal sector and yet they fail to get the recognition from the family and the society. The domestic life of the women from rural areas operates in such a way that contributes to the maintenance of the local economy. The women from the village are subconsciously focused to develop agriculture. They form strategies to grow food in the backyard of their houses as well. Rural women use their knowledge for family healthcare as well. When in need they can become pasture successfully. They use their local knowledge to increase productivity in agriculture as well. Due to cultural beliefs, women in the rural areas and agricultural families do not use oxen to plough land for farming but take care of all the agricultural activities.

### **Methodology**

In this research work, while I was immersing in the village, I proceeded unsystematically, paying attention to all interesting events. The methods which have been used in this research work are based on mixed methods. Methods of observations, discussions and meetings such as self-help group meetings, personal interviews or group interviews, case-studies, informal conversations.

Since, I spent a significant time of my research in the village thus, the methods for my research includes: home visits, informal conversations, helping them in their daily chores, visiting them to their fields, going out with them to collect firewood, leaves etc.

In the field it was not a piece of cake. Contrary to appearances, the transition from gaining access to the field to actual observation is not a linear and uninterrupted process. From the cognitive point of view, the shift is intermittent, like the change from being a stranger to being



familiar to a community. All the rituals, discourses and spaces are the elementary referents of observational practice. This research work is a result of action research methodology, which is conducted by a collaborative partnership of participants and researchers. I, being a researcher, participants from the community, co-researchers are from the community as well. "Action research is an orientation to inquiry rather than a methodology. It has different purposes, it is based in different relationships, and it has different ways of conceiving knowledge and its relation to practice". (Reason, 2003, p 106).

It involves development of knowledge and understanding of a different kind. The focus on change and development in a natural social situation, in this case in the village and the involvement of participants–researchers who are 'insiders' to that situation gives access to kinds of knowledge and understanding that are not accessible to traditional researchers coming from outside. This kind of research starts from a vision to transform people which further influences people to transform socially. In this process, the researcher also gets transformed – emotionally, psychologically and as a researcher as well. This involves a high level of sensitivity and reflexivity and also a high level of improvising skills in the whole research process. Since, this research combines reflection on practice, it also gives a certain degree of independence of thoughts to flow. The development of self-understanding is important in action research. "Action research can be seen as a methodology that uniquely enables and facilitates this process of knowledge transformation as the basis for powerful social action" (Somekh, 28).

The process of action research can provide a better picture by unfolding the outcomes of action which further help to improvise new actions. Hence, action research is generally, researching with learning through reflection and doing it. The knowledge which women from villages have are not considered to be as important as other skills such as computer skills, technical skills etc. And, since rural women are pivotal to development for the development programmes thus, creating such programmes specifically for women where they feel empowered enough, will actually work in favor of development.

### Discussion

The discussion included women from the village and have voiced their opinions about wages, employability and education, different development programmes from various NGOs working at the block or panchayat level.

1. **Market: Wages and Labour:** The market does not provide equal wages to men and women. Women get paid less than what men receive. In the local market, the hegemony by men over wages is evident (what I mean to say here is that it is evident in the local market, where women sell all their forest produce and they get paid less than what the men in the market get paid).
2. **Challenges of rural development programmes:** Few women are not comfortable in full participation of rural development programmes, here, there is a need to look for the -constraints on full participation of women in socio-economic level, at public level, local level. And thus, try to develop a few specific programmes in their favor such as a few training courses – like stitching, tailoring, beauty parlors etc.



3. **Educating them in what will help them:** Providing them a homogeneous solution such as enrolling them in school is not a solution which women can afford. In their opinion, rural structures do not allow them to attend school on a regular basis. Since, the idea of getting education sounds fine and wise, but what are they going to do after they get educated, as they won't be allowed to leave the village.
4. **Provide training:** Most of the development organizations focus on education, sanitation, women empowerment but how actually to make them feel empowered enough is what they miss to do. By training the skills what they already have such as making plates from leaves, since, they are already aware of how to pick leaves from the forest and what leaves to be picked is the skill/knowledge/know-how. They make a living for themselves and help the environment as well making sure that the meaning of using those leaves-plate to be sustain in their culture.

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