

**Gender Responsive Skill Development Policies: Promoting Women's Empowerment
Under Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)**

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Abstract

Gender equality and women's empowerment are integral to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly under Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5). However, persistent gender disparities in education, employment, and skills acquisition hinder the realization of this goal. This research paper critically examines gender-responsive skill development policies (GRSDPs) as a catalyst for empowering women, fostering inclusive economic growth, and promoting social equity. It aims to explore the intersection between policy frameworks, implementation strategies, and their real-world impact on women's livelihoods and autonomy, especially in developing countries.

The research is grounded in a multidisciplinary approach, drawing from policy analysis, gender studies, and economics. It first outlines the global and national policy landscape, highlighting how different nations—particularly India—have integrated gender-sensitive strategies within their skill development initiatives, such as Skill India Mission, Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), and National Policy for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship. Through this lens, the paper evaluates the degree to which these programs align with international gender equality targets.

A core part of the study analyzes barriers faced by women in accessing skill development—ranging from socio-cultural norms, digital illiteracy, lack of mobility and safety, to the

absence of financial and familial support. The paper also discusses how these obstacles vary across rural-urban divides, social classes, and educational levels. In response, gender-responsive policies must go beyond token inclusion and aim for structural transformation by ensuring equal access, tailored curriculum, inclusive infrastructure, mentorship programs, and gender-disaggregated data monitoring.

To support the analysis, empirical data from national surveys, international development reports (like UN Women, ILO, and World Bank), and primary case studies from successful regional models (e.g., SEWA in India, UNDP-SME initiatives in Africa) are presented. These examples showcase the potential of targeted skill development to uplift women by enhancing their participation in formal and informal economies, entrepreneurship, and digital spaces.

The paper further examines the impact of GRSDPs on economic empowerment using metrics such as labor force participation rates, income generation, enterprise ownership, and decision-making autonomy. It argues that skill-building, when coupled with social protection and gender equality frameworks, enables women to transition from subsistence livelihoods to resilient, growth-oriented careers.

Moreover, the role of public-private partnerships, digital platforms, and community-based organizations is evaluated as crucial enablers of scalable and sustainable impact. Special emphasis is placed on digital skilling and green economy jobs, which are emerging sectors where proactive gender-responsiveness can break traditional occupational segregation.

The study concludes with a set of policy recommendations, advocating for a comprehensive, intersectional, and transformative approach to skill development. It calls for integrating gender indicators into policy planning, ensuring budgetary commitments for women-specific programs, promoting leadership among women trainers, and embedding legal safeguards for workplace equality.

In essence, gender-responsive skill development policies serve as a cornerstone for achieving SDG 5 and the broader development agenda. When effectively implemented, they not only empower individual women but also lead to intergenerational benefits, resilient communities, and inclusive national progress.

Key Words: Gender-responsive policies, Skill development, Women's empowerment, Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 5), Economic inclusion, Vocational training.

Introduction

The empowerment of women through skill development is a critical component of inclusive and sustainable economic growth. As the global community works toward achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5)—which focuses on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls—stands out as both a priority and a challenge. In many parts of the world, women continue to face systemic obstacles in accessing education, skill-building opportunities, and gainful employment. These barriers not only limit their personal growth but also hinder national development by excluding a significant portion of the population from economic participation.

Gender-responsive skill development policies (GRSDPs) play a transformative role in breaking down these barriers. These policies recognize the unique needs, constraints, and socio-cultural contexts of women and are designed to create inclusive ecosystems where women can learn, grow, and thrive. Such policies focus not just on enrolling women in programs but on designing training that is accessible, relevant, and empowering for them.

Despite several government and international initiatives aimed at skill development, the gender gap remains significant. Women are often underrepresented in technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programs, especially in non-traditional sectors such as science, technology, and construction. The reasons are multi-layered—ranging from societal norms and early marriage to lack of childcare facilities, transport, and female mentors. Gender-blind policies fail to account for these realities, resulting in limited success in enhancing women's participation and employability.

This research paper seeks to investigate how gender-responsive skill development strategies can promote women's empowerment in practical terms. It analyzes existing policy frameworks, evaluates their implementation effectiveness, and highlights best practices from national and global contexts. By doing so, it offers insights into how nations, especially developing economies like India, can strengthen their policy responses to achieve not just SDG 5, but also interconnected goals like poverty reduction, decent work, and economic growth.

Literature Review

Gender-responsive skill development has emerged as a critical area of focus in the global development agenda, especially under Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5), which aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. The literature extensively

documents the role of education and vocational training in enabling women to gain economic independence and social mobility. According to the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report (2022), targeted skill development programs not only improve employment outcomes for women but also contribute to broader social changes, including increased participation in community decision-making and reduced gender-based violence.

Studies by UN Women (2020) and the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2021) emphasize the importance of tailoring skill development programs to the specific needs of women, taking into account constraints such as time poverty, care responsibilities, mobility issues, and societal norms. These studies advocate for gender-sensitive curricula, flexible training schedules, provision of childcare support, and safe learning environments as essential features of effective skill development initiatives.

A growing body of literature also critiques the gender-blind nature of many national skill development programs, especially in developing countries. Kabeer (2016) argues that simply increasing female participation in training is insufficient if the training is limited to low-paying, traditionally “feminine” sectors such as handicrafts, tailoring, or beauty services. She emphasizes the need for gender-transformative approaches that actively promote women’s participation in non-traditional, high-growth sectors such as information technology, construction, and green jobs.

In the Indian context, government schemes like the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) and Skill India Mission have made efforts to incorporate gender components. However, studies by NITI Aayog (2021) and ILO-India (2020) reveal persistent challenges such as gender stereotyping in course offerings, lack of gender-disaggregated data, and poor retention of female trainees. These limitations point to the need for institutional reforms and robust monitoring frameworks to ensure genuine inclusivity and long-term impact.

The role of technology-enabled learning has also been widely discussed in the literature. Digital platforms have the potential to bridge access gaps, especially for women in remote or conservative areas. World Bank (2022) findings suggest that mobile-based and online skilling modules, when designed with a gender lens, can significantly enhance outreach and effectiveness. However, the digital divide remains a barrier, with many women lacking access to smartphones, internet connectivity, or digital literacy skills.

Community-based models and public-private partnerships (PPP) have shown promise in creating sustainable and scalable gender-responsive skill development ecosystems.

Organizations such as SEWA (Self-Employed Women's Association) in India and UNDP-supported SME initiatives in Africa have demonstrated success by integrating skill development with access to finance, entrepreneurship training, and market linkages. These examples underscore the importance of a holistic, livelihood-centered approach to skill development.

Finally, the literature emphasizes the importance of intersectionality in policy design. Gender does not operate in isolation; factors such as caste, class, age, and geography compound disadvantages for marginalized women. Crenshaw (1989) and subsequent feminist scholars highlight the need for skill development policies that are inclusive not just of women as a general category, but especially of those who are doubly or triply marginalized.

In conclusion, the existing literature provides strong evidence that gender-responsive skill development policies are essential for empowering women and achieving SDG 5. However, for these policies to be truly transformative, they must address structural inequalities, challenge gender norms, and be rooted in the lived experiences of women from diverse backgrounds. Future research should focus on measuring long-term impacts, understanding regional variations, and exploring innovative delivery models that can make skill development more inclusive, equitable, and empowering.

Research Gap

While numerous studies have acknowledged the significance of gender-responsive skill development policies in achieving women's empowerment under SDG 5, there remains a notable gap in assessing the long-term impact of such policies on women's economic mobility and decision-making power. Much of the existing literature focuses on enrollment rates and program participation, but lacks in-depth analysis of post-training employment quality, sustainability, and income parity. Furthermore, there is limited exploration of how intersectional factors—such as caste, rural-urban divide, and disability—affect access to and benefits from skill development programs. The role of technology and digital inclusion, especially in low-resource settings, is under-researched in the context of women's skilling. Moreover, existing policy evaluations often ignore the perspective of the beneficiaries themselves, relying instead on top-down data. This research aims to fill these gaps by offering a more nuanced and holistic understanding of how gender-responsive skill development policies can be made more inclusive, effective, and transformative.

Objectives of the Study

- To examine the role of gender-responsive skill development policies in promoting women's economic empowerment under Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5).
- To analyze the effectiveness and inclusivity of existing national and international skill development programs targeted at women.
- To identify the barriers and challenges faced by women in accessing and benefiting from skill development initiatives, particularly in developing countries.
- To suggest policy recommendations for designing and implementing more inclusive, equitable, and impactful gender-responsive skill development strategies.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods research approach combining both qualitative and quantitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of gender-responsive skill development policies and their impact on women's empowerment under Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5).

Sources of Data:

The research utilizes both primary and secondary data sources.

Primary data is collected through structured questionnaires distributed to women beneficiaries of skill development programs, policymakers, trainers, and program managers across selected regions. The questionnaire includes both open-ended and close-ended questions to capture diverse perspectives and real-life experiences.

Secondary data is obtained from government policy documents, national and international reports (UN Women, ILO, World Bank, UNESCO), journal articles, research papers, and organizational case studies (e.g., SEWA, Skill India Mission). Statistical data from the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) and NITI Aayog is also incorporated for factual grounding.

Sampling Method and Sample Size:

Purposive sampling is used to select regions and programs where gender-responsive components are clearly implemented. A sample of 100 respondents, including 70 women participants and 30 stakeholders (officials, trainers, NGO workers), is selected to ensure varied insights.

Data Analysis Tools:

- The collected data is analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques.
- For quantitative data, tools such as SPSS and Microsoft Excel are used to perform frequency distribution, percentage analysis, mean scores, and cross-tabulations.
- Qualitative data from interviews and open-ended responses are analyzed using thematic analysis, allowing the identification of recurring patterns, barriers, success factors, and gender-specific challenges.
- Gender-disaggregated analysis is used to examine differences in access, participation, and impact of skill development initiatives.

Period of Research:

The research is conducted over a span of four months, from January 2025 to April 2025. The first month is dedicated to literature review and tool development, the second and third months focus on data collection from both primary and secondary sources, and the final month is allocated for data analysis, interpretation, and preparation of the final report.

This structured methodology enables a thorough exploration of how gender-responsive policies function in practice and to what extent they contribute to the empowerment of women, thus aligning with the broader goals of SDG 5 and inclusive development.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

This section provides a comprehensive analysis and interpretation of data related to gender-responsive skill development policies and their impact on promoting women's economic empowerment under Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5). The analysis is based on secondary data, government reports, and survey findings where applicable.

1. Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the demographic profile of women participating in skill development programs. Most participants were in the age group of 20-35 years, primarily from urban and semi-urban regions. The education levels varied, with the majority having completed secondary education. A significant portion of the participants were either unemployed or engaged in informal sector jobs.

2. Participation in Skill Development Programs

Data shows an increasing trend in female enrollment in government-sponsored skill development programs, such as PMKVY (Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana) and DDU-GKY (Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana). However, regional disparities exist, with lower participation in rural and tribal areas due to socio-cultural constraints.

3. Employment Outcomes Post Training

Employment rates post training indicated that around 60% of the trained women secured employment or started micro-enterprises. Those trained in high-demand sectors like IT, healthcare, and retail reported higher employment rates. However, wage disparity and job retention remain challenges.

4. Barriers and Challenges

Several barriers hinder the effective implementation of gender-responsive policies, including:

- Lack of gender-sensitive curriculum and trainers
- Limited access to childcare and transport facilities
- Societal attitudes towards women's employment
- Funding and resource constraints

5. Policy Impact and Recommendations

The policies have had a moderate impact on women's economic empowerment. There is a need for more inclusive program design, gender mainstreaming in all levels of implementation, and improved monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Partnerships with private sectors and NGOs can enhance outreach and effectiveness.

6. Interpretation of Findings

The data indicates that while there has been progress in promoting women's empowerment through skill development, the impact varies significantly based on geography, education, and social norms. Programs tailored to local needs and supported by strong policy frameworks are essential to sustain and scale positive outcomes under SDG 5.

Conclusion: Findings, Recommendations, and Future Scope

The study on Gender-Responsive Skill Development Policies: Promoting Women's Empowerment Under Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) highlights several critical

insights. It finds that while government and institutional efforts have expanded access to skill development programs for women, significant gaps remain in inclusivity, implementation, and outcomes. Women in urban areas, with basic educational qualifications, and those trained in high-demand sectors such as IT and healthcare benefit the most. However, rural women continue to face systemic challenges such as lack of mobility, social stigma, and limited access to training centers.

Key Findings:

- Participation of women in skill development programs has increased, but is uneven across regions.
- Post-training employment opportunities are improving, yet issues like wage disparity and job security persist.
- Gender biases in training content, lack of mentorship, and absence of enabling environments (like childcare facilities) hinder long-term success.

Recommendations:

- Integrate gender-sensitive curricula and trainers across all skill development initiatives.
- Strengthen support systems such as transport, childcare, and safety provisions to enable greater participation.
- Forge stronger public-private partnerships to enhance placement opportunities and entrepreneurship support.
- Implement continuous monitoring and evaluation frameworks with gender-disaggregated data to assess real-time impact.
- Promote awareness campaigns to shift societal perceptions around women's employment and entrepreneurship.

Future Scope:

Future research should explore longitudinal studies on the socio-economic mobility of women post-training and evaluate the long-term sustainability of the jobs created. Comparative studies across states or countries can offer global insights and best

practices. Moreover, integrating emerging digital skills and green economy sectors into training programs can prepare women for the future of work under SDG 5.

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