

## **Role of Vocational Training in Women Empowerment in Hunza, Gilgit Baltistan**

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### **Abstract**

Women empowerment is a Global phenomenon. Empowerment of women is not only vital but also crucial for the overall development of society and the nation as a whole. This study was conducted in Hunza Valley. The study aimed to identify income-generating opportunities pursued by women after completing vocational training. Additionally, it aimed to discover the entrepreneurial aspirations of women who have completed vocational training. The study employs a qualitative technique and a purpose sampling technique was used to conduct interviews with 16 women who have completed their vocational training and are working as master trainers and those who are running their Small businesses. The data was analyzed through thematic analysis. The study revealed that, after vocational training women are engaged in diverse income-generating activities like collaborating with institutions, securing orders, working within the organizations, showcasing their products, and expanding customers. The entrepreneurial aspirations of women are to start a business, expand initiatives, and also working on sustainable solutions. The study underscores the transformative potential of vocational training in empowering women, enhancing skills, and fostering enterprise development in Hunza. This research provides valuable insights for policymakers and experts aiming to promote women's empowerment and socio-economic development through vocational training initiatives.

**Keywords:** women Empowerment, vocational Training, Income Generation, Enterprise Development

## INTRODUCTION

Empowerment as a process cannot be given to women as a gift, but women can only gain it over time as individuals or groups (Choudhry, Abdul Mutalib, and Ismail 2019). The process by which people, communities, and organizations take charge of the difficulties and problems they encounter is also known as empowerment (Mackie, 2010). Women's empowerment has been a very important issue in the contemporary world (Bushra and Wajiha 2015). Empowering women is one of the most vital concerns of the Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations (Varghese 2011). The third Millennium Development Goal (MDG3) focuses on advancing gender equality and women's empowerment (Khan 2015). Empowerment of women has appeared as an important issue in recent times (Ahamad, Hemlata, and Narayana 2015). Empowerment of women is essential to transform a developing country into a developed country (Aamir 2004). In the previous study, it was stated that Employment plays a vital role in empowering women. women who are involved in any income-earning activities or are contributing to the family income are more empowered than women who are not engaged in any income-earning activities (Hossain et al. 2020). Empowerment programs have motivated women to create businesses in their communities. increasing investment in business prospects has resulted in increasing women's independent income and confidence (Christopher 2021). Rural women can work wonders through their effective and competent participation in business activity. Rural women possess basic indigenous knowledge, skills, aptitude, and resources to create and operate enterprises (Sharma, Dua, and Hatwal 2012). On the other hand Access to funding is a vital aspect in enabling women's entrepreneurial development, especially in terms of building and developing businesses (Purrini 2011). Rural women can work wonderfully through their effective and competent participation in business activity. Rural women possess basic indigenous knowledge, skills, aptitude, and resources to create and operate enterprises (Aysha et al. 2018).

A skilled and self-assured woman has the potential to contribute significantly to building a strong and vibrant society (Parveen, 2023). Education offers the door to a life of independence, but skill development makes freedom meaningful by allowing one to achieve success (Shetty and Hans 2019). skills contribution is prominent, in the previous study it is stated that The major contribution of women's empowerment is the ability to boost women's productive talents (Shetty and Hans 2019). Skill is the link between a job and the labor force. Skill development is crucial in promoting women's employability and income-generating options, as well as enhancing sustainable rural development and livelihoods. "A woman's talent is like an unused reservoir in the world," states Hillary Clinton. This suggests that although a woman has many talents, her qualities are not effectively utilized or used for gender discrimination (Parveen 2023).

Vocational training programs have the objective of providing skills and confidence to women from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, enabling them to attain economic and social independence (Ahamad, Sinha, & Shastri, 2016). These programs are particularly beneficial for marginalized populations, as they offer opportunities to increase income and improve labor market prospects (Psacharopoulos, 1997). Additionally, Vocational training programs enhance employment prospects by imparting specialized knowledge, job-specific skills, and fostering professional networks. This contributes to a positive impact on job placement opportunities (Doerr, 2022). Vocational training significantly contributes to women's economic empowerment by enhancing their employability and income-generating capacities. Women with vocational training are better positioned to secure jobs or start their businesses, which in turn increases their societal status (Johnson 2015). Economic Opportunity and Economic Participation are important factors influencing women's empowerment in Pakistan (Bushra and Wajiha 2013). The role of women in income-generating activities is vital to the economic development of their households (Alemu, Woltamo, and Abuto). The contribution of women to the development of the economy has received great attention in the past years. Therefore, to motivate women to engage in entrepreneurship, it is necessary to understand the growth impediments that impact their entrepreneurial intentions to achieve sustainable development goals (Bilal et al. 2023).

Traditionally, the role of women in Hunza was primarily limited to household responsibilities, constrained by societal traditions, cultural norms, and norms. Women had limited options for suitable jobs, and in some communities, their education was restricted to basic literacy skills such as reading and writing. These factors contributed to a conservative society with high poverty rates. However, in recent years, Gilgit-Baltistan, including the region of Hunza, has made significant progress in education. It is now recognized as one of the most literate regions in Pakistan. Additionally, numerous women's organizations and institutions are actively working to empower marginalized women socially and economically in the region. Hunza, specifically, is considered to have a relatively higher level of women's empowerment compared to other parts of the Gilgit region. These institutions play a pivotal role in the overall development of the society (Ahmed & Khatoon, 2018).

In Hunza Valley different NGOs are working for the betterment of the community, they are providing vocational training to women to empower them. The researcher conducted research in Hunza Valley to identify the role of vocational training in women's empowerment.

The research questions of the study are

1. What income-generating opportunities are women pursuing after completing vocational training?
2. What are the entrepreneurial aspirations of women who have completed vocational training?

The rationale for this study is rooted in the crucial need to support women's empowerment through effective strategies. Vocational training programs have become a key way to provide women with valuable skills, knowledge, and economic independence. Despite this, there is not enough comprehensive understanding of the specific income-generating opportunities women pursue after training and the impact these programs have on women's business development, particularly in the context of Hunza. Recent progress in women's empowerment emphasizes the importance of vocational training in promoting economic independence and entrepreneurship among women. Research shows that women who have access to vocational training are more likely to participate in various income-generating activities, improving their economic status and making important contributions to their communities.

This study aims to fill the knowledge gaps by identifying the income-generating activities women engage in after vocational training and exploring how these programs contribute to the development of women's enterprises. By focusing on Hunza, this research will provide localized insights that can be applied to similar settings, expanding our understanding of income generation opportunities and the role of vocational training in women's enterprise development. The ultimate goal is to provide valuable insights for policymakers, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other stakeholders, enabling them to design and implement more targeted and effective initiatives for empowering women through vocational training. This study will inform community-based interventions and support the efforts of local NGOs and development agencies by understanding the dynamics of income generation and enterprise development among women who have undergone vocational training.

### **Research Methodology**

The study was conducted in Hunza Valley, and a qualitative research design was used in this study. The population of the study comprises 77 women working in Karakorum Area Development Organization (KADO) Handicrafts companies and CIQAM. Through purposive sampling technique, interviews were conducted with 16 women who are master trainers or those running their small businesses after taking vocational training. The interview was conducted with participants in their native language (Wakhi and Brushaski language), also Urdu language was used during the interview. Throughout this process, informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they were fully aware of the research purpose and the use of their data. Interviews were recorded with participants' consent to facilitate accurate transcription and analysis. The researcher collected data through interviews. Researchers generated themes and codes for qualitative study, then thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. Findings of the study are presented, and recommendations are outlined.

## FINDINGS

### Opportunities for Income Generation

#### I. Collaboration

Most participants stated that After vocational training there were a lot of opportunities for income generation. Some participants shared that Collaboration with other businesses or organizations allowed them to reach new markets and expand their income-generating opportunities, the study aligns with a previous study which stated that economic opportunity available to women increases their power (Bushra and Wajiha 2015). So it means availing such opportunities and collaborating with organizations for income generation make a woman powerful and independent. Partnering with established retailers or distributors provided access to larger customer networks.

Another participant stated that,

*As I improved my skills in gems cutting and polishing, I began to observe a significant increase in income-generating opportunities. Shopkeepers approached me to collaborate and sell my products in their stores, recognizing the quality and expertise of my work*

#### II. Financial Support from Organizations

Most of the participants mentioned that the organization provides them opportunities to work within the organization and they mentioned that they are shareholders in organizations. Participants received financial support or salaries from organizations that recognized the value of their skills and expertise. This support helped sustain their income and provided stability as they pursued their entrepreneurial endeavors. According to (Kahu and Morgan 2007) paid work is essential to individual well-being. In the previous study, (Chauhan 2023) It was observed that women who were enrolled in vocational training, such as garment stitching, agreed that their status improved after the training.

One of the participants said,

*As a shareholder in the organization, I have been able to capitalize on the demand for various woodworking products, including chairs, musical instruments, and other custom pieces. This has provided me with a steady source of income and improved financial stability for my family.*

#### III. Securing Orders

Vocational training provided participants with opportunities to secure orders or contracts for their products or services. Most of the participants stated that The quality of their work and the skills they acquired were recognized by potential clients, leading to income-generating opportunities. Showcasing Products Participants had opportunities to showcase their products or services to potential customers, allowing them to attract new clients and expand their customer base. These events provided exposure and recognition for their work.

A participant stated that,

*Upon completing my vocational training, I witnessed numerous opportunities for income generation. My newfound skills in carpentry, including making doors, windows, and chairs, allowed me to receive orders from people in need of such services*

#### **IV. Expanding Customer Base**

Some of the Participants shared that after vocational training they are selling their products in different ways. Participants visited different cities and even countries to expand their business. Positive feedback and word-of-mouth recommendations helped participants expand their customer base and attract new clients. Satisfying customer demands and delivering high-quality products or services were key factors in growing their businesses, this helped participants to generate income. According to a previous study, The income generated by individuals in income-generating community projects provided the opportunity to explore entrepreneurial activities (Niesing, Van Der Merwe, and Potgieter 2016).

A participant said,

*In 2015 when I had the privilege of visiting Paris for 15 days. This experience not only broadened my horizons but also presented profitable prospects for business endeavors. Additionally, local establishments such as Serena Hotel in Hunza entrusted us with significant projects worth millions of rupees for constructing wooden components.*

#### **V. Showcasing Products**

Participants shared that after undergoing vocational training, they develop the skills to make different products and sell them. some of the participants stated that they made products and showcased the products through stalls, hotels, and shops. Participants mentioned that this helped them with their income generation.

Another participant mentioned that

*I discovered numerous income-generating opportunities. One such opportunity was the ability to create and sell small carpets. Additionally, the arrival of foreign visitors presented another avenue for generating income through showcasing and selling my craft.*

### **Entrepreneurial Aspirations of Women**

#### **I. Starting Own Business**

Most of the participants planned to establish workshops or boutiques where they could showcase their products and services. These spaces would serve as hubs for creativity, innovation, and collaboration, allowing them to engage with customers directly and create unique experiences. This shows that the participants after vocational training have the determination to work independently by using their skills. Recently the government of Pakistan aggressively encourages women to participate in all aspects of life. Female entrepreneurship is encouraged by programs such as the Prime Minister



Youth Loan scheme, which has a 50% reservation for women. In addition, a lot of women gain from self-employment and internship programs, which offer excellent chances for skill development and financial empowerment (Abbas and Muneer 2019).

A participant said,

*I am very interested in starting my own business. Specifically, I aspire to establish a carpet center. I believe that my vocational training has equipped me with the necessary skills and knowledge to pursue this entrepreneurial endeavor successfully. I am excited about the prospect of contributing to my community while also fulfilling my entrepreneurial ambitions*

## **II. Creating Employment Opportunities**

Most of the Participants aimed to create employment opportunities for themselves and others by starting their businesses. Participants shared that by hiring local talent and providing training and mentorship, they hoped to empower individuals within their communities and contribute to the economic growth and development of the community. They believed that vocational training would help them create employment opportunities for other women and also transfer their knowledge and skills to others.

One of the participants mentioned that,

*My vision is to establish a carpentry workshop where I can not only utilize my skills but also empower other girls to pursue careers in this field. By creating a supportive and inclusive environment, I aim to break gender stereotypes and provide opportunities for women to excel in carpentry*

## **III. Expanding Initiatives**

Most of the participants expressed a desire to expand existing initiatives or projects related to vocational training. They saw potential for growth and impact in scaling up these initiatives, whether through partnerships, funding opportunities, or community engagement. Participants shared that the organization has not only provided vocational training but also a platform for business, they stated that expanding the existing initiative will help them to fulfill their dreams.

*I am enthusiastic to establish my own business and make this Carpet Center an international brand. I envision showcasing my work on a larger scale and expanding my business globally.*

## **IV. Sustainability solution**

Most of the Participants emphasized the importance of sustainability solutions for community development. They sought to create businesses or initiatives that would not only benefit themselves but benefit the whole community. participants shared that plastic bags are harming the environment, and we should start an initiative that will help to protect the environment.

A participant shared that,

*Currently, I am making environmentally friendly bags. with a clear vision for the future, I am determined to start my own business focused on manufacturing environmentally friendly bags using ultrasonic machines.*

### Discussions

The study aims to explore the opportunities women are availing of after taking vocational training and also to identify the entrepreneurial aspirations of women who have completed vocational training. The findings revealed that vocational training equips women with the skills and confidence to avail entrepreneurial opportunities, leading to the establishment of various income-generating ventures such as handicrafts, carpentry, garment making, and gem cutting. These schemes provide women with economic independence and contribute to community development and economic growth in the region. For income generation women are availing opportunities like showcasing their products through stalls, and shops to different local and foreign customers, collaborating with organizations, and also they are working within the vocational canter as master trainers, and securing orders from customers are an opportunities women are availing after vocational training to empower themselves, this results aligns with previous study (Sharmin et al. 2016) which stated that Income generating experiences is significant for empowerment which means a person having higher income generating experiences will have higher empowerment and vice versa, another study stated that The income of women is crucial for the basic survival of low-income families in many Third World cities (Mahmud 2003). skills play an important role in income generation. according to (Diwakar and Ahamad 2015) Skill development is used as an agent of change in promoting women's employment. These opportunities encourage women to start their businesses by using their skills and establishing carpentry workshops, boutiques, and carpet centers. Also, participants stated that they are planning to create employment opportunities, expand initiatives, fostering community development and sustainable solutions in the Hunza region. Previous studies mentioned that Vocational training improves productivity and enhances the efficiency of labor for better participation in economic development (Khilji, Kakar, and Subhan 2012).

According to (Hilal 2012), Vocational programs have played a crucial role in magnifying the opportunities for marginalized youth and women to access the labor market and participate in the workforce. In the previous study (Sharma, Dua, and Hatwal 2012) Women entrepreneur networks are major sources of knowledge about women's entrepreneurship and they are increasingly recognized as a valuable tool for its development and promotion. This will motivate other rural women to engage in micro-entrepreneurship with the right assistance and they can strengthen their capacities besides adding to the family income and national productivity. To



empower individuals it is essential to incorporate training that will not only benefit the individual but the whole country, According to (Purrini 2011) With the development of policies, governments Should promote and strengthen small enterprises, new businesses and entrepreneurship opportunities, and, where possible, facilitate the transition with the creation of a favorable environment for economic development. According to a previous study by (Basu and Basu 2003), Women entrepreneurs must be aware of the varying costs associated with finished goods and raw materials in various marketplaces, including wholesale and retail. It is knowledge in business. Women must create marketing connections to market their goods and purchase raw supplies to keep the business running smoothly. Members certainly require immediate assistance with company management and other competencies. An economic development program's main objective should be to provide chances for self-employment (Basu and Basu 2003).

### CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the project initiated by KADO and CIQAM has played an important role in women's empowerment by providing vocational training to marginalized women. A qualitative study revealed that vocational training plays a significant role in women's lives. Women who participated in vocational training reported positive outcomes, including increased skills development, income generation opportunities, and enterprise development. Overall, the findings underscore the importance of vocational training as a tool for women's empowerment in rural mountainous regions like Hunza. This demonstrates that providing skills and opportunities to women who may not have strong educational backgrounds can be beneficial not only for individual households but for the entire society.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- This study is limited to women's economic empowerment future researchers can also find out other aspects of women's empowerment.
- The study is limited to KADO and CIQAM organizations in Hunza, in the future other organizations should be included.

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