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**NON-AGRICULTURAL
EMPLOYMENT FOR
YOUNG WOMEN IN INDIA
STATUS, OPPORTUNITIES
AND WAYS FORWARD**

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D Rajasekhar*

Abstract

The issue of whether young women can undertake non-agricultural activities has been analysed in the paper with the help of data obtained from young women and key stakeholders in Krishna district in Andhra Pradesh through survey, participatory rural appraisal and discussions. Nearly three-fourths of the households, characterized by larger dependency ratio and unemployment, stated that their young women were in need of alternative economic activity. A larger proportion of young women preferred to undertake activities relating to manufacturing and services, not entirely because of growth and demand, but due to non-economic factors. The paper has argued that socio-economic factors at the household and village levels together with frozen parental expectations determine the choice of economic activity.

INTRODUCTION

The youth in India, especially in rural areas, account for a larger proportion of non-workers. With increasing educational opportunities and non-availability of jobs in the formal manufacturing and service sectors, the problem of unemployment among educated youth is assuming serious proportion¹. Notwithstanding government support in terms of policies and programmes to develop rural non-farm sector (Fisher and Mahajan 1997), the entry of women into rural non-agricultural activities has been slow in the last three decades (Rajasekhar 1995: 280). Even if women diversify into rural non-farm sector, such a diversification is termed as 'distress diversification' wherein the employment is not decent and the incomes earned are insufficient (Vaidyanathan 1986).

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Youth transition is the stage in the life of young persons when they are not in school and also are out of work for a substantial period of time. It is noted by several studies carried out in the western context that the youth transition is becoming difficult and unemployment is the most important part of this youth transition problem. The main obstacles for a smooth youth transition are socio-economic factors, parental expectations, generation gap in the perceptions of what is good employment, etc. There is no study in the Indian context which analyses the issues relating to youth transition.

Against this background, the paper has addressed the following questions. What is the incidence of unemployment among young women? How many unemployed young women are willing to undertake new and non-traditional economic activities? What factors at the household level influence the women to take up alternative economic activities? What are the activities in which they are interested? What constraints do they face in undertaking such new economic activities? What are the perceptions of the key stakeholders (government officials, bankers, NGOs and leaders of the industry) on alternative employment opportunities available to young women? What are their perceptions on the support that is needed to enable them to undertake economic activities?

These questions have been answered in the specific context of a district in Andhra Pradesh province in India. The database used in this paper includes primary data collected from 161 households in 17 villages, qualitative data on the study questions with the help of participatory rural appraisal (PRA) techniques and intensive discussions with key stakeholders at the district level. It is argued in this paper that socio-economic factors at the household and village levels, parental expectations together with demographic characteristics, determine the choice of economic activity. It is surmised that the support structure needed for young women has to take the above into consideration, and provide an institutional framework for imparting skills, providing

access to credit and other inputs, establishing linkages with other actors and accompanying the youth to complete the transition in a smooth manner. Such an institutional framework is likely to enable young women to undertake new economic activities, which will provide decent employment and sufficient income, and complete youth transition.

RATIONALE FOR UNDERTAKING THE STUDY

The population of India increased from 230 million to 1,027 million in the last century. The population of males increased from 120.8 million to 531 million (i.e., an addition of 410.2 million), while the population of females increased from 117 million to 496 million (i.e., an addition of only 379 million). As can be expected, the sex ratio (females per 1,000 males) declined from 972 to 933 during the period 1901 to 2001. The reasons for continuous decline in sex ratio are both cultural and socio-economic. Infant mortality and death rates are higher for girls and women leading to low life expectancy at birth. An important reason for declining sex ratio was low female labour participation. 'High female labour participation increases value of the females at the societal level and of the female child in the household. It is shown that female contribution to prosperity is a more crucial determinant of her entitlements than the overall prosperity of the household' (Agnihotri 2000).

The rates of work participation of women through the last two decades have been rising. The work participation rate of females in rural India, which was 15.9 in 1971, increased to 27.1 in 1991. In contrast, the work participation rates for males in rural India was 52.5 in 1991. The lower work participation rate for women was, to a large extent, due to the definition of 'worker' in the Indian population census. Indian census defines 'workers' as those involved in economic activities. By implication, if persons are engaged in non-income earning work (such as fetching water, sharing work with men, etc), they are not considered as workers. Indian women spent 34.63 hours out of 168 hours in a week on non-income earning work as compared to only 3.65 hours by men (NSSO 2000).

There have been differences in the growth of female work participation across sectors in rural India. The participation of women as cultivators went up from 30 per cent of the total female workforce in 1971 to 34 per cent in 1991. In contrast, the participation of men as cultivators declined. Although participation of women as agricultural labourers declined in terms of proportion during the period 1971-91, the number of female agricultural labourers increased by about 13 million (from 15.8 million to 28.4 million). On the whole, the gender disaggregated data for 1981 and 1991 decadal changes indicate a slight decline in the dependence of men and an increase in the dependence of women on the agricultural sector (Kulkarni 1994). Women constitute 45 per cent of the agricultural labour force and the sector employs about 84 per cent of all economically active women in rural India. A number of micro-level studies from different parts of India show that although modern agricultural technology has displaced the job opportunities for men, it did not adversely affect the employment for women.

Although a significant proportion of female workforce depended on agricultural wage labour (Rajasekhar 2002a), the wage rates were lower for women as compared to men. For instance, rural female casual labourers earned wages in the range of Rs.21.88 to 55.73 as against to wages of Rs.34.68 to Rs.61.54 by male casual wage labourers in 1999-2000 (NSSO 2000). Further, average wage rates for female agricultural labourers increased from Rs.15.12 in 1993-4 to Rs.17.99 in 1999-2000 at an annual average growth rate of 2.94. In contrast, the growth rate of wage rates for casual labour in non-agricultural female workers was 5.07 during the same period.

Yet, women face a number of constraints in entering into non-agricultural sector. Between 1971 and 1991, the proportion of female workers in non-agricultural workers increased from 17 to 19 per cent as against an increase of five percentage points (from 28 to 33 per cent) in the case of rural men. The reasons for limited entry of female workforce into the non-farm sector are not difficult to find.

- ❑ Socio-economic factors constrain women into non-agricultural sector (Rajasekhar 2002b).
- ❑ The decline of traditional industries such as handicrafts has adversely affected the household centred work and participation of women therein as well.
- ❑ The liberalisation policies and entry of branded cheap products have displaced female-intensive industries like food processing.
- ❑ Cuts in government spending adversely affected investments on rural infrastructure and rural employment programmes. This has, in turn, affected private investment in rural areas.

'Right to work' being a Directive Principle under the Constitution of India, only enjoins upon the state to make effective provision for securing the right to work. The search now is for opportunities to obtain 'decent and productive work' in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity. It is in this context that the German Development Co-operation (GTZ) supported a group of NGOs in Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh to impart skill training to young girls in rural and semi-urban areas to enable them to undertake decent self-employment. It was felt that, before the provision of skill training, a participatory study to find out a dynamic non-farm activity should be undertaken. Accordingly, a participatory study with the involvement of all important actors in the district (district level government officials, elected leaders of local government, NGOs and target group) was initiated with the following objectives:

- ❑ Identifying a dynamic non-farm activity that has the potential to provide employment for young girls in rural areas of Krishna district.
- ❑ Identifying constraints (economic and social) that young girls are likely to face in obtaining training and undertaking dynamic non-farm activity.
- ❑ Identifying the actors who can play a role in enabling young girls to take up the dynamic non-farm activities, and indicate the roles of these actors.

Methodology and Data Sources

The study adopted a participatory approach to develop the methodology. This means that the essential components of the methodology were finalised by the key stakeholders. The methodology adopted in the study had three important components. First, obtaining perceptions of the important development actors in the district on what were potential informal sector activities for women. Second, discussions with women themselves on what activities would they like to take up if an opportunity was provided. Third, arriving at the roles and responsibilities of development actors if a sector was identified.

Accordingly, the study obtained the perceptions of the following development actors by canvassing a semi-structured interview schedule among them:

- ❑ Government officials including the District Collector, Project Director of the District Rural Development Agency (DRDA), General Manager of the District Industrial Centre.
- ❑ Bankers, including the Assistant General Manager of National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), the Lead Bank Manager and the Chairman of the Regional Rural Bank.
- ❑ Elected officials of district local government including President and Vice President.
- ❑ Representatives of NGOs and training institutions.
- ❑ Presidents of Mahila Mandals and women's associations.
- ❑ Representatives of Chambers of commerce.

Subsequently, the primary data were collected from women. After identifying the number of villages where the NGOs were working, three villages were randomly selected from six project areas of NGOs. From each of these villages, one Self-Help Group (SHG) and 50 per cent of the members from the selected group were randomly selected.

The study adopted both survey and Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) methods. The purpose of PRA exercise was to enable women and men in the villages to brainstorm on an identification of a

viable non-agricultural activity for women. The specific method used was activity matrix.

PRA was conducted in six villages. In each of the villages, SHG members from all the groups and men were invited to participate in PRA exercise. After they had assembled in the meeting, the purpose of the meeting was explained to them. Initially, the discussion was on knowing the overall economy of the village in terms of the size of the village, what crops were normally grown in the village, infrastructure and the business opportunities present in the village. After facilitating a discussion to understand the present livelihood activities undertaken by both men and women in the village, a question on whether the present livelihood activities were sufficient to meet the livelihood needs was posed. If they were insufficient, what alternative economic activities would they like to undertake? What factors contributed to the need for undertaking of these activities? What constraints and difficulties were they likely to face in this regard? When participants came up with alternative livelihood activities, they were encouraged to rank them and provide logic for the same.

The steps followed in this exercise were as follows: Women and men attending the PRA exercises were first asked to list different activities. Second, they were requested to provide reasons for selecting these activities. Even if there were more than one reason, they were encouraged to provide the same. Third, the participants were requested to assign ranks to each of the activities on the basis of criteria mentioned in the second step. The reasons cited by them were good margin, availability of skills and knowledge, small capital, growth potential, cultural compatibility, not much travel was involved and possibility to involve household members, etc. Fourth, there was facilitation among them to discuss further if the outcome was different from that emerged from discussions with different development actors in the district.

As far as the survey was concerned, a questionnaire was canvassed among 161 member households in 17 randomly selected SHGs. The questionnaire, in addition to basic information on the households, sought to collect data on livelihood opportunities that were available to the household members and whether there were any young women

interested in taking up alternative livelihood activities. If yes, the details on these options were collected.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION OF THE DISTRICT

Krishna district is one of the most prominent coastal districts in Andhra Pradesh. Located as it is in the centre of the province, it is called the nerve centre for all important activities like trade, commerce, industries and culture. Machilipatnam is the headquarters of the district; but Vijaywada is an important city not only in the district but also in the province. Administratively, the district is divided into 50 mandals, which are spread over four revenue divisions. There are 937 inhabited villages in the district.

The geographical area of Krishna is 8,727 sq. kms. The population of the district was 36.99 lakhs in 2001. The density of population was 424 persons per sq. km. The level of urbanisation was also higher (35.83 per cent), and the district is one the most urbanised one in the state. The literacy level was high; but female literacy was relatively low. Youth accounted for larger proportion of the literate as well as highly educated population (Table 1).

Table 1: Educational levels (%) in Krishna district (excluding children in 0-6 age group)

Sex	Educational level						Total
	Illiterate	Primary education	Secondary education	Pre-university	Technical education	Graduation and above	
Males	39.39	32.91	18.28	3.73	1.05	4.64	100
% in the age group of 15-24	17.84	14.17	39.69	51.06	44.04	24.13	22.47
Females	54.46	30.00	11.37	2.00	0.17	2.01	100.01
% in the age group of 15-24	19.02	17.47	44.26	63.32	38.43	41.64	22.83
Total	46.80	31.48	14.88	2.88	0.61	3.35	100
% in the age group of 15-24	18.52	15.72	41.41	55.24	43.30	29.30	22.65

Source: Census of India, 1991.

Irrigation facilities are well developed in Krishna. Further, Krishna district has assured irrigation facilities through canals. Paddy, cotton and chillies have been important crops. As far as the distribution of landholdings is concerned, the district witnessed a rapid increase in the proportion of marginal holdings and a decline in the average landholding. Nearly, 65 per cent of the total landholdings were less than one hectare. This indicates that tiny landholdings made farming nonviable leading to small landholders to depend on wage labour either in agriculture or other activities.

In general, and also for both males and females, the workforce participation rates were lower. The youth accounted for a larger proportion of the non-workers. Thus, unemployment was higher among the youth (Table 2).

Table 2: Distribution of population (%) by their work status in Krishna

Categories	Males		Females		Total	
	% in the total population	% in 15-24 age group	% in the total population	% in 15-24 age group	% in the total population	% in 15-24 age group
Workers (main and marginal)	57.04	21.33	29.11	24.26	43.29	22.30
Non workers (in the 15 - 59 age group)	8.45	81.52	33.38	36.79	20.72	46.06
Others	34.51	-	37.51	-	35.99	-
Total	100	19.06	100	19.34	100	19.26
(in numbers)	(1,878,789)	(358,025)	(1,820,044)	(352,077)	(3,698,833)	(710,102)

Source: Census of India, 1991.

Agricultural labour and non-farm activities provided employment to a bulk of the workforce in Krishna. The feminisation of agricultural labour market was taking place². Non-farm activities were more confined to urban areas and among men in rural areas. Services, small business and small manufacturing were significant non-farm activities (Table 3).

Table 3: Occupational distribution (%) of the workforce in Krishna

	Rural			Urban			Total		
	Per-sons	Males	Fe-males	Per-sons	Males	Fe-males	Per-sons	Males	Fe-males
Cultivators	20.49	28.31	6.80	3.02	3.42	1.07	15.73	20.12	5.95
Agri. labourers	61.05	48.26	83.44	15.38	11.21	36.07	48.60	36.07	76.44
Livestock	2.20	3.03	0.74	1.28	1.39	0.77	1.95	2.49	0.74
Nonagricultural activities	1626	2039	903	8031	8399	6210	3373	4131	1686
1. Mining & quarrying	0.38	0.41	0.33	0.64	0.49	1.36	0.45	0.44	0.48
2. Mfg., processing, servicing and repairs in HH industry	2.04	2.12	1.90	3.31	2.61	6.74	2.39	2.28	2.61
3. Mfg., processing, servicing and repairs in other than HH industry	2.98	4.20	0.85	14.71	16.58	5.43	6.18	8.27	1.53
4. Construction	0.66	0.96	0.14	4.15	4.42	2.85	1.61	2.10	0.54
5. Trade and commerce	3.65	4.56	2.04	21.81	23.82	11.85	8.60	10.90	3.49
6. Transport, storage and communications	1.74	2.70	0.06	14.82	17.43	1.85	5.80	7.55	0.32
7. Other services	4.81	5.43	3.71	20.88	18.63	32.01	9.19	9.77	7.89
Total	1,125,171	716,110	409,061	421,873	351,010	70,863	1,547,044	1,067,120	479,923

Source: Census of India, 1991.

Banking network is relatively more developed with larger bank-branch network and higher level of advances. In Krishna, bulk of the credit from institutional lending agencies goes for crop production. Plantation and horticulture, dairy and other priority sectors are important. The factors contributing to rapid flow of credit to these activities suggest that financial institutions prefer these activities as the infrastructure and marketing facilities are conducive to undertake these activities.

An added dimension is that these are land based activities, and preferred by the affluent sections in the rural areas, and better-off among the poor. The institutional credit agencies do not deliver much credit for start-up enterprises and for those activities which are needed for poorest in rural areas. It is because of these reasons, the micro-finance services delivered by the NGOs become very important for the poor. An attempt to find out alternative livelihood becomes important for females, as women are mostly engaged in agriculture as labourers with less wages. The shift to non-traditional employment in non-agriculture is needed for both employment and income security. Of late, the SHG members have been asking NGOs to find out alternative employment opportunities for their young and educated daughters. The present study is to be seen in this context.

Profile of the Study Villages and Sample Households

The study villages were small to large with total number of households ranging from as low as 360 to as high as over 1,000. While some of the villages were closer to Mandal headquarters, others were distantly located. The business opportunities were present only in some of the villages. The notable business opportunities that were not present in these villages were cycle shops, TV repair centres and welding shops. All the villages were electrified. Approach roads were good, and were being used in all seasons.

Most of the poor households in these villages were either landless or owned small landholdings. The marginal farmers, unable to obtain sustenance from cultivation, participated in labour market as agricultural labourers. Thus, wage labour in agriculture was the predominant livelihood source for a majority of the households. Most of the women were involved in agriculture labour market, with a few of them also undertaking milch-animal rearing as a supplementary activity. On the other hand, a larger proportion of men were involved in non-farm sector.

The normal tendency among poorer households in these villages was to educate girls up to 5th or 6th class and subsequently, induct them

into the wage labour markets. The boys were encouraged to study up to 10th class after which they were either inducted into the labour market or sent for higher education. In general, the tendency was to provide education to boys. The girls at tender age were taken for tasks such as plucking of cotton, agricultural wage work and removing of pests. The wage rates provided to young girls were in the region of Rs. 20. The boys normally found employment in non-farm activities such as quarrying, urban informal sector or agriculture. There were male-female wage differentials in these villages. While men were earning around Rs.50 per day, women earned around Rs.25 per day.

The women in PRA exercises stated that the existing employment was insufficient for them to obtain decent livelihood because of uncertain and seasonal employment availability. Further, it was perceived that the number of agricultural labourers was increasing in all the villages, and this resulted in difficulties for the existing labourers to obtain employment. This led to two changes. First, the rural male labourers slowly shifted to non-farm employment activities located in rural and semi-urban areas. Second, the feminisation of agricultural labour market got intensified³. Against this background, it was perceived that additional labour force might not be in a position to find any sufficient employment in the agricultural wage labour market.

The employment available in the agricultural labour market was nearly insufficient for the existing female workers in the villages, and the participants in PRA meetings were of the opinion that the wage income earned was insufficient. This was especially the case with female-headed households and those having alcoholics, unemployed men, etc. It was also found that, in the absence of adequate employment opportunities, young women from poor households were inducted into flesh market. The district, being important in trading of agricultural and non-agricultural activities, had regular flow of transport vehicles into and out of the districts. This stepped up the incidence of HIV positive cases in the district. Citing these reasons, women noted that supplementary activities were needed not only for meeting the household needs but also for meeting education

and health needs of their children. They were also of the opinion that their young educated daughters would like to undertake non-farm opportunities.

A questionnaire was canvassed among 161 members belonging to 17 SHGs. Of these members, over 50 per cent were Hindus, while 49 per cent were Christians. About 57 per cent of the households belonged to depressed castes (SCs and STs) while less than one third belonged to backward castes. Most of the households had their own houses, and were living in non-durable houses. A vast majority of the households obtained water through protected water supply sources like pipes and bore wells, and had electricity supply. About 73 per cent of the households were having access to public distribution of food grains. A majority of these households were having white cards and this implies that they were all living below the poverty line.

Over 81 per cent of the households did not own land. The land owning households belonged to either marginal (less than one acre) or small (1 to 2.5 acres) farmer categories. With widespread landlessness, a majority of the households depended on wage labour in agriculture or undertook rearing of milch animals as a supplementary livelihood activity.

SURVEY RESULTS

To a question whether any young woman in the household was willing to undertake an alternative economic activity, nearly 74 per cent of the households provided an affirmative answer. Most of these households were landless belonging to depressed castes.

Willingness to Undertake an Alternative Economic Activity

The proportion of dependants to total workers in a household influenced the decision to go for an alternative or not. We have classified the households under three categories, i.e., households with only two workers, households having two workers along with dependants and households having more than two workers with dependants. Table 4 shows that there was positive relationship between the proportion of households

expressing desire to take up an alternative and households with more dependants. This implies that the households with two workers did not want to undertake an alternative economic activity. In contrast, households consisting of many workers found it difficult to find productive employment for all workers in their household, and hence, preferred to undertake an alternative.

Table 4: Distribution of households (%) by willingness to undertake an alternative economic activity

Household with	In need of an alternative	Not in need of an alternative	Total
Two workers	66.7	33.3	100 (27)
Two workers and dependants	75.0	25.0	100 (92)
More workers and dependants	76.2	23.8	100 (42)
All	73.9	26.1	100 (161)

Note: Figures in the parentheses are absolute numbers.

In addition to demographic pressure, the availability of employment to workers in a household is a crucial variable. Table 5 shows that a majority of the households, who were in need of an alternative, have had less than 200 days of employment per member in a household. Thus, the households with more number of workers and relatively less average number of days of employment per worker wanted to undertake alternative economic activities.

Table 5: Distribution (%) by average number of days of employment per working member

Size class of number of days of employment	In need of an alternative	Not in need of an alternative	Total
< 200	41.5	47.4	43.0
200 – 250	24.6	18.4	23.1
250 – 300	19.5	18.4	19.2
300 – 365	14.4	15.8	14.7
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total (numbers)	118	38	156

Preferred Economic Activities

Of 664 persons residing in 161 households, 320 were females and 344 males. In the ensuing paragraphs, we will concentrate only on female members of sample households. Of 320 females in these households, more than 32 per cent belonged to the age group of less than 16 years. About 38 per cent belonged to the age group of 16-30 years, while 30.3 per cent belonged to the age group of above 30 years. We mainly concentrated on two age groups, viz., 16-30 years and above 30 years in so far as a detailed analysis on activities preferred by women and constraints that they were likely to face. The total number of women belonging to these two age groups was 217.

Of 217 women belonging to the age group of 16-30 and above 30 years, 102 (53 per cent) stated that they were in need of an alternative economic activity. It needs to be noted that a relatively larger proportion of women in the age group of 16-30 years expressed the need as compared to the older age group.

Most of the women wanted to take up tailoring and embroidery followed by dairying, petty business, manufacturing and service (mainly flour mill and Chilli pounding unit), dyeing and gas stove repair in that order. There were differences between the activity preference of women in the age group of 16-30 and above 30 years. A larger proportion of women in the age group of 16-30 years preferred tailoring and embroidery and dyeing. On the other hand, the proportion of women preferring traditional activities such as dairying and petty business was relatively high in the age group of above 30 years (Table 6). Similarly, a larger proportion of women belonging to the age group of above 30 years stated that they were not in need of alternative economic activities.

Table 6: Distribution (%) of women by activity preference and age groups

Activity	16-30 years	Above 30 years	Total
Tailoring and embroidery	25.0	11.3	18.9
Gas stove repair	1.7	3.1	2.3
Dyeing	5.8	3.1	4.6
Dairying	8.3	14.4	11.1
Business	8.3	9.3	8.8
Manufacturing and services	5.8	5.2	5.5
Others	1.7	2.1	1.8
No need of alternative activity	43.3	51.5	47.0
Total (numbers)	120	97	217

Implications of Marital Status on Activity Preference

In order to find out the constraints relating to child bearing and rearing, an attempt was made to find out the demographic characteristics of the aspirants. Most of the women wanting to undertake an alternative activity were married (Table 7). The proportion of unmarried women was high in the age group of 16-30 years. This implies that women in the age group of 16-30 years would soon get married. The sample respondents noted that they had social compulsions of getting women married. Further, in rural areas, having unmarried girls at home were considered to be a burden by a majority of the households. They, therefore, were of the view that there was no need to focus development interventions on unmarried girls. According to them, it would be better to provide opportunities of undertaking non-farm activities to those women who were in the age group of 25-35 as they would have completed the child rearing and bearing responsibilities.

This is further corroborated by PRA results. The women members felt that providing training to young girls was not appropriate, as their mobility was often restricted until they got married. The

utilisation of skills acquired by these young unmarried girls in a training programme depended on the consent of the parents-in-law. In view of the above, the women suggested that the training might be confined to married women in the age group of 20-30. They also felt that it would be good if training was provided to those women who were free by then from reproductive functions and responsibilities.

Table 7: Distribution (%) of women by marital status and need to undertake an alternative

Marital status	Aspirants (%) belonging to the age groups of					
	16-30 years			Above 30 years		
	In need	Not in need	Total (No.)	In need	Not in need	Total (No.)
Married	63.1	36.9	84	50.6	49.4	89
Unmarried	39.4	60.6	33	100.0	0.0	1
Others	66.7	33.3	3	14.3	85.7	7
Total	56.7	43.3	120	48.5	51.5	97

Implications of Education Levels on Activity Preference

The educational levels of the women who were in need of an alternative were relatively high in the younger age group. Most of them have had some school or college education (Table 8). Of those women who were highly literate (completing school education and having some college education) in the age group of 16-30 years, a majority preferred to undertake an alternative economic activity. Perhaps, this group was more suitable for providing non-farm employment opportunities in the activities of repairs of gas stove, mixer and grinder; and even in electricals and electronics.

Table 8: Distribution (%) of women by educational levels and willingness to take an alternative

Educational status	Aspirants (%) belonging to age groups of					
	16-30 years			Above 30 years		
	In need	Not in need	Total (No.)	In need	Not in need	Total (No.)
Illiterate	42.1	57.9	38	41.1	58.9	56
Up to 5 th	68.6	31.4	35	66.7	33.3	21
6 th to 10 th	60.9	39.1	23	63.6	36.4	11
10 th & above	58.3	41.7	24	33.3	66.7	9
Total	56.7	43.3	120	48.5	51.5	97

Implications of Existing Livelihood on Activity Preference

A majority of the women in need of an alternative were either agricultural labourers or unemployed. On the other hand, primary occupation of those stating that they did not need an alternative was also agricultural labour. A relatively larger proportion of women wanting an alternative was involved in some activity or the other. This implies that opportunity cost for them was higher and the activity suggested and planned must provide income higher than that obtained from existing activities.

Table 9: Distribution of aspirants by principal occupation and age groups

Occupation of the aspirants	Aspirants (%) belonging to the age groups of					
	16 – 30 years			Above 30 years		
	In need	Not in need	Total	In need	Not in need	Total
Agricultural labour	30 (44.00)	21 (40.30)	51 (42.50)	21 (44.60)	29 (58.00)	50 (51.50)
Tailoring	6 (8.80)	3 (5.70)	9 (7.50)	5 (10.60)	2 (4.00)	7 (7.20)
Petty business	2 (2.90)	0 (0.00)	2 (1.60)	2 (4.20)	0 (0.00)	2 (2.00)
Masonry	2 (2.90)	0 (0.00)	2 (1.60)	3 (6.30)	0 (0.00)	3 (3.00)
Service	2 (2.90)	0 (0.00)	2 (1.60)	1 (2.10)	1 (2.00)	2 (2.00)
Non-agriculture	1 (1.40)	1 (1.90)	2 (1.60)	2 (4.20)	0 (0.00)	2 (2.00)
Others	3 (4.40)	0 (0.00)	3 (2.50)	8 (16.9)	1 (2.00)	9 (7.20)
Nil	22 (32.30)	27 (51.90)	49 (40.80)	5 (10.60)	15 (30.00)	20 (20.60)
Total	68	52	120	47	50	97

Note: Figures in parentheses are percentages.

It appears that the current livelihood activities did not provide sufficient income for the women (Table 10). Most of those interested in undertaking an alternative economic activity stated that their existing livelihood was insufficient, and hence, they needed to undertake an alternative. The next important reason was convenience. This basically implies that the proposed activity should provide an opportunity for women to undertake the same at home; enable them to attend to their other tasks in the household; and, should not result in too much of travel. This implies that they had chosen activities (mentioned in Table 7) not because they had good demand potential; but because they were convenient for

them. About 20 per cent of the women stated that they had chosen an activity on the basis of its growth and demand potential.

The factors such as low education and self-confidence were the reasons why women did not prefer activities such as computer training and repairs of gas stoves, mixer, and grinder. Further, factors such as existing market potential and low investment influenced women to select tailoring and embroidery. According to women, there was growing preference for having different designs on sarees and dresses. Hence, an economic activity combining tailoring and embroidery would ensure enough work and larger incomes. Other important factors for choosing this activity were low initial investment and working capital, and convenience of working at home so that they could combine household chores with non-farm economic activity. Some of the women stated that the activities such as food processing and manufacturing of soaps would have limited market potential.

Table 10: Distribution of aspirants by type of activity chosen and reasons for selecting an activity

Reasons for choosing activity	No of women expressing the desire to take up						
	Tailoring	Dairying	Petty business	Manufacturing	Dyeing	Others	Total
Present livelihood is insufficient	9	7	9	2	1	3	31
Convenience	11	4	2	2	4	2	25
Growth and demand	8	4	5	2	1	2	22
Skills and knowledge	7	2	1	2	2	0	14
Good margin	2	1	1	3	1	1	9
Others	4	6*	1	1	1	1	14
Total	41	24	19	12	10	9	116

* Small capital was an important reason

Frozen Parental Expectations?

Let us now compare the preferences of sample households on key economic activities with those emerged in the discussions with key stakeholders at the district level (Box 1) and those emerging in PRA discussions (Box 2) to find similarities and dissimilarities, and the reasons for the same. Table 6 and Boxes 1 and 2 show that the interviews with key stakeholders at the district level, PRA exercises and survey resulted reach more or less similar conclusion in so far as the important activities that could be promoted for young women.

This is not entirely true. For instance, the key stakeholders at the district level emphasised that preference be given to the computer training. Their logic was that the computer industry was witnessing a rapid expansion and hence, job opportunities for educated young women would be brighter in this. They also emphasised on nurse training. For some reason, they did not give much importance to traditional activities such as dairying and petty business.

Box 1: Perceptions of the government officials on dynamic non-farm activities

The district level stakeholders suggested that the following activities would not only be viable but were also suitable for young women.

Tailoring and embroidery: Most of the stakeholders mentioned that the demand pattern for clothing was undergoing a change with rise in incomes of significant proportion of rural population. The demand for ladies suit, fashionable dresses for children and undertaking embroidery work for sarees and dresses was increasing in rural areas. Most of the tailors in rural areas were old fashioned, and hence were unable to meet the new and emerging needs of the rural population. It is in this context that they suggested tailoring and embroidery as the dynamic activity. According to them, women who already had basic knowledge in tailoring and also those who were keen to equip themselves with the skills of stitching new designs and embroidery could be trained to have alternative employment.

Dyeing of sarees: The emerging trend in rural areas was to go in for dyeing of old sarees so that they looked new and fresh. One of the training institutes which provided training to a large number of women and girls noted that this could be encouraged as group activity for three to four rural women located in an over-grown village or small town.

Nurse training: Educated unemployed young women were interested in undertaking only a salaried job. The private health delivery system was becoming important in this region. The private hospitals, nursing homes and dispensaries constantly looked for trained nurses. There was excess demand, which was partially met by recruiting trained nurses from Kerala province. The officials felt that there was a need to link these women with established nurse training institutions so that they could obtain training and subsequently get employment in the private medical hospitals.

Computer training: The educated unemployed could also be encouraged to obtain employment in computer related activities, if they were provided with training in this area.

Basket making: Some of the officials stated that women could easily make plastic baskets even when they had low education. According to them, plastic baskets had very good market in the local area.

On the other hand, men and women in PRA exercises, though assigned key ranks to tailoring and embroidery/ dyeing, were emphasising petty business, food processing, etc., on the grounds that these activities did not need much capital and could be pursued while attending to other tasks in the household. In the survey, tailoring and embroidery emerged as an important activity due to skills (tailoring) that women had already possessed. Further, dairying emerged as the second important activity, although this was the first preference in the PRA exercises.

There is, however, one thing common in the preferences which emerged from different actors. All of them mentioned tailoring and embroidery, and dyeing as activities that could be promoted among young women. What are the reasons for this? The reasons provided by sample respondents (i.e., parents and in-laws of young women), participants of PRA exercises and district level officials indicate that the following was an important reason.

Box 2: PRA findings on dynamic non-farm activity

The participants in PRA exercises suggested a number of alternative activities. In general, the traditional activity of rearing of milch animals was the first one to be mentioned by the participants. The subsequent facilitation helped women to have a lively and analytical discussion on different non-farm activities. The participants came up with the following non-farm activities. While the activities of tailoring, embroidery and dyeing were mentioned in all the villages, others were mentioned only in one or two villages. Thus, in each village there was one or two activities mentioned, in addition to tailoring and embroidery and dyeing.

1. Tailoring and embroidery
2. Dyeing
3. Repairs of gas stoves, mixies, grinders and Television
4. Computer training
5. Manufacturing of soaps
6. Petty business in vegetables, provisions, etc
7. Flour-mill and chilly pounding
8. Shop (readymade cloths, fancy items, chappals etc)
9. Food processing
10. Plastic basket-making

The activities of tailoring, embroidery and dyeing were preferred on the grounds of convenience. This mainly implies that young unmarried girls were not expected to go out into the market to undertake the economic activity. Similarly, they were not expected to interact with male customers. Married young women were expected to combine the household chores and reproductive activities with alternative economic activities. All these indicate parental expectations, which were frozen in time. They were frozen even in the case of educated young women. The tendencies of parents to withdraw girls from school soon after they attained puberty and see marriage as the best way to complete the transition indicate frozen expectations. These expectations do not seem to have changed although a larger proportion of educated young women wanted to undertake non-agricultural activities.

WAYS FORWARD

Based on discussions in PRA exercise and qualitative evidence collected from the households, Chart 1 was prepared. Chart 1 shows that tailoring/ embroidery/ dyeing activity could be undertaken by young women provided the support that they needed was provided. According to young women, they needed support in training, supply of inputs such as credit, information on marketing opportunities and institutional framework conducive to undertake these activities.

Chart 1: Feasibility of Tailoring/Embroidery/Dyeing Activity

Particulars	The evidence
Internal favourable factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Possession of skills among some women. ▪ Those who did not have skills expressed willingness to learn the skills in training programmes. ▪ The activity could be taken up at home.
External favourable factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ As the tastes and preferences among youth were changing, there was scope for marketing. ▪ There was a possibility of getting bulk orders on uniforms for school going children.
Constraint	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cheaper products arriving from Mumbai and Hyderabad.
Support needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Training to upgrade skills, finance and marketing.
Possible linkages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Linkages with government and other recognised schools for supplying uniforms. ▪ Linkages with local garment factories. ▪ Exploring opportunities for undertaking piece work.
Overall feasibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ This activity was considered to be feasible on the condition that effective marketing linkages were provided. A mechanism to provide information on changing tastes and preferences should also be present.

Training

According to women from sample households, the following should be kept in mind while designing a training programme.

- **Duration and location of the training:** Women members expressed their inability to attend the training, which was of longer duration. They felt that training should be of short duration. Further, it would be ideal if the training programme was conducted within or close to their villages.
- **Proximity:** The members felt that, after the training, they should be able to undertake the activity within the village. Further, the chosen activity should not involve much daily travel.

The above views were expressed as the women were of the opinion that whether they could participate in the training and undertake an alternative would depend on the acceptance of spouses and parents-in-law. The chances of their acceptance would be better if the duration of training was short, if training was held within or close to their village, if the activity could be undertaken within the village/home and there was a potential for increased income and employment.

Institutional Framework

The development of identified activity among young women needs a multi-pronged strategy and co-ordinated efforts from the government agencies including banks, the NGOs and the target group. Such an effort should involve the following key stakeholders: NABARD/Banks, NGOs, training institute and young girls.

NABARD/ Banks

NABARD has a vision on development of informal sector in each district, and is developing different schemes and loan products towards this end. It is also willing to collaborate with NGOs and training institutions for informal sector development. Further, as an apex institution and

promotional agency for commercial banks, regional rural banks and co-operatives, NABARD can play an important role between the trained youth and banks in ensuring that young girls get adequate credit to start self-employment activities.

Role of NGOs

The density of NGOs is good in several districts in the country. The like-minded NGOs can form into a cluster. Such a cluster of NGOs should have shared vision, collective objectives and activities.

A cluster of NGOs may be in an advantageous position to facilitate transition among involuntarily unemployed youth for the following reasons. First, each NGO works with 50 to 200 SHGs consisting of poor and marginalised women. Second, using the network of SHGs, they can assess the important activity and constraints in undertaking the activity. Third, NGO staff can counsel parents of young women on the need to undertake viable income generation activities and that they would provide the necessary help and support in this regard. Fourth, self-help groups, which are also involved in the savings and credit activity, can provide financial assistance to women preferring to undertake self-employment. Fifth, SHGs can be useful in informal sector training programme and follow-up.

The NGOs usually have trained field workers who can identify, motivate, encourage and prepare young women for the training programme. These NGOs can also help the youth in establishing linkages with banks, enable them to undertake self-employment activities and facilitate a smooth transition from being unemployed to employed.

The cluster of NGOs can have an informal structure. They can meet regularly and discuss the activities relating to sharing of mutual resources, learning from each other, resource mobilisation from the government, lobbying and advocacy. They can also discuss the issues emerging in the process of training and enabling young women to undertake economic activities in these meetings along with other stakeholders.

Training Institutions

Each district will have training institutions started by both government and private sector. At the lower level, development agencies like the DRDA and SC/ST Finance Corporation provide training (both skills based and job oriented) to the targeted people. In this respect, DRDA plays a major role in providing training under various government schemes. The DRDA usually have spacious training centres in several districts. One of them can be utilised to provide training.

As the discussion above has shown, some women members expressed interest in fine-tuning their skills and start some business in a small way to meet the local needs. The tailoring is one activity that is being encouraged by the Department of Women and Child Welfare under many schemes. The officials of the Department observed that they could organise training programmes to NGOs to enable the target group women to undertake production of readymade garments. Development of linkages between young women and government departments is, thus, necessary.

CONCLUSIONS

Unemployment is an important problem in India. This is especially so in the case of young women (educated and uneducated) belonging to poorer households in rural areas. In recent years, the dependence of female workforce on agriculture has increased. However, most of the women are involved in agriculture either as cultivators or agricultural labourers. The wage rates are low and non-remunerative. Opportunities to diversify into non-agricultural occupations, which are characterised by higher wage rates, are limited for young women due to socio-economic factors and the government policies relating to market reforms. Even after 53 years of planning in independent India, the problem of unemployment and underemployment is acute among rural women, in general, and young women, in particular. It is in this context that there is a need to adopt a different approach for the development of employment opportunities among women.

This paper has explored such a possibility in the context of a district in Andhra Pradesh state. The attempt was to find out an economic activity that could be promoted by all the development actors at the district level. The attempt was also to suggest an institutional framework to minimise the difficulties faced by young women in undertaking alternative economic activities. The data required to answer the study questions were obtained from women and key stakeholders through survey, participatory rural appraisal and discussions. The study covered 161 households from 17 villages. Of 320 females (out of 664 persons) from these households, 38 per cent belong to the age group of 16-30 years, while 30.3 per cent belong to the age group of above 30 years. With stress on women belonging to these two age groups, the study arrived at the following findings.

- Nearly 74 per cent of the households, characterised by larger dependency ratio and unemployment, stated that their young women were in need of alternative economic activity.
- Most of the women in need of alternative economic activities were married. This implies that one of the important constraints that young woman faced was child bearing responsibilities. In the absence of support systems at the household level (most of the households are nuclear) this might be an important constraint especially during the process of imparting additional skills required for women to undertake alternative economic activities. Hence, training programmes should not be long in duration. Further, they should be held at a place convenient to them.
- A large proportion of women in need of alternative economic activities were illiterate or semi-literate. This has two implications. The training programmes should be user-friendly. Second, handholding is necessary by one of the development actors.
- Another important characteristic of women in need of alternative economic activities was that they were already employed in agriculture

as labourers. In their case, the opportunity cost involved in occupational shift would be high.

- An activity that was mentioned by all the development actors at the district level, focus group discussions at the village level and young women was tailoring/ embroidery/ dyeing. A larger proportion of young women preferred to undertake this activity not entirely because of growth and demand, but due to non-economic factors. These are convenience and low investment. Convenience is important for young women as they have multiple roles at the household level.
- A main finding is that socio-economic factors at the household and village levels together with parental expectations determine the choice of economic activity. This implies that the development of identified activity needs a multi-pronged strategy and co-ordinated efforts from all the stakeholders.
- The functions are identified to different development actors at the district level. Banks need to provide credit. Government departments and training institutions need to build the skills among the target group in undertaking the activity. The NGOs should support the process by way of identifying, motivating, encouraging and preparing young women for the training programmes. These NGOs can also help in establishing linkages with banks and other departments and enable them to undertake self-employment activities and facilitating a smooth transition from being unemployed to employed. The self-help groups at the village level need to provide constant support to young women.

NOTES

- ¹ There has been significant deterioration in educated employment in the country during the last three decades (Vaidyanathan 1994: 3155). NSSO (2001: 133) has concluded that unemployment was much higher among the youth (15-29 years) as compared to that in the overall population.
- ² Also see, Rajasekhar (2002a) for micro-level evidence on this.
- ³ A survey conducted in three villages in the district showed that nearly 91 per cent of the female labourers were involved in agriculture as compared to only 43 per cent in the case of male labourers.

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