

# Skilling the Other - The Many Facets of Skill Training for Women in Informal Sector

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## 1. Introduction

Keeping India's current economic conditions in context, Godrej, as a private sector response, has developed a "Good & Green" vision for playing its part in creating a more inclusive and greener India. One of the key interventions of this vision is ensuring employability through skill development. By 2020 Godrej aims to invest in training of one million rural and urban youth. Besides, the company plans to address environmental issues by achieving zero waste, carbon neutrality, positive water balance and a 30 per cent increase in renewable energy use. It plans to innovate such that a third of its portfolio revenue comprises of Good and/or Green products and services.

**SALON-i** is one such course designed to train women participants in beauty care, skin and hair care and *mehendi* application along with an Entrepreneurship Development Program (EDP) module. Though SALON-i's employability goal is just a fraction of the country's overall need, the program is unique as it specifically aims at employability, entrepreneurship and empowerment of women.

Empowerment has been defined as a "process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes". Empowerment is about self-esteem and dignity. A large number of women and girls cite domestic responsibilities or family restrictions as a major hurdle in taking up jobs or starting their own ventures. Among the trainees were women who had to quit their government jobs to take care of children at home. We also trained women who had to discontinue their education because of marriage. There were young girls who were unsure about pursuing their interests or vocation once they were married, and women who were graduates and post-graduates but unable to take decisions related to their choice of career. Women and girls, they said, were expected to adjust and compromise all their life, and that now they were resigned to their fate. In such a situation, achieving the goal of employability and/or entrepreneurship, we believe, calls for a process that "empowers" women and girls. Across partners in different states and their centres, we found women and girls were unanimous that the SALON-i course, apart from training them with basic skills related to beauty and hair-care, allowed them to

find time for themselves and venture out of their homes. They found a space where they could come together, make new friends and have fun while being independent. This, according to us, is a great opportunity for GCPL and its partner organizations.



Figure 1

Launched in 2011, the Salon-i programme was envisaged as a highly scalable “shared value” opportunity with its focus on the two main outcomes of training unemployed women in beauty related skill and the creation of new jobs and opportunities in this sector.

## 2. The Salon-i Plan

The 440-hour SALON-i course involves:

- Identifying partner organizations with the potential to demonstrate viable models and set up 100 centres in the next five years
- Designing and developing technically-sound course content that meets industry standards
- Capacity building of trainers (training of trainers or TOT) and equipping them with the required knowledge and skills
- Providing beauty and hair-care related equipment for setting up of centres
- Providing beauty and hair-care related consumables as a student kit and regular replenishment of supplies to centres for conducting practicals
- Certification of trainees on completion of the SALON-i course
- Establishing linkages with salons (potential employers) and facilitating placements
- Providing support and guidance to strengthen capacities of partner organizations

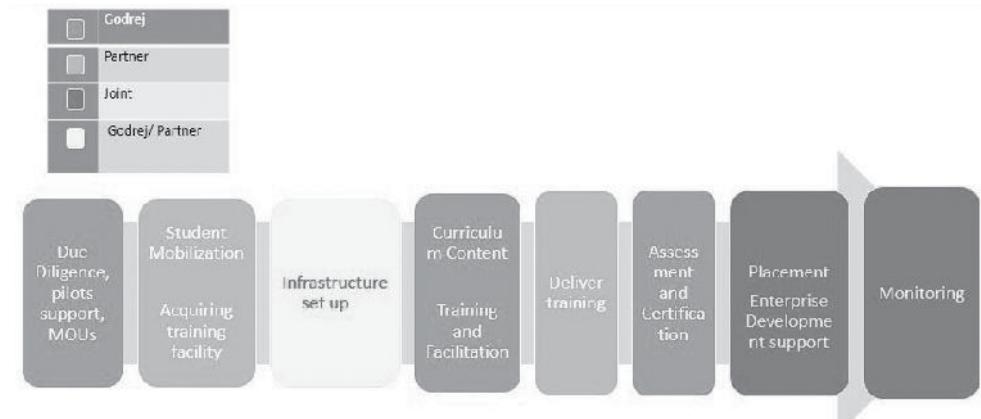


Figure 2: Godrej Salon-i Training Strategy

### 3. The Gap that Salon-i Aimed to Fill

Why was a programme like Salon-i necessary? With dime a dozen beauty-care courses already on the offer, where did Salon-i fit it? To understand this we look at a few cases where women felt cheated by the previous types of salon training.

**Geeta** was married at the tender age of 17. She is 32 now and is raising two kids. She wanted the freedom to make her own decisions through financial independence. She found it very difficult to get employment after her training. Employment with a somewhat decent salary came with a daily travel of around 7–10 km each way with 8 hours of work. Such prolonged absence from home was not easy for her because she was also supposed to take care of the household chores. She had found the 3-month training period easy as it hardly consumed 3 hours a day. Her training thus didn't prepare her for the long hours of work. Post training her only options lay with local salons, which were generally reluctant to employ or pay her. - All this made her question the worth of her certificate.

**19 year old Leena** had undergone the salon training program through a residential training institute (supported by Godrej Consumer Products Ltd (GCPL)). Although before the programme she didn't have much idea about the career prospects in this sector, during the course of her training, she learnt of placement opportunities with a large salon chain. The opportunity came with a relocation clause which she took because she wanted to be economically independent. However after joining, Leena, found out that her actual salary was less than the package promised. With no documentation proof, her only options were to either settle for the lower salary in the new city to gain experience or return home, both of which made her equally vulnerable.

Noori was promised by her trainer that she could “work from home” because she knew her family would never allow her to relocate for a job. However post training, she has no idea where to get funds or the source materials from. She also didn’t know how to publicise and get new clients.

**19 year old Fahmida, only had formal education till class 8 but was very spirited and optimistic.** She latched on to the first opportunity which came her way in a skill training centre. She was deft at Mehendi and really wanted to complete a beautician course to get a job. The training centre had a 3rd party assessment system. After completing her training and getting an A grade in her certificate she set out in search of a job. On her first interview she was asked to ‘cut, file and polish nails in Squa-oval shape’. Fahmida was rejected because she had never heard of filing shapes. In the assessment she filed her classmate’s nails and everyone was happy, but she did not know how to soften and cut the cuticle.

On close examination it was found that the assessment agencies often have no subject expert in the team and these National Skill Development Corporation empanelled 3<sup>rd</sup> party assessors had no understanding of content. Needless to say, words like “Pedagogy”, “facilitation”, “quality assessment “ had never even been discussed in the technical training domain, which was surprising given that adult learners were involved, most of whom had dropped out of formal schooling system.

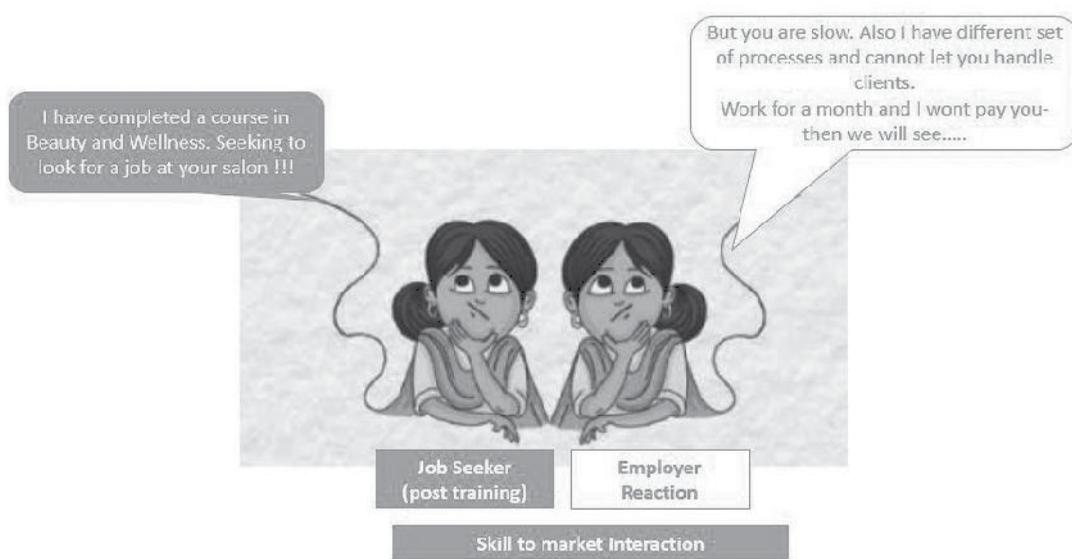


Figure 3

More often than not, the assessments are performed in such a way that everyone is passed without actually being evaluated. A case in point in the following sample MCQ question.

*i. Eyeliner is used for:*

1. Defining the eyes
2. Defining nose
3. Defining lips
4. Defining ears

*There is also a considerable weightage on internal marks given by the trainer who more often than not does not keep proper records. Other than this the course also comprises of practical exams, but the assessment agency has no external clients who can be serviced for unbiased assessment of practical skills.*

## 4. Content and Training

It has been found that the final impact of skill to market connect is impeded due to the non-uniformity of skilling pattern (GCPL works with 15 NGO partners in 22 states). To overcome this we have created an AV (Audio-Visual) demonstrative video of the entire Beauty and Wellness curriculum, which was done through research inputs of the stakeholders (especially the employers)

eliminating subjectivity and enhancing learning outcomes. In the next roll-out, an app loaded Tab-based version is being launched by Oct 30. Creating and transforming technical content (covering both conceptual understanding as well as “how to do” sections) was an urgent need in the skill sector.

In the sector there is no way the employer can spend time on developing skills post-employment. Moreover many of the trainers have dropped out of formal learning environment and even the trainers have not gone through a training and facilitation experience aimed at reaching adult learners. Even at the policy level, a framework for guidelines is provided which often becomes subject to interpretation. Here getting the final granular details from the employer (one who is to finally recognize the skills for gainful employment) is important. Hence it’s more important to remove subjectivity brought in by the trainer and provide functional demonstrative learning modules aimed at providing same outcomes. The unique AV modules ratified by large industry players in the sector and then combining animated videos and demonstrative

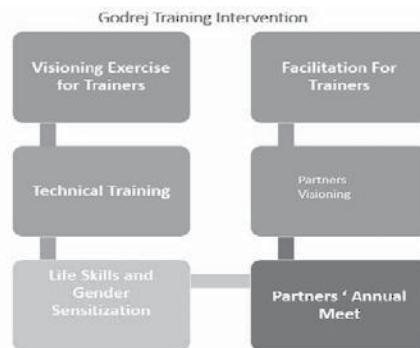


Figure 4

practices with quizzes to check comprehension have made great impact. There are simulations creating onscreen a salon-like environment and thereby helping the students to understand work-place safety guidelines and hygiene standards (something which often is a selection criterion for jobs). The module could be revised to incorporate aspects like the objective of the programme; overview of the industry; career options and possibilities; the range and kinds of parlours and services; scope of self-employment; inputs on risks related to exploitation and abuse.

## 5. Challenges Faced

The Salon-I program is targeted at women audiences in the 18–35 years category. Through technical beauty training Salon-i wants to be able to influence women at the cognitive level to initiate “social change”. And almost 95% of our target audience comprises girls, who have been forced to drop out of formal education system. They routinely face rejection in the family as a girl child and their dreams of doing something of their own choice are often left unfulfilled. Hence, getting such an audience to connect with the concept of employability is a key challenge.

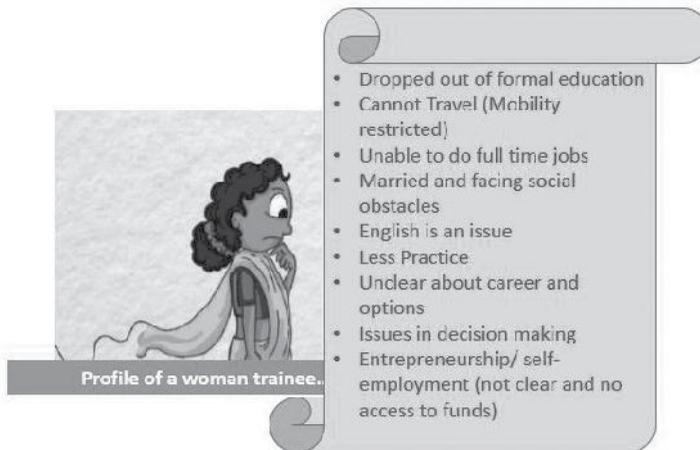


Figure 5

The main challenges came in terms motivating women to join the course, creating the structure of enrolment, addressing post-course concerns and understanding the trends and opportunities of this sector.

*And above all, it brought forth what the programme stands for—“empowerment through employability or entrepreneurship”.*

## 6. Studying Impact

Within a span of two years, and in a situation where the current system of training is neither comprehensive nor helpful in providing jobs, the following have been achieved:

- The SALON-i programme has reached out to a large number of women and girls across 18 states covering urban, semi-urban and rural areas.
- There are 21 partner organizations, through 160 centres who have demonstrated a range of strategies on mobilization, formatting and duration of the course, job placements and follow-up
- The SALON-i course helped women fulfil their long cherished dream of pursuing their interest in “beauty”.
- A large number of women and girls felt confident about having acquired a “skill” that could be useful in future –for taking up a job or to explore self-employment opportunities.
- Despite the constraints of having to travel to a full-time assignment with poor compensation, girls felt they had to gain some experience before they could explore better paid jobs or start on their own.
- A few of the girls have explored and succeeded in different models of self-employment such as providing door-to-door services or specialized services.
- The partner organizations value GCPL’s partnerships and recognize its contribution and support, which include the supply of equipment and consumables for the SALON-i labs, content development, TOTs and certification.
- Naturals acknowledged that the SALON-i programme is a timely response to the industry’s needs and the course design matches with industry standards for assistant beauticians. They are keen to absorb SALON-i graduates in their salons across the country.
- The recent partnership with the salon chain to strengthen its upcoming training academy, specifically in the area of content development and pedagogy, is another step into establishing linkages and building shared value.
- For GCPL, the learning drawn from the two-year long process is quite valuable – specifically, gaining a broader understanding of the beauty industry, the possibilities and challenges in “skilling” women and girls for gainful employment or entrepreneurship, and recognizing the scope of the programme in creating a platform for empowerment of women and girls.

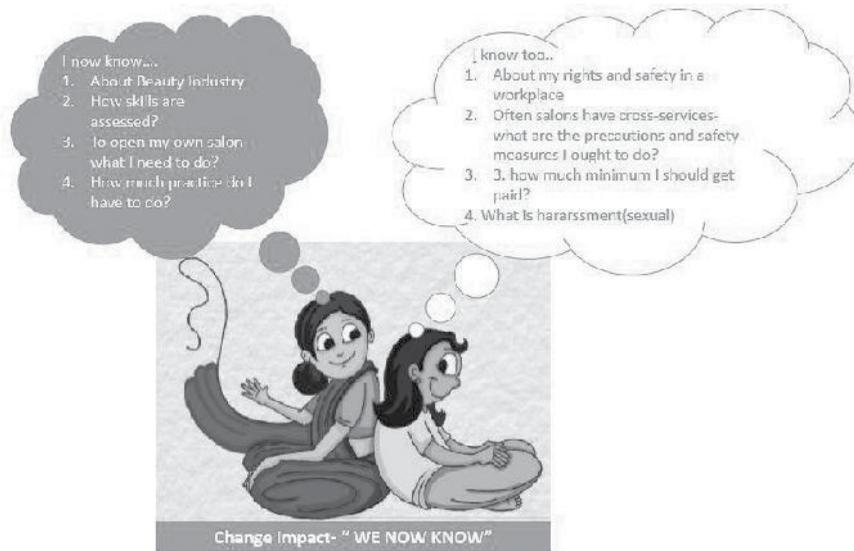


Figure 6

## 6.1 Suchitra's Story

Suchitra always dreamt of becoming a teacher, so that she could inspire students who would want to respect her and learn from her. Suchitra a trainer in a Thane centre is one of 200 trainers under the GCPL Salon-I program. The fourth daughter born in a Mumbai shanty to a physical challenged mother and an alcoholic violent father, Suchitra dropped out of school early and augmented the family income through odd jobs. Her only support was her mother, through whom she got in touch with a local lady, who ran her own beauty parlour. The world of shampoos and creams and coloured lipsticks and cosmetics was in sharp contrast to Suchitra's own difficult life marked with hopelessness. Soon Suchitra (now trained in the beautician's trade) was the only financial support for the family of 7.

When Suchitra heard of the Salon-i training centre she grabbed the opportunity to become a trainer attracted by the twin promises of an assured income and an escape from a marriage she didn't want to get into. She met with GCPL members during the interview. Of course Suchitra didn't have a regular diploma in beauty care (as is true of many of Salon-i's trainers). But she did possess in abundance, the strong desire and grit to change her circumstances. These were characteristics greatly valued by the GPCL team which hired her.

## 6.2 Mariya, our Miracle Girl

Mariya was one of three daughters and had been unable to clear her 12<sup>th</sup> boards. Her parents were reluctant to let her continue her education. In the summers she enrolled into a beautician's course (with Godrej salon-Ias partner organization). Although initially she was not very interested in the course, after the three month training and with post-interactions with her trainer, she changed drastically. Mariya's transformation was remarkable because she soon aspired to be not just a beautician but a trainer.

She respected the way a trainer could motivate and handhold participants with patience and understanding and wanted to be able to emulate that. Unlike the teachers she had in school who ignored students "who were not good enough", here there was someone who took an inclusive approach and tried to involve everyone. Mariya took on life with a new sense of purpose one of the best students in her class. She participated in the zonal skillathon and went on to the National Finals in Delhi. She went to one of our employment partners and had special sessions. She also became the face of our AV based training modules as an inspiration for other girls. And needless to say, she is one of our best trainers today.

## 6.3 Veiled Victory

Samreen from a conservative Muslim family migrated to Mumbra in 1992, post the communal riots in Mumbai. Life for her was already predetermined— going to school and waiting to get married. She decided to build her own fate instead of sitting as a mute spectator and letting life run its course and that made all the difference. The journey was not easy though. There were societal pressures on her family to keep her veiled and confined. However Samreen negotiated her way through the opposition and completed the course at Salon-i.

Today at 21, she is an exuberant, talkative woman who is proud to be a manager at a parlour in Kandivali (in the Western suburbs of Mumbai) and also the first girl in her family to be working for a salary of Rs 10,000 per month. She has vowed to help her younger siblings achieve whatever they want in life and strives to make her parents' life comfortable.

## 7. Future Plans

### 7.1 Life skills and Gender Sensitization: Gender Resource Centre

In consultation with partner organizations, the beauty training centres are being further transformed into gender resource centres with a range of activities and events that equip women and girls with life skills – assertion, negotiation, critical thinking, decision-making, working together, personal/collective goal setting – and prepare them to dialogue on issues related to patriarchy, violence and abuse. Life-skills, gender and facilitation are being introduced as cross cutting themes for empowering women and girls, and to strengthen the spirit of the programme. This will increase the agency of women and girls as employees, entrepreneurs, members of the family and society. They will become confident, be able to negotiate, and to support each other in times of crisis. The trainees look towards building stronger relationships, add value to the centre and slowly develop their own network. A range of issue-based learning resources will be made available, along with activities and events that establish and strengthen a meaningful engagement with women, girls and the larger community, and in turn support the mobilization process, increase visibility and strengthen the shared value of the programme.

### 7.2 Revisit the intent of the programme, keeping the shared value perspective and defining the 3Es

Alignment of the programme objectives of employability, entrepreneurship and empowerment (3Es) with partner aspirations is important. While empowerment is a cross cutting outcome integral to the process there is a need for reflection within the GCPL team, along with workshops/consultations with partner organizations, center managers and trainers.

Since the SALON-i course is the key activity of the intervention, there is a need to respond to the **specific streams of demand** (if required, by offering two different courses):

- For women and girls who wish to take up full-time employment, the industry (especially professional salons / chains) expects candidates with skills in pedicure, manicure, and facial and as assistants. The need is to provide women and girls with lots of practice that would help strengthen the Standard Operating Procedures. Precision must be maximized and time taken minimized for each service.

- For women and girls who wish to be self-employed, the course will have to be tweaked to include basics of different skills for a range of (culturally relevant) services including bridal make up, hairstyle, haircut, Mehendi and other services. Such a group may not be keen on perfecting only a few skills.

For this to be successful, SALON-i trainers and team members of partner organizations need to identify women and girls with an attitude and aptitude for entrepreneurship. An intensive EDP is designed and offered to such trainees across partners/centres every six months.

### **7.3 Facilitation and Pedagogical Guidance for the Future**

The pedagogy of the ToT and training sessions with participants need to be based on the principles of adult learning and adoption of an engaging process with a focus on “learning” rather than “teaching”

There is a need to create further capacity building opportunities for SALON-i trainers and team members through periodic regional-level refreshers. There is also a need to reflect upon the intent of the programme, overview of the industry, scope and possibilities in terms of career and market opportunities, and on each of the key steps of the programme—mobilization, screening, planning and transacting sessions, mapping and exposure visits, providing support for placement and self-employment.

Designing and development of audiovisuals, films and other learning resources can further strengthen the TOT, the course and the programme.

## **8. Looking forward**

For the Salon-I team the journey continues. They believe that this is a human intervention and not a juggernaut of numbers where people especially women can be put through training inputs and the output/outcome would be livelihood enhancement. The entire ecosystem needs to be considered. The training also cannot be a merely one-size fits all formula, especially with a heterogeneous group of women who all have their own challenges shaped by several social and cultural factors. The intervention is to create change catalysts through trainers who envision transformation thereby kindling the spirit of self worth and self reliance amongst the girls and women. They can then handhold the students and enable and encourage them to dream and imagine.