

Evaluation of Skills Training Impact on Women Empowerment in AJK

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Abstract

A Women Skills Training Centre was established in Dhulli (AJK) for the time period from 2007 to 2010. With the overall objective to empower women in the earthquake affected areas of Azad Jammu and Kashmir, with the specific objective to provide demand-driven skills training, this course has addressed two issues that generally hamper women's perspectives - societal restrictions and limited commercial opportunities.

By passing on skills through some women trained, it was possible to reach 17% of all women between 15 and 25 years in the area within 7 courses over 6 months each, directly affecting 7% of the total population. The average income of trained women after only some months to a year after the training already reached half the average wage of skilled women in Pakistan. 10% were offered a job after the training. Coupled with their increased confidence, about 70% felt that their family and community now respected them more. Nevertheless there were cases where communities or family members would initially support the training, but then hinder the woman from offering her skills on a commercial basis. Some women assured that just offering their skills to family already meant a great economic relief, but many attempted to establish a commercial venture and of these most successfully did so.

Most women openly complained how they were marginalized by society, even though the earthquake has brought some positive change in the mindset of many people. The success of such a training centre will always be dependent on community acceptance, and assistance to women and communities should always be provided along.

An unexpected positive side effect was, that many women were motivated to rejoin school after the training. Initially abandoning education because of a lack of perspectives with increased education, they were encouraged by their abilities in the handicrafts sector and with their own income were also able to afford higher education themselves. Keeping this in mind, highly effective vocational training is possible in such remote areas, granting positive economical as well as societal trade offs. Observing the success of women in village based training centers over future years, especially the acceptance among the local community, will prove whether this option could be a role model for the area.

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1. Acknowledgements

The success of the WSTC in Dhulli would not have been possible without the donations received from many different people in Austria. We hope that they can read from this paper what their contribution has achieved.

The ADC has funded the centre and has this way left a positive image of Austria in the Earthquake stricken area as a committed donor even years after a disaster.

ERRA was a cooperative supervisor to the whole Reconstruction process. Without their support the WSTC would have never come into existence.

The DRU Bagh was always readily available for information and support during the project duration and for writing the evaluation. Equally the SWWD has been of great help all along.

A special acknowledgment goes to Madam Saira, principal of Government Vocational Training Centre, Rera, UC Swange. She was there for all walk in interviews for all the batches to help us select the right candidates and has always extended a great moral and practical support, whenever we needed it. In addition to that she has also trained our teachers.

As highlighted in the paper, the centre's success was heavily dependent on community acceptance. The whole staff of the centre, including guards, cook, teachers and project coordinator have all contributed to that cooperation. They have worked for this institution with passion and the wish to contribute to the development of their area.

2. Introduction

The project *Empowering Women through Skills Learning* or *Women Skills Training Centre (WSTC)*, in Dhulli, District Bagh, Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), Pakistan was established in August 2006 by Hope 87 and since 2007 was run as a cooperative effort by Hope 87 and proLoka. It was established for the demand of training for women in the area, who otherwise had very limited job opportunities and often were not even able to complete their schooling. With the co-financing of the Austrian Development Cooperation from 2008, a time frame until January 2010 was fixed that was later extended for an additional 6 months to July 2010. It was further decided that once the training centre was closed, multiple training units should be established in the different villages, run by former trainees of the Centre.

By evaluating the impact of this training, this paper aims to shed some light on the situation of women in AJK, their restraints in society their perspectives in commercial activities.

2.1. AJK - History and Area

Azad Jammu and Kashmir ("Free Jammu and Kashmir", referred to as PoK, or "Pakistan occupied Kashmir" by India) is the Pakistan administered part of the former princely state of Kashmir that was divided after partition in 1947 and has since been the scene of an ongoing conflict between India (which today administers the major part of Kashmir) and Pakistan. With the UN Resolution (Simla Agreement) in 1972 the *Line of Control (LoC)* was established, now separating this mountainous area.

Today AJK is not an official province of Pakistan and for example not included in the nation wide census. It has it's own Parliament and even President, but is not fully independent from the Government in Islamabad (see Mahmud (2006)).

District Bagh is one of the 10 districts of AJK and is itself again split into 3 Tehsils and 19 Union Councils. The WSTC is located in Tehsil Bagh and carters the Union Councils Nar Sher Ali Khan and Swange, the earlier bordering the LoC. The area, like the rest of AJK consists of lush mountains and valleys (see fig. 1). The forests are extensive and cover the mountains nearly to the highest peaks. The area is situated at an altitude of 1800 to 2300 m. a.s.l. and many villages are not accessible via roads.

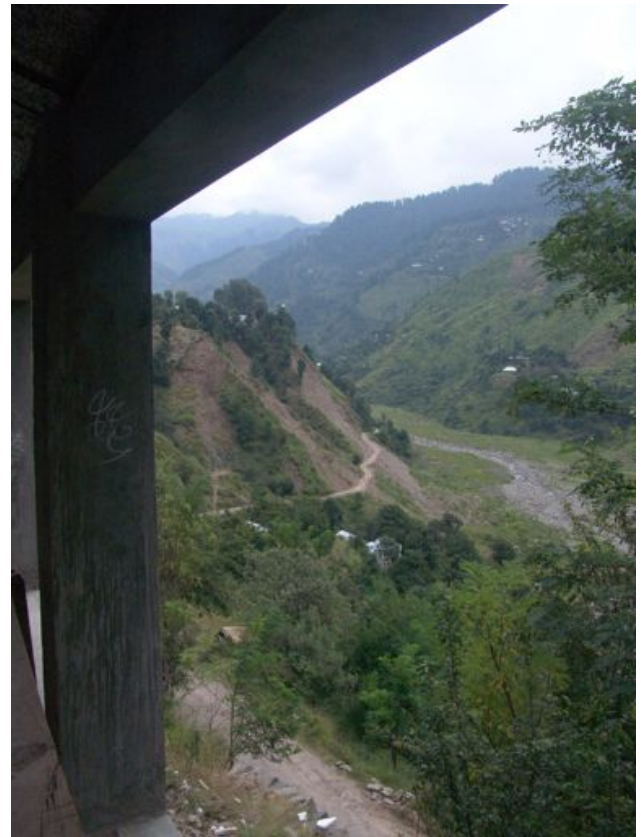


Figure 1: Nar Sher Ali Khan district seen towards the LoC.

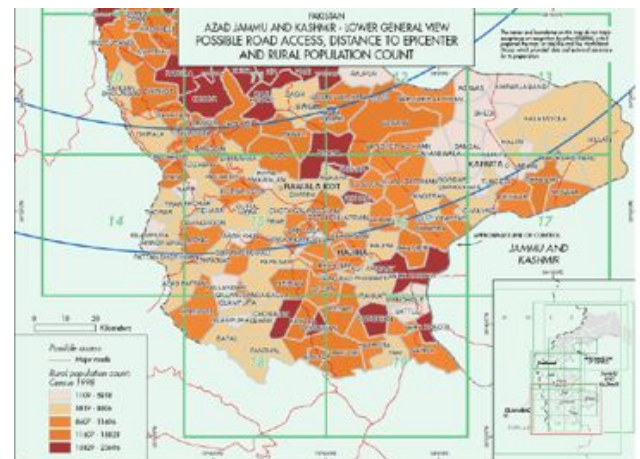


Figure 2: Nar Sher Ali Khan and Swange are East of the District capital Bagh.

2.2. Population

After the 2005 Earthquake, the population of District Bagh was 525 000, approximately 13% of the total AJK population. The population growth rate is 2.41%. Although the area is so mountainous, the population density is higher than the Pakistan average (280 people/m²). Nar Sher Ali Khan had 26 000 people, Swange 22 000. According to

AJK government sources the fraction of male/female population is close to unity in the area. According to the 2003 census, 87.5% live in rural areas. The average family size is 7.4 in district Bagh.

Although more and more common especially in the cities of AJK (Balakot, Muzaffarabad, Bagh, Rawalakot, Mirpur), women are generally not carrying out a job outside their home and are seldom entering public space at all. Women may stay in the same room as male guests and are seldom veiled. Nevertheless they are subject to the decisions of their male family members at most times, be it their future husband or their education. With more and more husbands and fathers leaving the area for a job outside the AJK, it happens increasingly that women are left in charge of a household without having a say in community matters. In situations where the father died and no male son was old enough, families left the area because they could not stand being subject to the disposal of the village community.

Pakistan generally and its rural areas especially has a very bad record of equality in medical treatment and education between the sexes (see [Bari \(2000\)](#) and [Easterly \(2001\)](#)). This can be felt in Kashmir as well, where medical standards especially in the remote areas and after the Earthquake are dire while education is generally better than the Pakistan average but has suffered a major blow with the destruction of many schools. Girls are often hindered by their parents to join school after 5th grade when no Girls Middle School is available in the closer area or when they grow old enough to look after live stock. Others leave school themselves because of a lack of perspectives.

2.3. Education

While the DRU Bagh (District Reconstruction Unit) claims that the female literacy rate of both Union Councils lies somewhere above 90%, this is probably highly exaggerated and is rather below 60% and even lower for the Nar Sher Ali Khan Union Council. Average female literacy in rural areas of Pakistan (excluding FATA, Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan) lies at 36.2% (see [PLFS \(2009\)](#)). The FATA has a lot lower values, AJK and Gilgit-Baltistan are generally above average. Literacy in AJK for both sexes lies at 64% (see [PD Department AJK \(2008\)](#)) compared to an average 57.4% in Pakistan proper.

2.4. Economy

84% of the households have small scale agriculture, which accounts for 30 - 40% of the total income. Additionally many Kashmiris work in other parts of Pakistan or have moved abroad (especially the Gulf States and Great Britain) from where they support their families.

While Union Council Swange is mainly covering low lying areas of the valley, including the villages along the main roads, villages in Nar Sher Ali Khan are often inaccessible with roads and people are more dependent on agriculture. This is reflected by the average economic data (see [fig. 3](#)) as well as the educational data (see [fig. 6](#)).

A comprehensive summary of population, economy and educational facilities can be downloaded from [PD Department AJK \(2008\)](#).

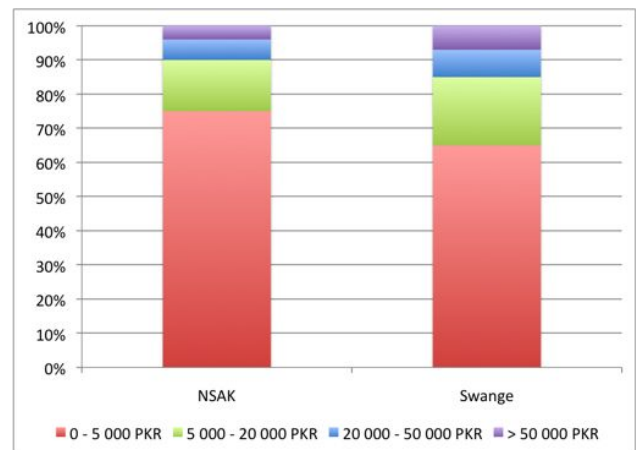


Figure 3: Average monthly income in Swange is 32% higher than in Nar Sher Ali Khan (100 PKR is roughly €1).

2.5. Recent Developments

On 8th October 2005 a disastrous earthquake hit AJK and parts of Khyber-Pakhtoonkhwa. Measuring 7.6 on Richter scale at 08.52 hrs, it directly affected around 4 million people, 3.3 million of whom were left homeless. In addition, over 75,000 individuals were killed and 125,000 were injured. According to [ERRA \(2006\)](#), 95% of all educational institutions in the most heavily affected districts of AJK, or 3,685 out of 3,879 buildings, were fully or partially damaged and many people lost their homes and often their agricultural land as well, which forced large numbers of families into refugee camps, some of which are populated to date. While this event has caused great destruction and personal loss, it has opened the area to outside investment, technologies like a mobile phone network and aid organizations from Pakistan proper and abroad. This change has greatly affected the population in their daily life, especially so women, who are traditionally subject to a more conservative lifestyle compared to other Pakistani provinces.

The whole Kashmir is a disputed border area between Pakistan and India and is as such a focal point for political dispute. Extremists trained in training centers in Pakistan (some of which probably are situated in AJK) infiltrate the Indian administered part regularly. Apart

from troop movement and a permanent heavy army presence, little is however felt in AJK or even talked about, while the multi-ethnic Indian part is striving with open conflict. With an aid vacuum especially immediately after the earthquake and now again after most other NGOs left, an influx of Extremist groups in disguise was feared (see [Byramji \(2006\)](#)). A recent survey provides insight on public opinions on both sides of the border (see [Bradnock \(2010\)](#)).

2.6. Vocational Training for Women in the area

The department of Social Welfare and Women Development, Bagh (SWWD, see [SWWD AJK \(2008\)](#)) is involved in many activities for social welfare and women development. Under their supervision 7 Vocational Institutes/Rural Household and Education Centers are being run for women in the whole of District Bagh. Additionally the government related institutions NAVTEC and TEVTA run 6 institutions and 4 training centers are run by the local government. 1 VTC is run by ERRA, 1 by the Qatar Charity and 2 further by unidentified NGOs. One TEVTA and the ERRA VTC are situated in UC Swange. In Union Council Nar Sher Ali Khan, the WSTC is the only available Vocational Training Centre.

UNESCO and the AJK government have published a policy paper that gives a comprehensive insight into future plans for Vocational Training in AJK (see [Ferej \(2009\)](#)).

Recently the Azad Jammu and Kashmir's Ministry of Women Development has launched a new initiative to provide income generation opportunities to vulnerable women of Azad Kashmir by linking them to markets (see [DAWN \(2010\)](#)).

2.7. The proLoka/Hope 87 WSTC and its goals

The overall objective of this project was a contribution to empower women in the earthquake affected areas of Azad Jammu and Kashmir, with the specific objective to provide demand-driven skills training opportunities for at least 140 women. The combination of need of additional income and opportunity of strengthening the women's role after the earthquake was a great perspective for the establishment of such a training institution.

The training was a six month long skills training course to women including tailoring, embroidery, knitting and making of home decoration items. The primary target group were women between the age of 16-30 of union councils Nar Sher Ali Khan and Swange (see [fig. 2](#)). The indirect beneficiaries were the families and communities of these women.

The head teacher and second teacher were both chosen from the local community, so they could build their capacities to manage the centre on their own and could make it sustainable in two to three years time.



Figure 4: Traditional Kashmiri embroidery is a typical feature of local women's dress.

Women are traditionally responsible for household chores and child rearing, along with contributing to the agricultural activities. The program aimed at developing the capacities of these poor and poorly educated women so that they become confident and become capable to earn some small amounts of money on their own. As each session had at least 20 women, it is an interacting point for women from different villages. They came to get training and also shared their knowledge and ideas. This was envisioned as broadening their horizon and thus contributing to a societal change in this area - according to the 'Build back better' better credo, which tries to see a disaster to a society as an opportunity for needed change and otherwise neglected progress.

Additionally the women would be able to earn and support their families and hence could take their part in Rehabilitation and Reconstruction.

2.7.1. Selection of trainees and general training concept

All women were between 16 and 27 years of age, with an average of 19 years. Their schooling was in average 7th grade (see [fig. 5](#)). Until 5th grade, children are generally taught in co-educated village schools, not far from their home. Between 5th and 10th grade the situation becomes more difficult, as girls middle schools are less often within reach and there is generally no co-education after 5th grade. 11th and 12th grade are colleges, students who passed the 14th grade are generally students of the Al-lama Iqbal Open University, based in Islamabad, which

supports distance learning. As can be seen in fig. 6, female education in the more rural and often a lot more remote Nar Sher Ali Khan Union Council is a lot lower than in Swange. Students from the WSTC were generally better educated than the average female population.

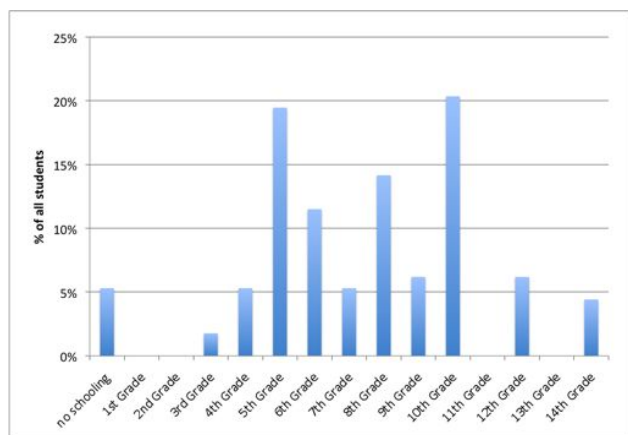


Figure 5: The education distribution of students from the WSTC (n=113).

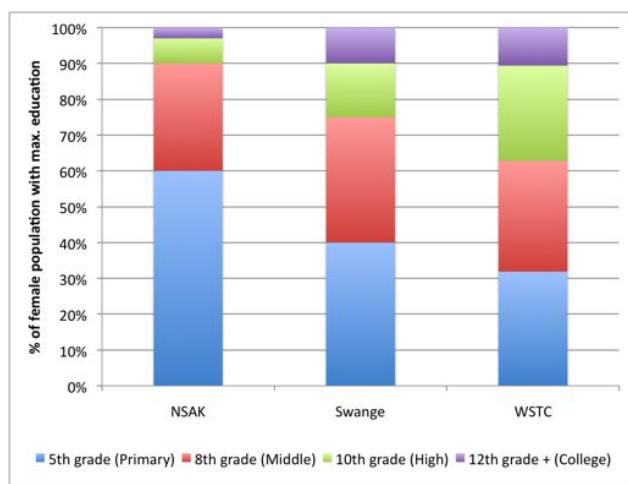


Figure 6: Girls education in Union Councils Nar Sher Ali Khan and Swange, compared to the students from the WSTC.

The women were chosen based on walk-in interviews which were carried out before each course. Out of 70 - 90 applicants who showed up each time, 20 - 25 were chosen for the training. Sometimes more experienced applicants were given the chance of a one month advanced course. Attention was paid to their native village to achieve an even distribution of trainees throughout the two Union Councils. Eventually the 199 women (173 in the main courses and 26 in the advanced courses) hailed from more than 34 different villages.

Considering the fact that the average family size in the two Union Councils is 7.4 and many students passed their

knowledge on to other people (see fig.7), a total of nearly 3600 people were directly affected by the Training Centre (7.38% of the total population of the two Union Councils). Using population data for Pakistan to estimate the female population between 15 and 25 years, 17% of the target group were directly or indirectly trained.

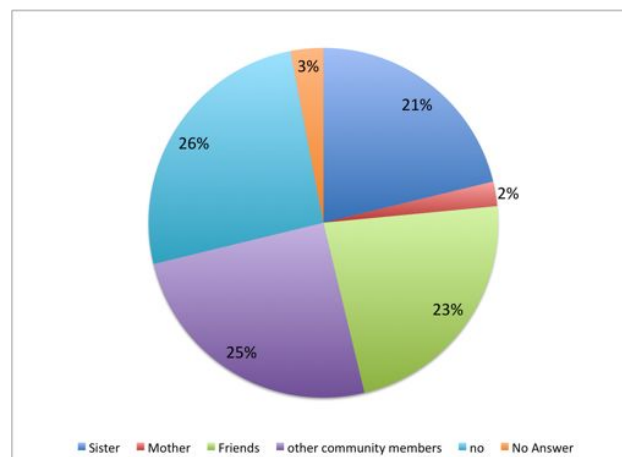


Figure 7: Have you trained any one in your family or in the neighborhood on the learnt skills (n=113)?

Each student paid a monthly fee of PKR 100 (€1) with an exception for especially poor families. Additional finances were acquired by selling the work pieces from the training centre in the local market and through a number of exhibitions (3 at the WSTC, 1 in Bagh and 1 in Muzaffarabad).

Parents were asked to come by once during the training time for feedback on the training and to voice concerns.

During the 6 months training the students were taught in the basic techniques of sewing, stitching, knitting, cutting, embroidery (manual and machine), design of local clothes, painting techniques and making of home decoration items. Training times were each day from 8 am to 5 pm with a holiday on Sundays. The students were working in groups, with their progress documented by a group leader in a daily write up. Group Competitions and days to display their work in public encouraged the trainees. At the end of each 6 months training course each trainee was given a certificate and a sewing machine as a start up capital.

After the last batch concluded its training in July 2010, the training centre was closed. 12 former students were invited for an interview out of whom 3 were chosen to set up a Training Centre in their Village. The sewing machines and other material from the centre were donated to these women.

2.8. Literature

The role of women in disaster relief and their stance in society in these times is dealt with in scholarly works and case studies from different countries (see "Gender and Disaster Sourcebook" at <http://www.gdnonline.org/sourcebook/> or Hamilton et. al. (2007) for the Kashmir earthquake). Nevertheless, all these studies deal with societies where women enjoy more extensive freedom and accessibility to jobs or the actual possibility to join in the reconstruction process actively. The role of women in AJK is still considerably restricted.

Ferej (2009) points at some key issues that vocational training in AJK should address in future, among them the basic education of trainees and gender equity which will both be addressed in this paper.

Naqvi et. al. (2002) give a good insight into commercial perspectives of women in Pakistan and their ability to make decisions independently. Basic statistics from this report will be used as a means of comparison and the factor of choice will equally be referred to.

The PLFS (2009) was used as a base for population data in general (assuming that the differences between the average Pakistani population and the AJK population are small). Although a comprehensive report on population of Pakistan published by the Government, it does not include any data on AJK which highlights how this part of the country is often sidelined in national considerations.

Hayat (2009) gives comprehensive statistics on women in the Pakistani job market which were used as a baseline for the results obtained from the answers women gave on their job wishes and successes.

Byramji (2006) gives a brief insight into the situation of the AJK after the earthquake in general and the women's role in the reconstruction process especially.

Other papers on women, labor and education in Pakistan were consulted for general concepts and statistical findings (Khan et.al. (2009), Aslam et.al. (2008)).

2.9. Goal of the Evaluation

This evaluation looks at the impact the WSTC had on the local population, and how it achieved its goal of women empowerment. By evaluating the responses of the women interviewed, more general statements about the commercial perspectives of women in AJK can be made.

3. Evaluation method

After the trainings all women were contacted and asked for an interview in their village. The interviews were conducted by the teachers from the WSTC. Although this risked biased responses from the students, this was the only option feasible. Because of cultural norms, interviews could only be conducted by women, who again had to be accustomed to the area since finding the various hamlets where the students lived was a challenging task. Additionally they evaluated whether the students were still capable of reproducing their learnt skills, to determine the most qualified women to establish village based training centers in future. It could be shown however, that most of the students were probably responding in a very honest manner and did not pay heed to the fact that their interviewers were their former teachers.

The students were asked to answer 21 questions. Additionally they were encouraged to recount their experiences, their situation as a woman in society and how the training had affected their life.

The questions were aimed at answering two distinct questions: *What was the success of the WSTC?* and *What are the commercial perspectives for women in the AJK society and what are their opinions?*

The complete Questionnaire is provided in the Appendix.

3.1. Conducted Interviews

Of 173 students who were trained in the WSTC during all 6 month courses, 113 were interviewed (65%). Some women could not be contacted since they had already been married outside Kashmir and a few could not be reached because either they had moved to the mountain pastures (*dhook*) where they move with their live stock or were in a bad health state. Some students who could not be reached in the first attempt, later visited the Centre independently to tell their teachers about their achievements. Additionally, the students from the last batch were not interviewed since this paper was written while it was still underway. Also students who only joined for an extracurricular short course were not interviewed.

4. Response to the Training

The students were asked to judge how satisfied they were with the training and with the teachers (see fig. 9 and 10). Some students in the first patch criticized that the teachers were not experienced enough, but acknowledged that the training as such was excellent.



Figure 8: Students cutting cloth pieces for a shalwar kameez.

Most of the students praised the discipline and strictness executed by the teachers, including the strict leave policy, the training techniques, group work and the daily supervision via a diary. The absence of this commitment prompted those who earlier had joined a Government run Vocational Training centre to leave and join WSTC. Many students also mentioned that having material and sewing machines available at all times was positive and motivated them. *"WSTC fulfilled my expectations, since teacher's attention and parents meetings made possible the good result. In Government schools no attention is paid towards the students."*, says Mehmoona. Aasia says: *"As a group leader student's diary writing to monitor the progress of each student was a good initiative."* Another argument for success was the safe environment of the premises which only made it's public acceptance possible. Nazia and Kalsoom state that as their most important plus: *"Safe and secure environment of the WSTC played the primary role. It build up the community confidence and they allowed the women to go for training."* While there was a lot of skepticism towards the training centre from the public in the beginning, regular meetings with village elders and parents gradually resulted in them supporting the centre and spreading this trust. Today, the communities are approaching the centre to keep up the work rather than close it as planned in August 2010. For one student the quality of the training centre in Dhulli prompted her to move from Rawalpindi back to Kashmir for 6 months: *"I have left a Vocational Training Centre in Rawalpindi because I was not satisfied there and have joined WSTC where I was very happy. For that reason I moved back to Dhulli and stayed at my un-*

cle's house", says Zamina who lives in Rawalpindi with her family.

Those students who were illiterate, always mentioned that fact to underline how even though they were handicapped, they learned all the same.

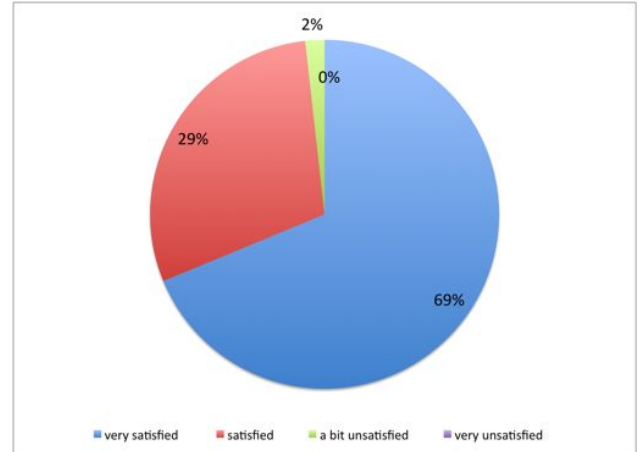


Figure 9: How was your experience at the centre? Did the centre fulfill your expectations and if not, why (n=113)?

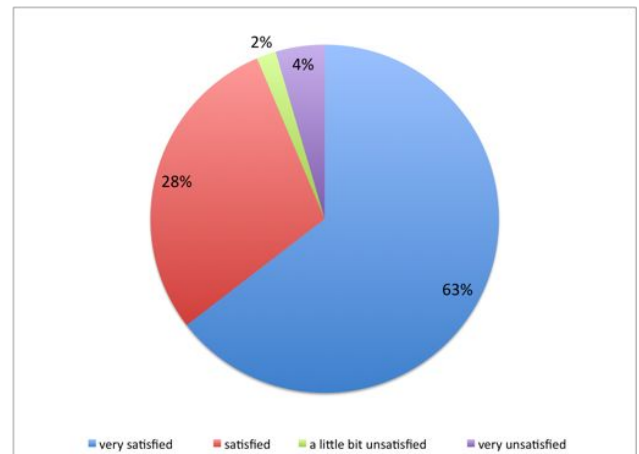


Figure 10: Are you satisfied with the performance of the teachers at WSTC (n=111)?

Asked what kind of assistance they would need to expand their work many were satisfied with the status quo and felt that first they need to get some experience before deciding how to move on. 2 - 3 students in each course voiced the wish to get financial support to set up their own small-scale training centre. Others said they still needed support in their village to convince the community that working independently and earning money was acceptable and should be supported. Some of the most skilled and motivated students were employed as support teachers in the WSTC. Setting up of small scale Village VTC is currently under way.

When asked what additional training they would like to get, most students voiced the wish to learn to make gents clothes (so they could make clothes for their brothers as well). Additionally training in local embroidery and different machines (pecot, over lock) were also in demand. Some also wanted to learn to work on a computer which would be an additional qualification for governmental school jobs. Many asked for a continuation of the Training Centre as an IT skills centre since their brothers voiced envy over not having the chance to receive skills training like they did.

Although the attendance policy was strict (there was a record kept and students who showed up most were awarded a cash prize at the end of the course) it was still up to every student to show up - nevertheless, the average attendance time for all courses was 95% in 6 months even though the travel time for many was long (see fig. 11). Especially in bad weather and in winter when long foot marches became not only tiring but also dangerous in exposed areas, the effort made by the students to reach the WSTC 5 days a week was considerable.

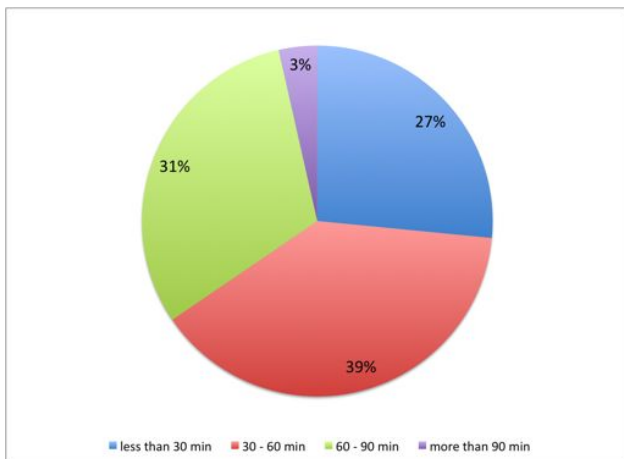


Figure 11: How long was your daily way (one way) to the WSTC (n=113)?

5. Perspectives

The perspectives such a Training Centre poses for women in AJK were evaluated on two grounds: economical and societal. In the end both can only be understood in an interrelation:

The *defensive* viewpoint states, that economic perspectives for women are only possible within the societal framework.

The *offensive* viewpoint acknowledges, that economic success will result in a loosening of the societal restrictions for women.

These perspectives, aptly pronounced by the wife of the founder of Pakistan, Madar-i-Millat Mohtarma Fatima Jinnah (see [Ahmad \(2003\)](#)) will be presented based on the data while the extensive narrative responses will be a guideline to link the two.

5.1. Economical Perspectives

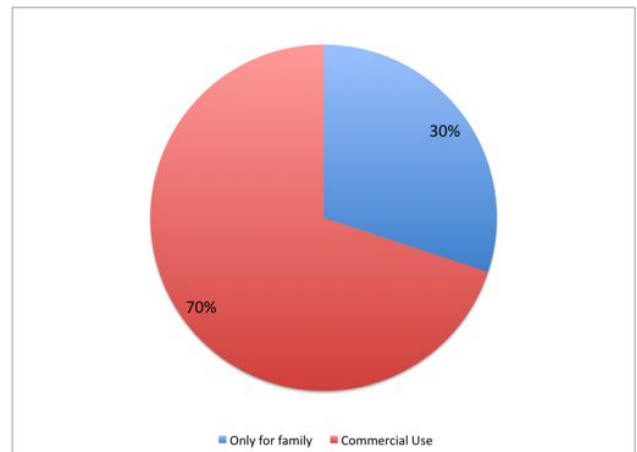


Figure 12: How are you using the skills in which you were trained in the centre (n=113)?

Most of the students at the centre had the subsequent wish to earn money with their skills apart from being able to do stitching and sewing for their immediate family. Of those only 2% did yet not succeed in earning money. Especially students of the later batches said, that being still inexperienced and already having other former WSTC students in their village who were offering their services, it was difficult to push into the market.

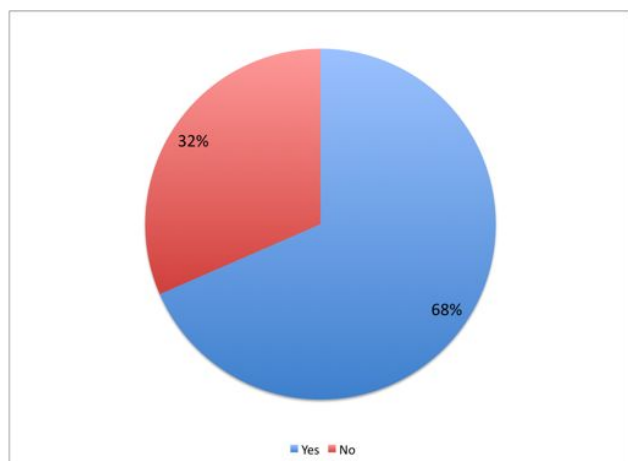


Figure 13: Are you able to make a living out of the training and are able to help your family (n=113)?

30% were only using their skills for their family or immediate relatives without earning money. A few had no other intention and emphasized that this was a form of saving valuable money and time since it would otherwise be spent on travels to the market and on the tailor. Some others though faced problems in expanding their work commercially. 3 former students gave health problems as a reason, which disabled them from sitting upright for a continuous time or limited them in making contact to prospective customers. Adding to these are two women who had to drop out of different courses because of health issues. The issues were always rather unusual for women at that age and generally deemed curable (extensive back pain, eye sickness, kidney malfunction) and document the lack of adequate medical treatment - especially for women - in rural areas of Pakistan (see Bari (2000) and Easterly (2001)).



Figure 14: Like at home, women work sitting cross-legged on the ground.

3 others said that after getting married, their husband

disallowed them to follow their profession. Others are restricted from doing so by their parents or brothers. They have limited their work to their immediate family. Nargas is experiencing this restriction at home but openly criticizing it in the interview: *"My parents do not allow me to leave the house, hence I am only stitching for my family. I would really like to get more education, but my father is convinced that education is not important for women and they therefore should stay at home."*

Many are facing the immediate effects of the earthquake. With family members deceased they have to look after the household at all times and did not have the time to expand their work (5 students gave this as a reason). Two students have to look after their livestock. Families often only have one or two water buffalos or goats that are kept in the vicinity of the house but have to be tended since there are no designated paddocks.

Yasmeen recounts how the remoteness of her house, close to the border, makes it impossible for her to reach customers: *"My parents died and my brother alone can not afford further education for me. Since I am living on a hill top with only two households in the vicinity I am not earning any money from my skills."*

4 students claimed they had lost interest in the work and were not pursuing it.



Figure 15: Home decoration items were among the most sought for pieces in the local market, bought from the centre.

These answers correspond somehow with statistical results from Naqvi et. al. (2002). It is probable that women who said they did not feel like using their skills commercially were ultimately not allowed to do so in the first place or felt too intimidated by the lack of perspectives (Hayat (2009) does not give the hindrance by husband/father as a reason either but summarizes all under "occupied in domestic work"). Considering this Pakistan wide statistic,

46% (10% at the WSTC) of women who did not seek work gave as a reason that their husband/father would not allow them, 24.3% (17.5%) said they were occupied with domestic work, 13% (42%) do not want to work outside their home, 6.7% (2.5%) see no perspectives in the region and 1.7% (7.5%) are physically impaired. 8.2% (20.5%) give other reasons.

While different papers (Naqvi et. al. (2002), Hayat (2009), Khan et.al. (2009)) observe different relations between socio-economical factors and the willingness to engage in commercial activities, those could only be quantified for education in this paper since the age of the women was not diverse and family situations were not determined. Naqvi et. al. (2002) and Khan et.al. (2009) observe that more educated women are more likely to engage in commercial activities although Hayat (2009) somewhat relativizes this conclusion. As can be seen in fig. 16, this general observation is equally made at the WSTC, as women with a high school education are much more likely to engage commercially while women with primary education are equally likely to not earn money. Nevertheless, the average education of those who decided to use their skill commercially was only 1.36 years above those who refrained from doing so. Also, from this findings, it should not be readily concluded, that less educated women are performing worse in commercial activities. As can be seen in fig. 24, more education only slightly tended to result in a better income. But women with less education, are likely to be less determined or confident to engage in commercial activities independently and may be less aware of the financial potential of their skills.

Also 67% of the illiterate women engaged in commercial activity, stemming partly from their pronounced motivation (all of them emphasized their pride of having a handicraft skill even though being illiterate), partly from another observation made by Naqvi et. al. (2002). They found, that the poorer the family was, the more likely women were engaging in commercial work - this time not because they were able to due to good education, but because they were forced too. It was obvious from the women from especially poor families, that they were supported by their family to sell their handicraft to contribute to the family finances.

Assuming that education and wealth of the family are not strictly related (many women leave school because they are not allowed to continue due to societal reasons or have lost motivation rather than not being able to afford it), education is the important cofactor when talking about skills training of women. Poor women may sometimes not join school because they need to work at home or can't afford higher education, but may nevertheless be more readily encouraged by their family to earn money. Women from wealthier families with low education however are not forced to earn money and their low education poses a bar-

rier for them to engage in commercial activities (only 52% of grade 5 students used their skill commercially, compared to 67% of illiterates).

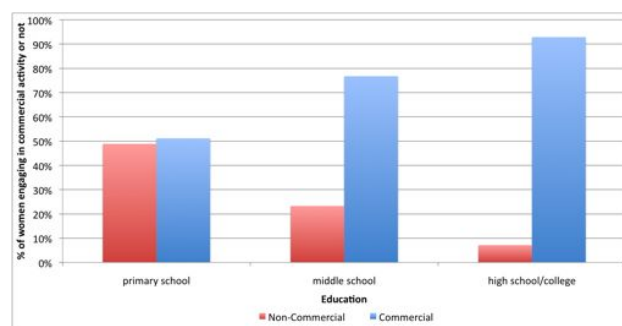


Figure 16: Educated women are more likely to engage in commercial activity (n=113).

Whether they are able to support their family with their earnings is not linked to a fixed amount but rather to the overall financial situation of the family and how the women decided to use the money. Some who didn't earn anything, saw it as a support as they could do the stitching and sewing otherwise done by a costly tailor in the market. Considering the times it took many students to reach Dhulli (see fig.11), which is the only main Bazaar in the area, travels for getting clothes fixed or made can be expensive and long. Others earned well but still could not make up for the loss of other earning family members. Shazia, who earns 500 - 1000 PKR/month recounts how her younger brother recently dropped out of school to get a job and equally contribute to the family's finances, now earning 5000 PKR/month. Fozia says: "I do not earn enough to cover all expenses, but its better than nothing. My father and brother both died in the Earthquake and now I am the only one earning money in the family. As a consequence I also had to leave school. Earlier I was already interested to participate in a Vocational Training Centre but could not afford it."

In a few families, the women have become the only family member with a regular income (see fig. 17). "My father died early and thus I never got any education. The teachers did an excellent job in teaching me skills even though I am illiterate. These days I am in a very upset state of mind since my only brother died just one month ago. But I am proud to be able to earn money for myself and my mother" says Pashmeen who earns up to 1000 PKR/month.

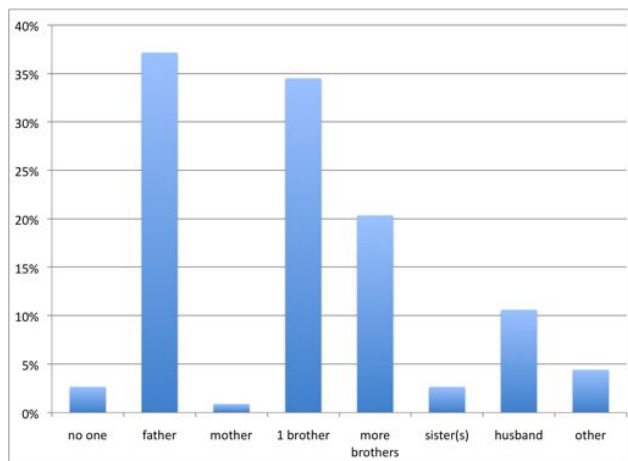


Figure 17: Who else in your family is earning money and contributing it to the family finances (n=113)?



Figure 18: Students are taking the opportunity of good weather to work outside.

Many women seemed to be using the money foremost for themselves. If the income was low (< 500 PKR/month) they could independently spend money in the market on clothes or other goods and afford travels to their desired school. For many families the inability to afford transport costs to a middle school further away resulted in the girls discontinuing education. Women who already earned more are affording their higher education fully themselves, a few even paying all tuition fees for younger siblings.

"My mother died in the earthquake and now I am leading the household but also stitching for other community members. For the poor families in my community I am stitching clothes free of cost. With my income I can pay for tuition of my younger brothers and sister. I even got offered a job at a training centre in Quetta but had to refuse because I have to look after my family." says Aasia. Sughra says: *"My income I spend for my shopping, expenses for a Diploma course, 10th Grade exam tuition fee and the like. I stitched the poor families' clothes on 50% discount or free of cost. Before Eid I even earned PKR. 3000 - 4000/ and purchased a Dish Antenna for our home. Since with my earnings I managed to finance my grade 10 exam, I am now able to look for a job in the government sector. I do not care too much about the salary there, but just want to get away from home where I am confined to the house and have nothing to do."*

Many women pointed out how they stitched free of cost or at discounted rates for poor families. Students from the WSTC collectively donated self made clothes to refugees from the Swat valley, an area heavily affected by counter-Taliban army operations.

The financial possibilities were often combined with a renewed motivation for education. Most women said they felt unmotivated to go to school since the opportunities to find a job with this education were very limited. Not only did they have the financial freedom to afford College themselves, but their self esteem rose to decide themselves. *"After finishing the WSTC education I was motivated to restart my education and am now looking forward to becoming a teacher after completing the 12th year exam,"* says Zaheen. Nazima recounts: *"My father is a daily wages labour, I left the college after 12th grade, I learned the skill from WSTC and rejoined the college and bearing all expenses of education myself. Additionally I am paying for the education of my sister. After school education I want to go for an exam that enables me to become a Professor at College."* *"Because of the training at the WSTC I have gained new motivation for education and have now restarted my schooling for which I shifted to Rawalpindi. There I will later attend Medical College to become a doctor",* says Sumaira. Zubaida tells: *"While getting training at the WSTC I grew very fond of the profession of tailoring and have now joined a 2 year Diploma Course with the Government. My dream is to become a trainer in a VTC myself one day."*

Sumaira says, that *I have soon lost motivation for getting school education and feel that as a woman to have a skill like taught at the WSTC is more helpful.* Saima sums up: *"Skills training is good, education is also important but it doesn't really raise the chance to get a job if needed."* Their fear, that mere school education would not help them in the job market is supported by findings from Hayat (2009), which shows that the income of "highly skilled" women is just as high as that of "skilled" and even "unskilled" men (while those of "highly skilled" men is twice as much) and "skilled" women earn just half the monthly wage of "unskilled" men. Aslam et.al. (2008) show, that

for women, labor participation rate only increases after 10 years of school education.

Some women haven't lost the hope of finding a job outside their village yet. Seeing the immediate need in their own communities many hoped to get a medical education but most were unable to do since their parents could not afford education. Others were hoping to work as an advocate or police woman. For many, the skills training proved to be a motivation to rejoin that path.

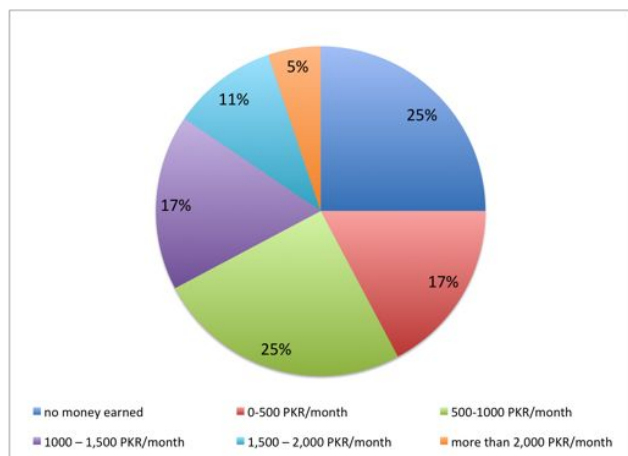


Figure 19: How much money do you earn with your new skills approximately (n=113)?

75% of the women were able to earn some regular money with their skills already a short time after their training (see fig. 19). As a means of comparison, a simple women's dress costs about 150 PKR, a trip to Bagh, the district Capital 30 - 50 PKR, 1 kg of flour 30 - 40 PKR. Wages of female Primary and Middle School teachers range between 2000 and 5000 PKR.

5.2. Job Perspectives

According to Hayat (2009), the labor force participation of women in rural Pakistan was 28.3% (2008), 3 times lower than the male average. Pakistan is performing worst in the absolute number and the gap between the sexes in South Asia.

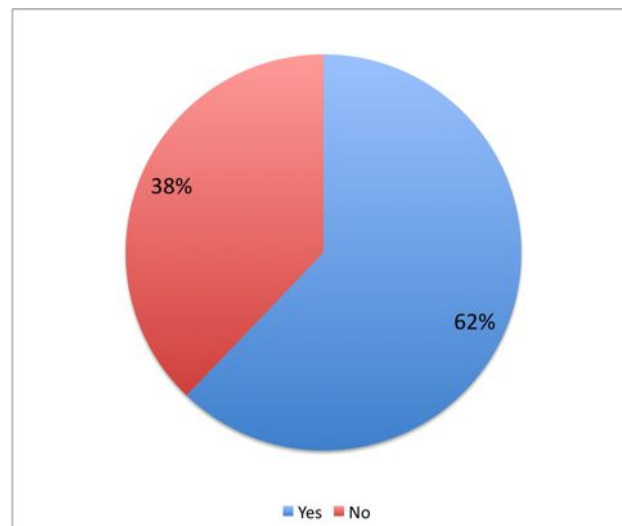


Figure 20: Would you like to find a job in future (n=111)?

To investigate the perspectives women have in AJK regarding the job market, they were asked whether they would be interested to follow a profession, what kind of profession they favor, how much they would wish to earn and finally if they tried getting a job or have even succeeded to do so.

The majority was clearly in favor of having a profession just like their brothers and fathers, 37% said they preferred to stay at home (see fig. 20). The most favored professions are those that are most likely attainable for women in AJK (see fig. 21). For most parents who would generally let their daughters take a job, working as a teacher in a local (Primary, Middle) School would be equally acceptable as carrying out the job at home (like tailoring).

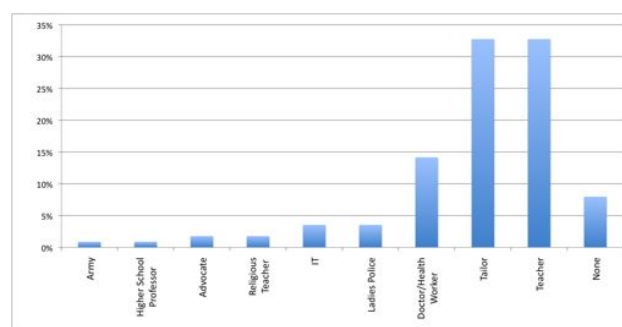


Figure 21: The most favored professions are those that are most likely attainable for women in AJK since they can be carried out close to home (n=113).

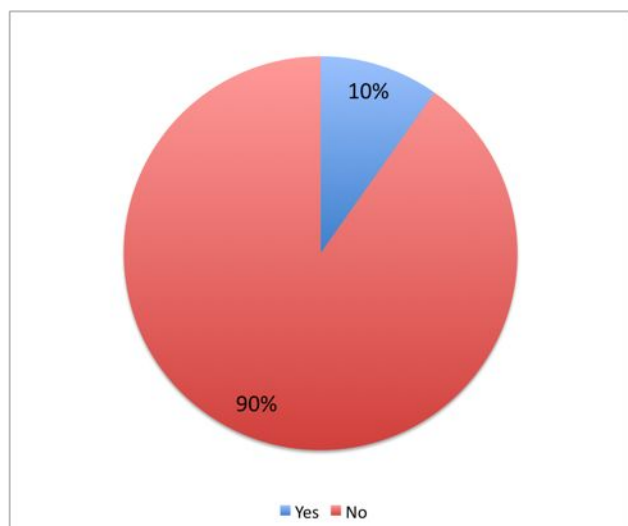


Figure 22: Did this training help you to get a job (n=113)?

When asked about the salary they would hope to earn one day when getting a job, the educational background was more pronounced (i.e. more educated women were more confident to be actually able to earn more) than when their actual earnings from the skills learnt were compared to their education (see fig. 23 and 24). As a comparison the real average wage of "skilled" women in Pakistan according to Hayat (2009) is given. The results from these questions show that for being able to turn vocational skills into a commercial benefit, prior school education only plays a minor role. But women who benefited from more years at school were rather speaking up and demanding their rights to get further education or enter a working relationship.

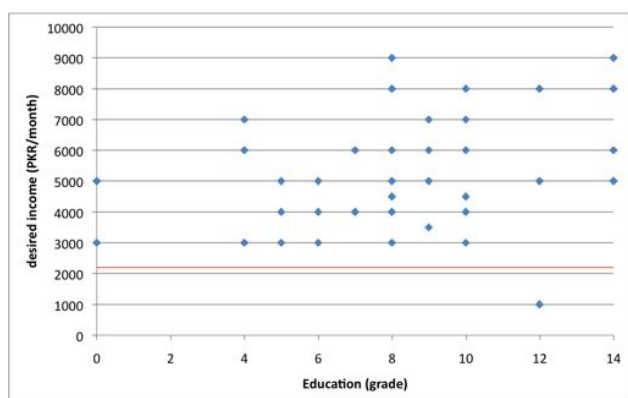


Figure 23: Women with more education were slightly more confident about their desired salary. (red line: Pakistan average wage of "skilled" women)

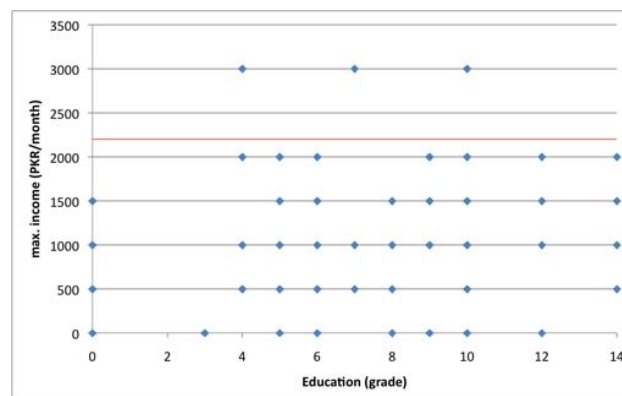


Figure 24: Prior school education only benefitted women slightly in marketing their skills. (red line: Pakistan average wage of "skilled" women).

Three students found jobs soon after they completed the training at the WSTC. Shahida had shifted to Rawalpindi but came to the centre for the interview. In Rawalpindi she found a job as a teacher in a private school. *"I joined the WSTC that fulfilled all my expectations. Now I got married in Rawalpindi where I joined as a teacher in a private school and also in spare time at home I am using my skills and earning approximately PKR.1500/month."* As Qadeera says, students could also learn skills apart from tailoring in the course, most of all to confidently speak up during presentations of their work, which may be a bonus for job seeking even if not in the field of tailoring. Already interviewed earlier, Rifat revisited the Center to tell her teachers, that she completed a 2 years diploma course and was then selected as a teacher in an NGO VTC for 1 year in Raikot Union Council, Nar Sher Ali Khan. Salma was married to Rawalpindi where she is offering her stitching skills not only to her family but also her new neighbors free of cost. When she visited a VTC in Rawalpindi they offered her a job there which she will commence soon. 2 more women were offered jobs but could not take them. Aasia was unable to since she had to look after the household, Saeeda's parents did not allow her to join. *"I already wanted to join the WSTC for the first batch, but my father did not allow me to go to the interview. For the second I was allowed to go and managed to join. After the training my earnings were high, now the income is distributed over more women in the village who got training. During Eid and for special occasions I earns between 2000 - 3500 PKR/month. I was offered a job in a Vocational Training Centre but my parents did not allow me to join. They also did not allow me to finish my education."*

Many women are equally subject to their brothers' wish. *"After my father died, my brother, saying that belonging to a Syed family Purdah had to be observed, did not allow me any further education. Nevertheless, generally the WSTC has brought a change in the local society - people are now more openly supporting women's education"* says

Nazia. *"Many women would like to get a job, but their parents or brothers often do not allow them. My brothers did not allow me to finish education after 6th grade and hinder me from looking for a job or further training until now"* says Shabina. As Hayat (2009) and Khan et.al. (2009) point out, higher male education is rather going to lead women to stay at home, hence women are somehow fostering their own reclusion by supporting them.

As Khan et.al. (2009) note, the aspirations of women to engage in a job may be motivated by the prospect that before getting married this is the last time in their life, where can leave their home and earn money for themselves. Many women noted that they try to convince their father not to get them married. *"I tried to convince my father that I did not want an early marriage but was nonetheless married off to Rawalpindi. There I now hope to earn money as well with my skills"* says Shazia. Saima tells: *"I have earned money for myself and my brother. My mother was sick, thus I had to abandon education and could not become a doctor. I have joined the Governmental Vocational Training Diploma Course after WSTC but had to abandon the training because of my marriage."* For others the training was a contribution to their dowry. *"Since I just got married 1 week earlier I am not sure if my husband will allow me to pursue any job. But I wish to take the final exam after school and subsequently become a teacher. I have stitched all the clothes for my wedding and for my family."* says Aasia.

Kausar highlights a problem that is prevalent for both sexes and in any job - the discrimination of Indian Kashmiri refugees. Families who fled Indian Kashmir because of the conflict there are since many years living in refugee camps, often even without a chance to get a National Identity card. *"On the one hand I am discriminated for being an Indian Kashmiri, on the other hand there is no merit system in Pakistan. I am currently still a student and will try to complete my education to find a suitable job, but it looks difficult."*

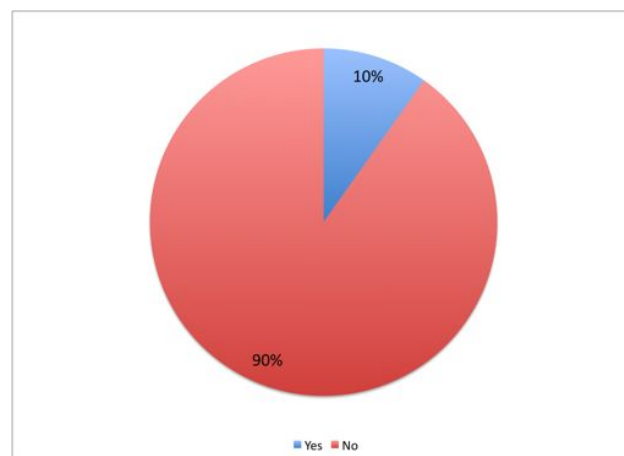


Figure 25: Have you attended any other Vocational training centre (n=112)?

As seen in fig. 25, 10% visited other Vocational Training apart from the WSTC. These are on the one hand students who earlier visited the VTC in Rera, a village close to Dhulli on the other hand students who joined the Government Vocational Diploma Course in Bagh (2 years) after the WSTC. The 6 month training from the WSTC was credited as equivalent to one year at the Government Training Centre and students could thus complete the Diploma quickly. Many women in the area benefited from some kind of Vocational Training in the area. Only 2% were the only ones in their village who have received any training at the WSTC or another institution, 4% said that their sister attended a vocational training course. 64% of the women at WSTC knew other women from their community who received training in another institution than WSTC and even more (79%) were from communities where other women had already attended the WSTC. This high percentage of women who completed the WSTC (17.21 % from the targeted age group were reached) proved a challenge to many. Women who completed an earlier course recounted how their earnings would go down once more women were trained, those who completed their training later found it difficult to push into the market. As a consequence some women decided to specialize. Tayyaba says: *"My father was not able to afford my medical education. Hence the skills I got at the WSTC are a welcome alternative. To be able to compete I am specializing in stitching children's clothes."* Zaheen says: *"Since now 2-3 women are offering stitching services in each village, people only go to those who work well, and therefor I have specialized in ladies suits design. [...] After the training I can now speak to anyone without hesitation."*

Many women proved to be innovative in marketing their skills. Offering clothes at discounted rates in the beginning to attract customers or giving away small items for free is already common practice.

5.3. Societal Perspectives

Many women are seeing their biggest chance in working at home. 35.4% of working women in Pakistan are performing their work from at home, with an increase of 6.7% in the last 8 years. On the one hand they are able to tend to their household commitments, on the other they are staying within the cultural norms that ask her to stay at home and not engage with men from outside her family (*purdah*). But like joining the WSTC, opening a small scale Village training centre is only possible if the family approves, and on top of that the village community has its say. As can be seen in fig. 26, no women joined without her family's consent. In some families it took a lot of convincing, sometimes for days. All those who said it was first difficult to convince their family (mostly their father), also said that they were later happy about the decision. Positive experiences from early students prompted more and more village communities to support the centre. Shaheen says: "The community in my village was first against the training but is now asking to keep the WSTC as a permanent structure." Other communities openly encouraged women to join.

Many women stated that the Earthquake did bring a change in society in regard to their stance towards women and their access to education and work.

"Before the Earthquake the majority of the community were against sending women to school or a training centre away from the village. Now they are willing and understand that education is also necessary for women. I started a small Vocational Training Centre at my home, but had to close after 6 months because of insufficient space. Actually the community is still against me working." says Kauser. Iram is convinced that "the success of WSTC is due to the secure environment, otherwise parents and community would not allow their women to go. Majority of the people did not allow their women for any training/ education away from their village before the earthquake. Some are not able to afford the bus fare and others think that traveling in buses is not safe for women. I am supported by my Village Committee to set up a VTC in my own Village. But also with me, the community resented me going to the WSTC first, but is now encouraging other women to go." Kalsoom believes that it still needs an outside push to make society realize it needed to acknowledge rights to women. "An NGO can encourage the community to encourage the women in this regard."

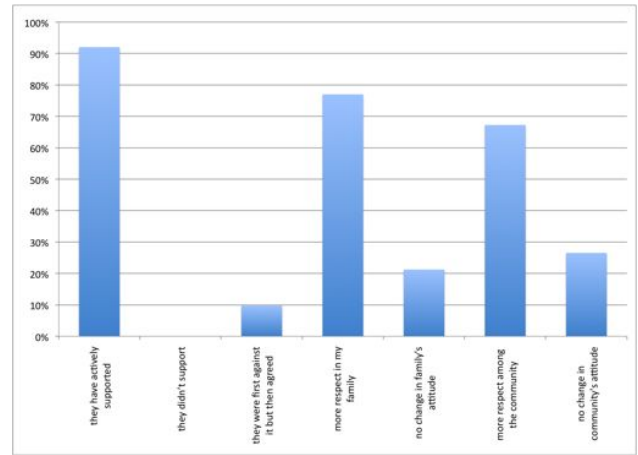


Figure 26: How was the response from your family/community towards the fact that you got training at WSTC (n=113)?

It may now be questioned for which reasons empowerment of women in the commercial sector is favorable in a, for that task, rather hostile environment. Put in a different way, is the support of commercial skills in women a promising way to start empowerment in a conservative society?

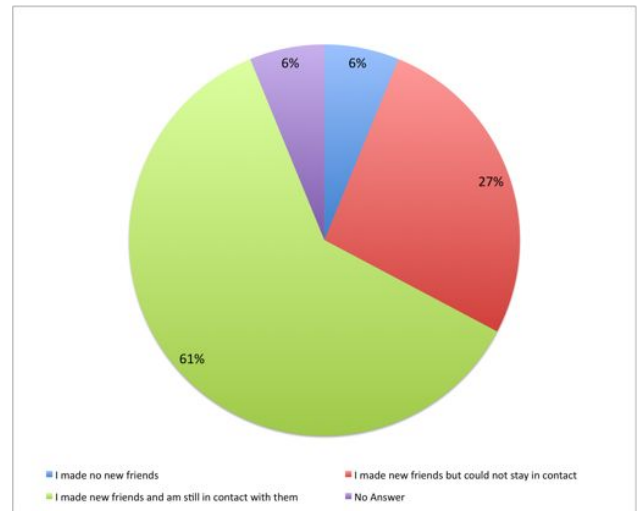


Figure 27: Have you made new friends during your time at WSTC (n=113)?

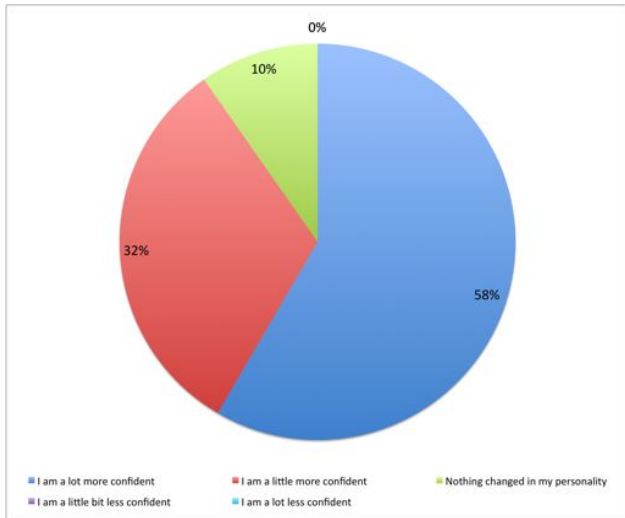


Figure 28: Is there any impact on your personality after you got this training (n=113)?

As Khan et.al. (2009) pointed out, the workplace away from home for many women proves to be one of the very few possibilities for them to interact with people outside their family and outside their village. This has been an important asset of the WSTC. Not only did the women learn skills, but they made friendships and acquired confidence (see fig. 27 and 28). Many added that after they received training they did not only have a handicraft skill, but also the confidence to speak to anyone freely which they proved at the final certificate ceremonies that were held in front of the public. 90% felt to some degree more confident. Combined with their skills, this has also helped to improve the attitude of their own family and the community towards them (see fig. 26). For 77% the respect of their family towards them increased, for 67% also the community shared that sentiment.



Figure 29: Women holding the inauguration speech at a WSTC Certificate ceremony.

6. Conclusion

Women Empowerment in AJK is hampered by two aspects that are intrinsically linked - a conservative society, and limited job perspectives.

Vocational Skills Training for women is offered in different areas of Pakistan, but impact assessments are hard to come by. For the WSTC in Dhulli, impacts on the economical as well as the societal side could be observed.

While many women, due to lack of perspectives, had lost motivation to go to school and get education, the skills training proved a double motivation to reverse this decision. Not only were they enabled to afford further education with their extra income, taking the burden off their parents' shoulders. Their increased confidence in their own abilities prompted them to rejoin school or college. Especially targeting school drop outs may hence have a positive side effect for general education. The additional income generated from working part time after school is an assurance that commercial activity is indeed possible. Additionally the combination of a completed skills training and College education is a sought for qualification for jobs in the governmental education sector.

For women who decided not to follow up on their education, the training in most cases proved to be a successful start up for their own income generating activity. Nevertheless, accompanying community awareness sessions are of utmost importance for such a training. Women should be accompanied in their wish to set up their own small scale business and the community must be taken along this path. Once a village community is convinced in one case, it will independently support other women to follow the same path. Showing them positive results can be a convincing argument.

Many women were able to afford education for their siblings which could otherwise not have been covered by their parents. Furthermore they were often successful in passing on their skills to friends and relatives in and around the village.

It could be shown, that while prior school education heavily influenced the probability that a woman would engage in commercial activities, it did not influence the performance once they had engaged commercially. More educated women showed more confidence and ability setting up a commercial venture, but compared to women with less education who managed to sell their work they did not perform better. This indicates that women with little or no education need special encouragement to use their skill commercially, taking their fear that they may underperform because of their poor educational background. Once this hurdle is taken, illiterate women will be equally able

to generate income as literate.

The impact of skills training on the personality of women in a suppressive environment should be valued. Many women emphasized that their confidence rose steeply during just 6 months of training which enabled them to rather stand up and demand their rights.

To be able to assess long term impacts of such a training, it should be attempted to contact women from the WSTC in 5 - 10 years time. This will indicate whether a long term change can be brought with such an initiative. Meanwhile, the local Government should be encouraged to support such training institutions but most importantly assure their high quality. A positive impact for women in local societies can be achieved through the trainings, with positive trade offs in terms of general education and entrepreneurial development.

7. Appendix

7.1. Abbreviations

ADC	Austrian Development Cooperation
AJK	Azad Jammu and Kashmir
DRU	District Reconstruction Unit
ERRA	Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Agency
FATA	Federally Administered Tribal Areas
LoC	Line of Control
NAVTEC	National Vocational and Technical Education Commission
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PKR	Pakistani Rupee (100 PKR \approx 1 Euro)
SWWD	Department of Social Welfare and Women Development
TEVTA	Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority
UC	Union Council
VTC	Vocational Training Centre
WSTC	Women Skills Training Centre

7.2. The Questionnaire

1. How was your experience at the centre? Did the centre fulfill your expectations and if not, why? (**very satisfied *satisfied *a bit unsatisfied *very unsatisfied*)
2. How are you using the skills in which you were trained in the centre? (**Only for family *Commercial use (for community/villages)*)
3. Are you able to make a living out of the training and are able to help your family? (**Yes *No*)
4. How much money do you earn with your new skills approximately? (** no money earned *0 - 500 PKR/month *500 - 1000 PKR/month * 1000 - 1,500 PKR/month * 1,500 - 2,000 PKR/month * more than 2,000 PKR/month*)
5. Do you need some sort of assistance to expand your work? If yes, of what sort?
6. Who else in your family is earning money and contributing it to the family finances? (**no one *father *mother *father and mother *1 brother *more brothers *sister(s) *other*)
7. Did this training help you to get a job? (**Yes *No*)
8. If no, would you like to find a job in future? (**Yes *No*)

9. If yes, how much do you earn approximately?
10. What did you want to learn/become when a child?
11. Are there other options for vocational training/education (apart from school) in your area?
12. Did you, your friends or siblings attend any of these institutions? (*No, I am the only woman in my surrounding/community who got vocational training *I know other women in the community who got vocational training in other institutions (not WSTC) *There are other women from my village who attended WSTC *My sister(s) got training in another institution (not WSTC))
13. Have you attended any other Vocational training centre after the WSTC (like Government Vocational Training Centre etc.)? (*Yes *No)
14. How long was your daily way to the WSTC (one way)? (*less than 30 min. *30 -60 min *60-90 min *more than 90 min)
15. Is there any impact on your personality after you got this training? (*I am a lot more confident *I am a little more confident *Nothing changed in my personality *I am a little bit less confident *I am a lot less confident *Other)
16. Have you made new friends during your time at WSTC? (*I made no new friends *I made new friends but could not stay in contact (as they live somewhere else) *I made new friends and am still in contact with them/her)
17. How was the response from your family/community towards the fact that you got training at WSTC? (*they have actively supported *they didn't support *they were first against it but then agreed * I have now gained more respect in my family *it hasn't changed the attitude of my family towards me (or has become less) * I have now gained more respect among the community/friends *it hasn't changed the attitude of the community/friends towards me (or has become less))
18. Have you trained any one in your family or in neighborhood on the learnt skills? (*sister *mother *friends *other community members *no)
19. Would you like to get trained on some other skills, please specify?
20. Are you satisfied with the performance of the teachers at WSTC? (*very satisfied *satisfied *a little bit unsatisfied *very unsatisfied)
21. Do you have some suggestions for the betterment of the WSTC?

8. Further Reading

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