



THINK LABOR

To keep up with everything skilling and employment

A village of Electricians

Women boarding a bus to work is a common sight in cities. But for Vadgaon, a small village near Aurangabad, this was a significant development on multiple fronts. One, it shattered the discouragement and a feeling of distrust among community members towards women becoming successful working professionals. And second, it allowed these women to prove that with proper skilled training, they can work in any field, even those not usually associated with their gender.

Vadgaon was no exception to the hardships presented by the coronavirus pandemic. Persistent restrictions on the movement of goods and services and lesser opportunities contributed to the plummeting income of community members. Consequently, there was a need to seek newer options for livelihood generation, and Pratham's multiskilling center at Khultabad was presented as a possible source. A few girls showed interest, but there was a problem. The skilling course was in the electrical trade, and community members refused to associate or imagine it with girls. However, the need for a stable source of income and the determination of a few girls to prove the skeptics wrong led to a strong ripple effect that continues to impact the village even today. Today, Vadgaon has contributed twenty-eight electricians trained at Pratham's multiskilling center at Khultabad, twenty-two of whom are girls!

"The course was exciting, and we learned many new things", said Sakshi, one of the four girls who began her professional career in May with three others. "Most importantly, we gained confidence that we can also work as electricians." Another electrician from the group, Sheetal, acknowledges the role of the first group of girls from the village who completed the course and began working. "Their jobs made us feel confident and motivated us to join the course", she says. "It also changed the opinion of our parents and community members."

As our conversation progressed, four more girls joined us after finishing their work shift. Their batch preceded Sheetal's and Sakshi's, and they expressed eagerness to welcome the new group of girls to their workplace. "Initially, it was difficult to convince our family members", said Alishiba Ghorpade. "But now, when we go to work every morning, and our salary helps us contribute to the family's income, our family members have changed their opinion", she continued, as her colleague Pradnya Salvi nodded in agreement. A few neighbors had joined the chorus of skepticism and bias, but the girls also managed to change their opinion. "When they saw us walking towards the bus stop and boarding the company's bus, they agreed that we had taken the right decision", added Alishiba.

The conversation moved to financial stability, and the girls happily shared what they would buy for themselves and the family. Clearly, they had developed a choice and were keen to take independent decisions. Moreover, this job ensured financial stability for their families, a significant development against the coronavirus pandemic and the negative impact on their livelihood. Perhaps, more importantly, it has unlocked a few more possibilities. Vadgaon now possesses skilled electricians, and they can help community members solve most of their problems with wiring, repairs and maintenance, which often remained pending owing to the unavailability of trained labor. Possibly, it opens up an opportunity to work as electrical contractors and hone their entrepreneurial skills.

Today, Vadgaon is an example of small steps leading to significant changes. What began as a simple walk by a few girls to board the company bus rippled into a series of incremental changes, culminating in a village of electricians!

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