The Work of Evidence in State-Building

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Abstract:- Evidence-based decision making is increasingly becoming the basis of governance in areas of health, education and employment. Policy making is dependent on the evidence collected. The outcome of a successful programme is based on streamlining various institutions working under a particular programme. The role of state building through the success of developmental programmes takes into account the stability of a government and whether the same government would come to power in the next election ruling out any chance of transgression in political ideologies.In this paper I critically look at the skill development programme of the present government in India in its scope of generating evidence of the number skilled vis-à-vis the role of the programme in increasing the work force participation of women. In doing so, this paper focuses on a programme for skilling women in plastic manufacturing where women were trained for three months and later placed in different plastic manufacturing companies.

Keywords: skill; work; women; evidence; job

I. INTRODUCTION

Earlier the success of a programme was confined to the stage ofimplementation which is now been taken over by the focus on outcomes of these programmes. There is a need for informed decision making from the initial stage of implementation for outcomes to be successful. Thus, informed decision-making has to besupported by work of evidence. The evidence present with Government will ensure successful future plans, efficient utilisation of resources and removal of wastages. For overall success of the programme the role of impartial institutions in collecting evidence becomes important leading to a rise of international NGOs and corporate department for development practices taking over this space. However, overlapping interests of the NGOs and corporates informulating a report to be used by the government as work of evidence have led to either delay in collection of data or ceasing of a process midway.In order to bring together different interest groups in collection of evidence, the purpose of collecting evidence is lost in the process. Since working of the government is dependent on the political party in power for five years and that with any change of government in power, there is also a shift in the programmes, -thepreference of evidence providers (NGOs and corporates) also changes with the government in power. This gives rise to a new form of power struggle among multiple stakeholders. The change in the political environment leading to exit of certain groups has led to programmes getting stranded midway and beneficiaries of certain programmes being affected the most as a result. The framework for change to be used for state-building is lost in the process. The politics involved in the work of evidence collection has often given rise to searching evidence within the work of evidence.To elucidate this point, I will discuss the current programme of skill development in India aimed at empowering women across the county.The paper is divided into sections such as, 1.Evidence,Research and Policy making; 2. Ecosystem of Skilling in India and Collection of Evidence; 3.Experiences from the field: Skilling of Women for working in Plastic Manufacturing Industry. In analysing the larger issue of evidence in state building I will draw my arguments from working in the field for a project aimed at skilling one million women. Due to ethical issues I would change certain names and may not want to name organisations/individuals or places with whom I worked. However, this would be done without losing the critical overview of skill development programme of the government through the lens of this paper.

II. EVIDENCE, RESEARCH AND POLICY MAKING

Policy is dependent on institutions of the government, ideology of the party in power and the time in hand. If the research done to inform policy is overtaken by the external context of change in the government in power then the research findings gets restricted and the application is limited. While research is part of outcome process of any policy, the success of a particular policy is always measured in terms of output. In such a

situation the consequence of a programme is more than the projected and actual KPI (Key Performance Indicators)[2]. It could also be nuanced changes in the lives of individuals not captured by KPI. For instance, in case for skilling women for jobs, there could be a situation where participating in a training programme influenced her immensely and she decided to start her own enterprise with the skill she learnt for jobs. However, in the KPI indicator it would be difficult to capture the change in the life of this particular woman when her not taking a job after training would capture her as a drop-out in the KPI with total number of women given jobs would be one point short. Similarly, in some cases a woman could have left a job and then joined again after sometime but such nuances would not be captured in the evidence.[i]The world is currently driven by performing indicators focusing on a lot of technicality involved in managing such big data sets. While nuances are overlooked, the solution of reaching the KPI is linked to the MIS (Management Information System). And if individuals have the technical know-how of first creating and then managing the MIS, then they canclaim to be able to manage the entire project. Nonetheless, the challenge starts at this point when collecting and managing the data have to be done simultaneously.Managing the data involves looking into minutest details within the big data sets which eventually is said to have impacted the progress of a policy.The process of collection is aimed at scalability of a programme or collection of data as part of impact evaluation. Both these processes require different methods of interventions. It is this intervention that would decide how efficiently the big data can be used. In case of the former, it is the storage of information that requires proper management and in case of the latter it is the flow of the data that needs to be balanced. However, both storage and flow cannot be separated from each other. In case of scalability or flow, it is the evidence based creation of big data that has to be mapped out.These two different processes are oftenmoving in opposite direction.It is also argued that the idea of changing the entire social structure is too idealistic and utopian when the aspect of efficiency and time constraint are taken into account.   While one can never make such big claims of changing the entire social structure, it is important that we understand the necessity of how data impacts social changes, decides outcomes and influences future plans. In all this, let us first understand the steps in collecting and processing a data and not just look into the data dump to be analysed. Behind each technical ordering of tools or machines, there are human hands and mind. Most often it has been observed that these human hands require training, understanding and purpose of work in data collection to ensure that when and how this data is to be collected. For instance, engaging the local level NGOs would helpat the entry level only as the person involved cannot be expected to know the purpose for which the data is being collected.Thus, the person's job ends after connecting the team of the data collectors with the villagers whereas the person working in the NGO which is engaged in a particular projectis well aware of the purpose of the project. Collection of real time data is dependent on various levels. Thus, training and appointment of the point person at the ground level is vital as he/sheknows the purpose for which it is being collected. While statisticians and IT (Information Technology)personnel or individuals with technical know-how can get a job for managing and analysing the data; there is also a huge untapped scope of involving individuals at the ground level in collection of data, which in itself is a skill. Once this skill is developed, it will immediately transform into a case for a successful MIS,otherwise no system can transform or make sense of the data being collected. However, the truth finding in collection of evidence to support a success of a programme depends on the ability of controlling the truth through probability and prediction. While mathematical intuitions can solve analogical problems it often fails to control human nature or to predict the outcome of a scenario as a result the aim of a programme and its outcome often have contradictory results. Intuitive results through predictive modeling rules out possibility of a multiple trajectories influencing the outcome of a policy decision. Along with mathematical intuitions the focus has also been on robustness[ii] to support the stated truth.Controlling for epsilon[iii] in a regression modeling cannot in any away change the course of progress. In such practices while evidence gets collected or can be manipulated, the truth becomes a philosophical resource and nothing much. So while probability as evidence can ensure increasingly high scope for emerging companies existing ones as well as the start-ups to emerge as potential firms engaged incollecting evidence. However, this is only creating an obsession with KPI, without looking for a long term sustainability of skill development programme which ultimately will ensure employability through education and skilling in a particular trade. In the current ecosystem what is produced is numbers such as: enrolled, trained, certified, placed and somewhere it is overlooked whether the certification will ensure jobs and   placement, as well as, protect the labour rights.

III.   ECOSYSTEM OF SKILLING IN INDIA AND COLLECTION OF EVIDENCE

The fast-moving economy demands the labour force to be skilled. This is a continuation of a long tradition where industrialization demands individuals for a specific role.However,there would always be an external influence of new forms of technological know-how along with this demand which will require specialization in a particular skill. In order to usher such changing dynamics, there has to be in place the protection of labour rights where the shifts from one skill to another can be smooth and does not create a situation of *skilled to be unemployed*. This demands that impact evaluation of a programmelooks into the

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[2] Key Performing Indicators are a set of quantifiable measures used by a company to measure its performance.

sustainability of the programme so that even if there is a change in government, the programmes continue because of the methods adopted in the programme of sustaining the labour force rather than overemphasis on processes of monitoring skill development. In advancing economies such as ours the process of skill development started a long time back with focus on ITIs[iv], at present the focus on skilling is processing a new ecosystem where the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship in India has come up with a policy framework, within which focus is on human resource development *"Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikaas"*[v] aiming at taking advantage of the demographic profile of the country. Skilling at present would be an overarching aim that covers different departments such as the defence, railways, health and family welfare, fertilisers, chemicals and fertilisers, steel, mines, coal etc. And the success of the working of all the ministries states that numbers could be generated with regard to the training and placement. The numbers are to be generated within the time frame of five years and schemes have been approved by the government. One of the schemes to enable faster conversion of numbers is Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY)[vi]. PMKVY has initiated some of the programmes such as the Rozgar Mela that would be organised by the TPs (Training Providers) for the large number to be generated showing total number giving information on a particular trade or profession. While short term dissemination of information could be beneficial for some, the aspect of using the information provided to transform the socio-economic advancement is a big proposition for which mechanism needs to be followed with regard to pave ways for individuals to make sense of the information. Taking advantage of demographic profile of the country, there is a need to first divide the country into areas of major focus emphasizing on economic growth of women/socially disadvantaged sections, identification of additional benefits to be provided to beneficiaries in areas of new trades and increasing the capacity of individuals in newer areas. Otherwise, PMKVY would only end up becoming policies such as the National Policy on Education, 1986[vii]. Changes aimed by the PMKVY should not only provide multiple training facilities but also should strengthen the infrastructure of the ITIs. Strengthening the infrastructure is basically removing the gap between skilling and placement otherwise the failure will reinforce itself time and again in the functioning of ITIs.As a result, the skilldevelopment programmeswill only end up creating a shield to cover up the number of unemployed by total number to be trained unless those trained cannot be shown to be successfully employed. As the employers need to make substantial investment such as "…the human capital perspective predicts that employers pay for specific training only".[viii] As pointed out in some literature that suffices that current situation is that job search often does not match with the training as well as, the role of group loyalties influencing individual decision-making on the kind of job to be taken up (Sieben, 2007).[ix]Evidence collection also becomes the prime focus with National Policy of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship 2015 focusing on "skilling at scale with speed, standard (quality) and sustainability". Standard and sustainability cannot be measured in the short run, in such a case the focus would be on skilling at scale with speed, when speed overtakes skilling the focus is on monitoring mechanisms over focus on sustainable skilling. This has also led to government's focus on setting up "Policy Implementation Unit (PIU) so as to review the implementation progress: "Impact Assessment will be undertaken to ensure that targets are met within the time frame".[x]

Diagram of collecting evidence at different stages
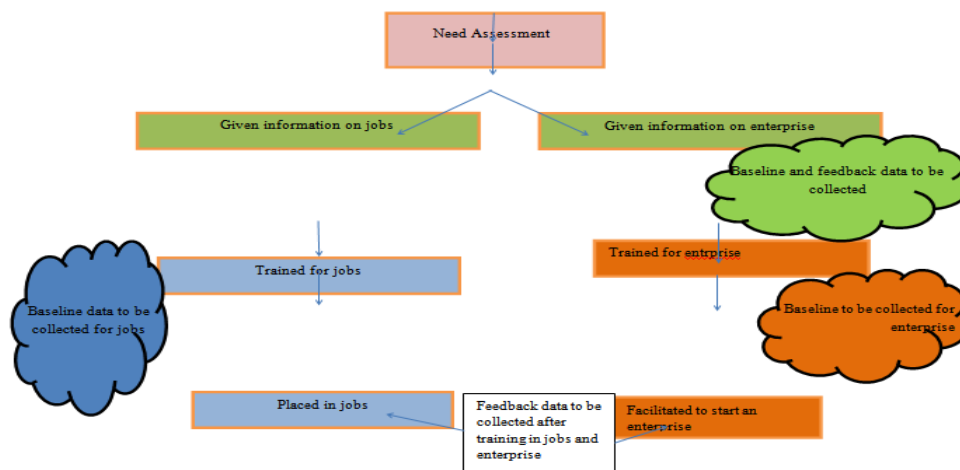
The emerging focus on impact assessments have been on the aspect of replication of a programme and increase of its outreach. While research to practice translations are aimed at, the 'translation into real world policy and practice'[xi] it has often led to creation of models useful for testing small scale programmes 'but it did

not elaborate on the intervention, adaptations that may be required.[xii] This is similar to other programmes as well where evidence collected is done for replication and scale pushing aside any scope of improving the contexts. Reports written by multinational companies and international NGOs only aim at focusing on cost effective results and comparison on outcomes based on 'before-after' situation. As a result, it is the component that is left behind. Somewhere the reporting of data in corporate social sector has also become a combination of philanthropic activities (in the form of corporate social responsibility) and skilling for economic development.

Experiences from the field: Skilling of Women for working in Plastic Manufacturing Industry

As per a recent report by a national daily in July 2016, female work force participation has declined due to suitable jobs at the local level.[xiii]A similar finding in 2012 newspaper report reiterates that India has one of the worst participation rates of women which already pointed out that 'underrepresentation of women in the workforce is a waste of the demographic dividends'.[xiv]Is this the reality at a local level? Is it lack of jobs or absence of a sustainable environment for placing women?In this section, I would discuss about the issue of sustaining programmes for women through field experiences byfollowing stories of women who were trained by a government institute for plastic manufacturing and later placed in jobs. This experiment was done for an ongoing project that is funded by an international organisation which aims to increase the participation of skilled women in the workforce. It also focuses on bringing women out of traditional sectors to non-traditional work breaking the socio-cultural barriers. Mobilisation took place at various levels by the international organisation itself, ASHA[xv] workers, ANM[xvi] and the training institute itself. These women were from different age groups, hence; their concerns were different from one another. All of them wanted to work and consider it essential for their empowerment. While the need to get employed was important for all of them, they want to work in a place close to their village.

The main concerns they voiced were regarding:
- The need for someone to personally convince their parents to allow them to join the course and stay in the hostel.
- Their safety at the training institute.
- Would the training programme allow them to pursue further studies along with this training, say graduation through distance learning?
- Would the manufacturing of the plastic products have any health hazards?
- Would the plastic being produced by them be bio-friendly?
- Was there any reservation policy in place in these factories for the backward castes?

Of the 21 trainees at the training institute for plastic manufacturing,12 trainees i.e. more than half had been to senior secondary school while 8 trainees had been to only secondary school. However, one trainee was a graduate. A majority of women (86 per cent) had no former technical education. Only 14 per cent of women had a diploma from some other place. Out of a total of 21 trainees, 14 (67 per cent) were unmarried and 5 (24 per cent) were married. One trainee was divorced and another one was a widow. Many of the participants were already in jobs. And those who were not in jobs were also aware of the need to earn for themselves, as also to improve their families' economic condition. The majority said they had been unable to continue with their studies because they had to support their mothers in earning money for their families, and hence; continuing studies would have meant waste of time, especially; since it did not guarantee any employment.Belonging to different social and economic backgrounds, the participants were united in their desire to come out of economic backwardness because of which they had to leave their studies midway, or to take up small jobs, or else to settle into early marriages. Many said that the men in their families were unemployed. In some families, the men earned too little and not often enough, so the women had to do temporary jobs to supplement household incomes. So, even as some participants attended the meeting with the hope of finding their first job, others were looking for switch over to better paying, more stable jobs and at the best- a government job. Women were trained in Machine-Operator- Injection Molding (MO-IM)for a period of three months. All of them were satisfied with the training. Some of the women who cleared the placement interview have started working as machine operators.However, it may be cited here that though all 21 trainees expressed satisfaction vis-a-vis the training having fulfilled their expectations— with 20 of them having expected to have been in jobs at the end of the training— only 14 were actually placed. One of the most important issue that emerged out of the post-training interviews with these women was that the three months allotted for the training was too less. Due to unrest in the state of Haryana over Jat agitation in February, the training was affected as the training centre is situated in a place which became the centre of violence. Due to the unrest, the three- months training finally happened for two months. As per the trainer of the trainees, the women do not want to join jobs on offer in a far off place despite their placements with different companies. But to add to this, trainers also pointed out the fact that these women coming out of their rural backgrounds could take a course like this should also be taken as a success. The training gave women exposure, confidence and the information which would help them to inform

others in their villages to join this training.In an attempt to analyse the reasons for not getting placement, I interviewed three women from a group of seven women who were not placed. One of the trainees with no placement was interviewed at her residence in Haryana. She lives in a two- room rented accommodation with her husband and three children. Placement for jobs after training is of foremost importance for her in order to bringabout a major change in her life. She said: "Training was good; I performed well in my classes. I remember resolving a hydraulic problem in class. Since no assessment results were shared, we do not know our scores. The institute did not declare the results of the exams.We were not informed about the date of interview. It was conducted all of a sudden. However, the questions asked during interview were very simple as therewere more of general knowledge questions." In the process of collecting numbers while we have placement records and total number trained we also see that in some cases the process of evaluation is completely overruled. Thus, in the process of evaluation the missing link is assessment, faster arrangement of interviews without any counseling before interviews. While the KPI numbers would show the total number trained and placed, the speed of scaling focusing on numbers would miss out on the nuances of assessment, counseling and also the need to provide facilitation for those candidatesinterested in starting an enterprise after skill training. Skilling is being taken very seriously by individuals focusing on employability more than just an alternative to education.

In case of women trained to be skilled for a particular job, it is also the place of job which determines the outcome of training. Out of a batch of 21, 14 trainees were placed in jobs in different plastic industries in Rajasthan, UP and Haryana (Gurgaon and Faridabad).Those trainees who could not be placed have cited distance from their homes to be the major factor impeding their decision of getting placed Another case shows that parents have no issue in getting their girls trained in a particular profession but the aspect of employability is influenced by socio-cultural norms of a particular region. One of the trainees took the classes in plastic manufacturing but when it was time to get placed she declined the offer of going to another place. This was similar to the findings by Hanson and Johnston[xvii] in which they state that distances matter for women as a result when women search for job opportunities closer to their home.As a result, the certificate in plastic manufacturing would only pile up with other certificates those of which could not end up getting her a job. In cases where placement could not be provided as a mechanism to placing them in a job, there needs to be dissemination of information with regard to starting an enterprise or some other facilitation. However, there remains a huge gap between job placement and starting an enterprise as one of the trainees said that: "At the training centre we were being told about the available loan options for buying machines but I don't want to invest money in buying machines, as my father will have to spend money in my marriage and I don't want to increase his financial burdens."

Interestingly, distance also influences decision of whether to continue with the current job or not for a trainee who is currently working.Unlike the previous case, this 20-year old, has completed class X with a six-month work experience working in a multinational car company. She was comfortable working in a department where only women her age are employed. She had to quit that job for family reasons. Her family was not supportive of her decision to live in a hostel, and work in a factory set-up. She is aware of the need to enhance her skills to improve her employability because she has already worked as a daily-wage labourer, and in a tailoring shop, and realised that lack of a specialised skill has kept her earning capacities from rising. When asked about her plans of changing workshe said that: "I want to apply in Gurgaon after gaining six months of work experience. I am looking for a permanent job and if I get to work in Gurgaon I will be able to stay with my aunt (father's sister). Along with current mobility the aspect of mobility after marriage also determines whether she would be able to continue working.When asked on issue of marriage and work, she said that: "I need the consent of my parents-in-law in order to continue to work after marriage. If the boy is well-settled then I would not like to work." When asked on the issue of work after marriage the mother of the girl placed said that: "I would like her to get married to someone who is earning well then my daughter will not have to work."Another girl reaffirmed this common feeling that decision of getting placed is also linked to her mobility after marriage. This was true even for those women who received a placement.Even they cited: "While my parents are supportive of my studies and work, I do not know what will be the situation like after marriage. But I also feel that opportunities such as these empower women who in turn are able to influence the next generation."[xviii]Another candidate who joined the programme and was eventually placed in a multinational plastic manufacturing company had in her initial interviews expressed that she already worked for six months in a famous car manufacturing company, and was hopeful of getting placed after training. However, when she was asked about her long term plan regarding work she said that continuing to work after her marriage would be difficult and felt that she might not be allowed to work after marriage. I feel that the success of training also lies in learning the ways of conducting in public life."[xix]With regard to private multinational companies that are placing these women, the issue of keeping women in third party pay-roll was striking. In such cases, skilling and placement is somewhere taking away the labour rights and encouraging companies not to take up the responsibility of those they employ. Thereby, questioning the very basis of fairness in this becomes possible with changes made in the Apprenticeship Amendment Act (2014) section 2 (r): "worker means any person working in the premises of the employer, who is employed for wages in any kind of work either directly or

through any agency including a contractor and who gets his wages directly or indirectly from the employer but shall not include an apprentice referred to in clause (aa)". As pointed out in the working paper by Jaivir Singh and others, that such a declaration is inclusion of contract workers and workers.[xx]

IV.   CONCLUSION:

Evidence collection has come to occupy an overwhelming role in determining the success of a programme. Rather than being a facilitator to induce change in the process of generating number (skilled) it itself has become a shield to hide the differences, nuances, challenges and possibilities of a skilling programme. The sacrosanct status being given to numbers in determining the scope of growth has somewhere overlooked the need to ensure sustainable growth and scope of changing the mandated policies in the process of implementation. As a result, the possibility of gender diversity in the programme is lost in the number to be achieved. While the targets proposed in millions is a creation of a scope for collecting data through faith in statistical analysis following robustness what it does away with is sustainability which could only be measured through gauging epistemic realities specially so in case of skilling women. Otherwise the entire process of skilling for jobs will be lost in the number skilled for jobs.. And at the end of it, evidence collection should not become a skill rather the reason for collecting evidence should lead to change in participation of the female labour force.

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[i]This is in context of a woman who dropped out from the training programme of plastic manufacturing in the first month itself and then she joined again. After two months into the programme when I visited her house to know the reasons behind such a shift from dropping out to again joining. It was found out that her family did not allow her to join, as her child was dependent on her for breast feeding. However, she was eventually able to convince them over joining this training and during lunch time she took out time to come back home—which is in the neighbourhood of the training centre—to feed her child. (Field visit to Sonipat in April, 2016)

[ii] Jacob Stegenga, 'Robustness, Discordance, and Relevance', *Philosophy of Science,* Vol.76, No.5 (December 2009), pp.650-661

[iii] Epsilon: It is a statistical notation denoting error.

[iv] As per the programme of the Ministry of Labour and Employment the Government of India Planning Commission in 1962 (the end of the Second Five-Year Plan) there were to be 166 industrial training institutes (I.T.I.) with 42,000 enrollment. See, Donald G. Lux, 'Technical Education in India', *Comparative Education Review,* Vol.7, No. 3 (Feb.,1964), pp.301-306.

[v] National Policy of Skill Development and Analysis, http://www.skilldevelopment.gov.in/National-Policy-2015.html

[vi] Ibid.

[vii] Balbir Jain, 'Vocational Education in India: Problems and Policies', *Indian Journal of Industrial Relations,* Vol. 28, No. 1 (Jul., 1992), pp. 25-36

[viii] Inge Sieben, 'Does training trigger turnover—or not? The impact of formal training on graduates' job search behaviour', *Work, Employment and Society,* Vol. 21, No. 3 (September 2007), pp.397-416.

[ix] Ibid.,400

[x]   National   Policy   of   Skill   Development   and   Entrepreneurship   2015, http://www.skilldevelopment.gov.in/National-Policy-2015.html

[xi] Lucie Rychetnik, Adrian Bauman, Rachel Laws, Lesley King, Chris Rissel, Don Nutbeam, Stephen Colagiuri and Ian Caterson, 'Translating research for evidence-based public health: key concepts and future directions', *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health,* 1979, Vol. 66, No. 12 (December 2012), pp.1187-1192

[xii] Ibid.,p.1188

[xiii] National Policy for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship 2015, http://msde.gov.in/National-Policy-2015.html

[xiv]   Anu   Madgavkar,   'India's   missing   women   workforce',   *livemint*,   Dec   30,2012, http://www.livemint.com/Opinion/dd8OFniJdurubBOoNJeoHK/Indias-missing-women-workforce.html

[xv] ASHA: Accredited social health activists are the community health workers instituted by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

[xvi] ANM: Auxillary Nurse Midwife (ANM) are village level female health workers.

[xvii]Susan Hanson and Ibipo Johston, 'Gender Differences in Work-Trip Length: Explanations and Implications', *Uraban Geography, Taylor and Francis Online,* Volume 6, 1985-Issue 3.

[xviii]Field visit to Sonipat, April 2016.

[xix]Field visit to Sonipat, April 2016.

[xx] Jaivir Singh, Deb Kusum Das, Homagni Choudhury and Prateek Kukreja, "Law, Skills and the Creation of Jobs as 'Contract' Work in India: Exploring Survey Data to make Inferences for Labour Law Reform", *Working Paper 330 ICRIER,* September 2016.

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[12]   India's missing women workforce", livemint, Dec 30,2012, (accessed on 7.10.2016), http://www.livemint.com/Opinion/dd8OFniJdurubBOoNJeoHK/Indias-missing-women-workforce.html>.

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