International Best Practices

Encouraging more female trainees in vocational training in traditionally male-oriented areas: What are we learning?
Background and summary

This short learning review draws out experiences with four of LKDF’s (Learning and Knowledge Development Facility) Public Private Development Partnership (PPDP) projects. Using a “learning by doing” approach, the four Vocational Training Centre projects included here – SAT (Iraq), AGEVEC (Morocco), HDECoVA (Ethiopia), and ZAMITA (Zambia) are all working actively to encourage more female applicants to their mechanics and heavy industry vocational training programmes. They are starting to see some real progress and share some of their strategies below.

One of the main things you will notice from the stories and examples below, is that gender-sensitive and targeted communication is a major part of their strategy, in addition to other actions that can both encourage women to apply as well as reduce any barriers to their entry, which can be quite context specific.

We’ll use a learning question approach to share some of these experiences below.

**Question 1:** Is there a right time to encourage female students to apply?

In Zambia, at ZAMITA, in order to increase female enrollment to the program, the Academy recently conducted a detailed survey, analyzing the impact of a communication campaign conducted in 10 high schools and secondary schools. It recommends the following:

- Visit schools - and visit them multiple times: A direct and repeated contact between students, trainers and role models could be particularly beneficial.
- Choose the right time to visit: Go before the year’s final exams - when students are beginning to think about the next year.

**Question 2:** Does social media work and if so, what kind of messages and visuals work best to encourage women to apply to the courses?

AGEVEC, in Morocco, has developed a gender-sensitive communication strategy that includes a social media component. Their posts combine two or more of the following elements:

- pictures displaying women involved in technical work;
- short messages addressing gender perceptions and stereotypes, and affirming that women are equally able to perform quality manual work;
- messages highlighting the power of passion versus obstacles (see example below);
• messages directly declaring AGEVEC’s readiness and willingness to welcome female trainees;
• relayed news articles related to women and business, or gender-empowerment initiatives in the country.

These messages have turned out to be among the most popular ones, reaching a high number of users and generating a significant amount of “likes” and comments. Even though men still constitute the majority of “fans” of the AGEVEC Facebook page, women are now on the rise. As of today, they represent about 25% of the people who follow AGEVEC’s updates.

SAT, based in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), has also used the mainstream media for communication. By broadcasting “general” adverts about the training on television, and distributing leaflets. This tactic alone has had notable results: since 2016, women have constituted 16% of the total number of students enrolled.
Zamita, thinks it is important to create gender-specific materials, and that was supported by the results of their survey of 10 high schools. For example, a programme can produce a brochure detailing the courses, with pictures of previous female students in the workplace and motivational quotes about the training and career possibilities. They also learned that it is important to be visual overall: Students that were shown pictures appeared much more interested in the training. As many of the girls are not familiar with this industry, images and videos (interviews with trainers, former students) seem to help young girls get a better grasp of what the job entails.

AGEVEC in Morocco also created gender-specific communication materials such as brochures as a part of their broad plan to increase female recruitment.

Question 4: In addition to media materials, how important is it to tailor other materials towards women trainees?

As we have seen above, ZAMITA has been recruiting with a focus on enrolling girls in high schools and secondary schools. Another place to recruit is internally. What does that mean?

- SAT finds “internal” recruitment to be successful: It says that the most popular SAT courses among women who join the Academy remain the non-technical ones (i.e. English Language, and Computer Skills). However, SAT specifically targets these women and encourages them to pursue
their studies and join the mechanics training - some of them have, as a result, ended up joining.

- **HDECoVA in Ethiopia also finds “internal” recruitment to be a successful strategy:** HDECoVA is part of a larger school called Selam, which also offers a great variety of non-mechanical courses. As with SAT, these (in particular restaurant, administration, and IT) remain the most popular courses among women who join the school; but in the recent years, HDECOVA has been able to recruit a significant number of women who, unable to join these popular courses, turned to mechanics instead.

Yes. In AGEVEC they have included in their broad plan the inclusion of families and other influencers. ZAMITA, also prepares materials for the parents. For example, they can give female students a letter with information about the training to give to their parents, presenting the training and notably addressing the alleged “manliness” and “dangerousness” of the job. In addition to a letter, it can be helpful to invite one parent and their child to a workshop to actually show them the work environment of the job, and convince them that it is a suitable one for women.

Photo: Ashna is one of the students of SAT which has joined their mechanics training. To find more information about SAT visit: [www.sat-stories.org](http://www.sat-stories.org)
In AGEVEC, the centre is working towards sensitizing companies through its gender-sensitive communication strategy. SAT is currently considering partnerships with locally-based agencies, such as IOM, to increase the screening of female candidates through their own separate programs.

It has been interesting to understand better some of the barriers to entry for female candidates. SAT has been working on reducing opportunity costs: SAT recently purchased a minibus intended to run a shuttle service between the Academy and the nearest city. This will progressively replace the current system of travel allowances. Female trainees have already expressed their comfort in using the service, and the goal is now to scale it up, encouraging more women to consider the courses by arguing that dedicated transport to/from the Academy would be provided for them.

AGEVEC will do a curriculum review and include the adaptation of training programs (no stereotypes in classes and materials for example), and will adapt their facilities so that they are more appropriate for female candidates. They will also identify role models in their programmes that can work with the girls. HDECoVA, which since 2012 has had on average 14% of its classes comprised of women, has also encouraged its female trainees to speak out and some have been featured in videos that are available on the LKDF website: www.lkdfacility.org. They have also adopted an affirmative action approach in the Ethiopia VTC, with the entry level lower for female applicants than for male applicants. They have found this to be a significant factor helping the participation of women to the program.

Useful Links:

LKD Facility: https://twitter.com/LKDFacility