

Examples of Non-Traditional Livelihoods being practiced in India and elsewhere.

THE DEFINITION OF NON-TRADITIONAL LIVELIHOODS (NTL)

(As defined by the NTL Network of India)

Non-traditional livelihoods refer to livelihood practices that help women break stereotypes and challenge the gender division of labor emerging from the biases of gender, caste, class, religion, sexual orientation and identity, disability, and other oppressive structures. NTL increases the set of viable livelihood choices available to women and gives them access and control over skills, technology, market, mobility, and resources. It creates economic stability along with psychological, social, and political empowerment.

From the above definition, what is clear is:

- ◆ *That non-traditional livelihoods are those which break the glass or rather a concrete ceiling and walls put around the women by virtue of belonging to a certain caste, community, religious group, or because of their sexual orientation, their gender identity, disability, their habitat, and this list can be long, and varied depending upon the discrimination structures that exist in any society. Gender norms around unpaid work and mobility for example have been one of the reasons for women not being allowed to take on occupations such as driving or masonry which requires them to be away from home for a large part of the day and also night.*
- ◆ *That invariably, practicing a non-traditional livelihood, gives women a greater control over skills, technology, market, mobility, and other resources. This is an obvious inference, since the occupations that women are denied because of any of the factors mentioned in point 1, would then mostly be practiced by those who are in relatively privileged positions. Men, largely. Also, by venturing into these occupations, women will gain skills, control over mobility etc. which happen by virtue of practicing such livelihoods.*
- ◆ *What follows from both the above is a possibility of empowerment – as women not just earn money but the fact that they have challenged social traditions and customs and dealt with adversity in the process also enables them to reclaim a sense of dignity, self-esteem, and confidence in themselves.*

The following examples further clarify these aspects. Most of these examples have been taken from the applications received in the first two years of Kamla Bhasin Award. And some are from other sources, deliberately picked to provide diversity.

Non-Traditional Livelihoods practiced by women	What makes them non-traditional and some examples of the same
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1	Women working as masons, plumbers, carpenters, drivers, electricians	<p>Most of these professions are completely male dominated. Women are not encouraged to gain skills nor acquire careers in these jobs. Any woman who practices these (or similar) professions challenges gender barriers to paid work and is thus considered NTL.</p> <p>There are many examples of these, to take a few. Archana Women Centre & Mahila Housing Trust – working with women masons. Women working in civil construction in Brazil Tatu Gatere, a woman entrepreneur in Kenya – works with women carpenters, construction workers Azad Foundation – working with women drivers</p>
2	Trans Women working as professionals	<p>For trans people, especially from under privileged background, there are limited options available. Mostly, they end up practicing sex work, begging or performing during weddings and childbirth.</p> <p>Therefore, when trans women become entrepreneurs such as Reshma Prasad in Bihar, India who set up Restaurant Satrangji or Vidya Rajput, Chattisgarh, India who became an activist and set up an organisation to work on the rights of trans persons or Dr. Yoga Nambiar, Thane, India who became the first trans woman to acquire a Ph.D in mental health through dance therapy or Tashnuva Anan, Bangladesh who became the first trans gender news anchor - they are all breaking the barriers that society has put in place for trans women and are all examples of NTL</p>
3	Dalit Woman (from the most backward communities) working as a lawyer and activist	<p>Dalits, especially those from the most backward communities – continue to face innumerable hurdles in moving out of their caste-based professions and acquiring livelihoods with dignity.</p> <p>Therefore, when Mohini Devi, from Valmiki caste, from Haryana, India manages to break down these barriers, struggling against not just caste but gendered barriers as well, and become a lawyer, she is practicing a non-traditional livelihood.</p>
4	Rural Dalit women working as journalists	<p>Opportunities for paid work outside agriculture are lesser in rural areas as compared to urban areas. Working as journalist requires being mobile at all hours, interviewing people from across caste groups and further in the current context becoming skilled in the digital media.</p>

		<p>Women journalists working with Khabar Lehariya in Bandha region of India are practicing non-traditional livelihoods by challenging multiple barriers of caste, class, and gender, bridging the digital divide as they choose to acquire careers as journalists.</p>
5	Survivor of PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), of violence becoming a mental health practitioner	<p>There continues to be a severe stigma against women (or even men) suffering from PTSD, and other mental health issues. Experiences of severe domestic violence, further challenges a woman's self-esteem, her sense of identity and her confidence. A survivor of gender-based violence is already dealing with one of the worse forms of gender based discrimination. When that gets compounded with other forms of discrimination, the choices for women to access employment and livelihood options get restricted even more.</p> <p>Therefore, when Adrija, a survivor of PTSD and gender-based violence, chooses to acquire a post-graduation in Psychiatry and becomes an entrepreneur in trauma based healing, it is non-traditional livelihood. Both because of her specific context, but also because trauma-based healing is not even recognized by mainstream psychiatrists in most parts of the world.</p>
6	Women with disabilities working as entrepreneurs	<p>Disability is yet another axis of marginalization, and when this intersects with caste and class its impact can be devastating in terms of limiting the choices living life with dignity. In most cases, especially for people with mental or physical disabilities</p> <p>So when Rewati Karke, an autistic person coming from a humble family of limited means in Nepal decides to put up her YouTube channel, or Ichhya KC, a visually challenged person from Nepal, decides to set up her own organisation, fighting for their rights, earning their livelihoods, then they are practicing non-traditional livelihoods.</p>
7	A young Muslim woman working as a football coach	<p>Women from under privileged families and belonging to minority communities (and in fact even majority communities) face severe restrictions on their mobility, choice of work, building social network etc. There exist strict boundaries when it comes to physical contact with people of another sex.</p> <p>So when Kulsum Shaikh, a young Muslim girl decides to become a football coach and teach other young women</p>

		and men the game of football, it is a non-traditional livelihood.
8	Woman going to sea as a fisherwoman	Traditionally women are not allowed to go to the sea to catch fish. It is considered a taboo and an ill omen. However, women put in a lot of labor hours in processing and taking care of the fish that men harvest from the sea. And when it is time to sell the same, it is again the men who handle the marketing and sale. So when KC Rekha from Thrissur became the first woman to acquire a fishing license, she became yet another example of a woman practicing non-traditional livelihood for a living.
9	Women from 'Nat' community taking on professional careers	<p>Nat community that was a traditionally nomadic community engaged in occupations such as rope dance, acrobatics, jugglery, plays etc. over time settled down as part of the "modernization and civilization" process. They are now considered as scheduled caste and for majority of 'Nat' women their main occupation for survival has become sex work.</p> <p>When a young woman from 'Nat' community decides to pursue another occupation – be that of a beautician, a tailor, a cook, a driver, plumber or mason or anything else, she is a practitioner of non-traditional livelihood; standing up against decades of tradition and challenging barriers created due to gender, caste, literacy, habitat and many others.</p> <p><i>(This is inspired by iPartner's work in Rajasthan)</i></p>
10	Woman with limited literacy skills, survivor of HIV working as an entrepreneur and activist	<p>Women from poor communities, with little literacy skills have extremely limited livelihood options for them other than labor, mostly on daily wages. This gets compounded further when she is also a survivor of trafficking, rape, and HIV.</p> <p>Therefore, when Natisara Rai, the winner of the first Kamla Bhasin Award in 2023, decided to set up an organisation that is led by women living with HIV to work for other women in similar circumstances she is practicing a non-traditional livelihood.</p>