



# Unlocking Women's Participation in Formal Jobs in Odisha

Key Takeaways from State-Level Consultation

9th March 2026  
World Skill Centre, Bhubaneswar

# Introduction

The Skill Development and Technical Education (SDTE) Department, Government of Odisha, in collaboration with The Udaiti Foundation, convened a state-level consultation on on “Unlocking Women’s Participation in Formal Jobs in Odisha” on March 9, 2026, at World Skill Center, Bhubaneswar. The Government of Odisha is committed to fostering women’s participation in the workforce by addressing the key barriers that limit their entry and retention in formal employment. This commitment is part of the state’s broader vision to ensure equal opportunities for women, making them active contributors to the state’s economic development. Increasing women’s participation in formal jobs is seen as a critical lever to drive Odisha’s economic growth and further its ambition to create a more inclusive and diverse workforce.

Despite significant investments in skilling initiatives, women continue to face challenges such as mobility constraints, safety concerns, and skill-job mismatches. The event served as a platform to bring together government officials, industry leaders, and development practitioners to discuss these challenges and identify actionable solutions to enhance women’s employment outcomes in Odisha’s formal job market.



# Agenda

<b>Agenda</b> <b>Consultation on Unlocking Women's Participation in Formal Jobs in Odisha</b> <b>9th March 2026   World Skill Center, Bhubaneswar</b>	
1	Welcome Address by Neetu Singh, Head of Programs, The Udaiti Foundation
2	Keynote Address by Shri Sampad Chandra Swain, Hon'ble Minister, Skill Development & Technical Education and Industries, Odisha
3	Experience Sharing by two role models
4	Remarks by Shri Bhupendra Singh Poonia, Commissioner-cum-Secretary, Skill Development & Technical Education Department, Govt of Odisha
5	Panel Discussion 1: Moderated by The Udaiti Foundation <i>Panelists:</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Rashmi Mohapatra, CEO, World Skill Center</li><li>2. Prasanta Dash, Chief, Field Office, UNICEF Odisha</li><li>3. Swagatika Mohapatra, Deputy MD, Gram Tarang</li><li>4. Smit Gade, Sr. Director (Research), Good Business Lab</li><li>5. Shipra Nigam, Senior Director, Just Jobs Network</li></ol>
6	Panel Discussion 2: Moderated by The Udaiti Foundation <i>Panelists:</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Sushmita Sarangi, Commercial Director, IHCL</li><li>2. Sukirti, CEO, Indulge</li><li>3. Kalpana Razdan, Director of Product, Last Mile, Delhivery</li><li>4. Yashveer Singh, Head, Hiring &amp; Sourcing, TeamLease</li><li>5. Arnav Kalia, Associate Director, GATI</li></ol>
7	Lunch
8	Roundtable with key government, industry & non-profit stakeholders



### **3. Opening Dialogue on Unlocking Women's Participation in Formal Jobs in Odisha**

*by Neetu Singh, Head of Programs, The Udaiti Foundation*

In her opening remarks, Neetu highlighted Odisha's ambitious goal of becoming a \$500 billion economy and emphasized that increasing women's participation in formal employment is crucial to realizing this vision. Despite advancements in education and skilling, women's involvement in the formal workforce remains low, with only 9% of women in regular wage employment in Odisha. Neetu emphasized that women's economic inclusion is not just a social priority, but an economic necessity for the state's growth.

She shared The Udaiti Foundation's mission to contribute to India's growth by increasing female labor force participation and supporting women-owned enterprises. Through collaboration with the SDTE Department, Udaiti is conducting the Sudakshya Diagnostic Study to assess barriers and identify solutions to improve women's access to formal employment. Neetu also highlighted the need to address systemic challenges such as mobility, safety, and workplace readiness to create a more inclusive workforce. By focusing on these critical issues, Udaiti aims to build a robust support system that will facilitate women's entry into and retention within formal jobs. Neetu concluded by stressing the importance of strong collaboration between government, industry, and skilling institutions to accelerate women's workforce participation in the state.

## 4. Speech by the Chief Guest, **Shri Sampad Chandra Swain, Hon'ble Minister, Skill Development & Technical Education and Industries, Odisha:**

Shri Sampad Chandra Swain, the Hon'ble Minister, began his address by highlighting Odisha's ongoing efforts to modernize and strengthen its technical education ecosystem. He emphasized the government's commitment to expanding ITIs and Polytechnics, alongside introducing supportive schemes such as Sudakshya and global-standard models like the World Skill Center. These initiatives are crucial in ensuring greater access, retention, and formal job pathways for women in the state.

The Minister outlined that the transition from training to employment is being actively reinforced through structured counselling, safe hostel facilities, and the promotion of inclusive workplaces that support women's long-term career progression. He stressed that the broader vision of Odisha's skilling strategy goes beyond just access; it focuses on women's advancement through increased participation in advanced technical programs, especially in non-traditional and high-growth trades.

He highlighted that under the leadership of the double-engine government, Odisha is making significant strides in advancing women's participation in high-growth sectors of the economy. As the number of women enrolling in ITIs and polytechnics continues to rise, the state is focused on bridging the gap between skills and employment. Efforts are being made to strengthen partnerships with industry to ensure that the training women receive translates into real employment opportunities, paving the way for greater economic inclusion and growth.

Shri Swain also discussed Odisha's alignment with the central government's vision, particularly with the goal of achieving a ₹500 billion economy. The state is focused on empowering women to play a central role in this growth by enhancing their skills, providing better employment opportunities, and aligning initiatives with national goals such as Viksit Bharat. He requested all department officials to take actionable insights from this consultation and work towards implementing them. Furthermore, he emphasized that these efforts would be periodically reviewed to track progress and ensure that women's workforce participation is continually strengthened as part of Odisha's broader economic development.



# Experience Sharing by two role models

**Bhagyashree Rout** , a skilled individual from Bhadrak district in Odisha, shared her inspiring journey. After completing her Diploma in Civil Engineering from Government Polytechnic Jaipur, she pursued training in Mechanical and Electrical Services at World Skill Center Bhubaneswar. Through this program, she gained international exposure with a six-month paid internship in Singapore. Currently, Bhagyashree works with Tata Steel at Meramandali while also pursuing her B.Tech.

Her message to junior students, particularly girls, is to seize every opportunity and stay confident. She emphasized the importance of the POSH (Prevention of Sexual Harassment) policy in ensuring a safe work environment for women, where they can perform without fear. Bhagyashree concluded with a powerful statement: "Women can do anything. They can cook, build careers, and balance responsibilities successfully. All it takes is confidence, taking opportunities, and proving women can achieve anything they want."

**Lavanya** , a proud graduate from the World Skill Center, shared her inspiring journey of defying societal expectations. While many people view women in the hospitality sector as limited to traditional roles, Lavanya has proven this stereotype wrong. She is currently working as a Technical Apprentice with IHCL in Bhubaneswar, showcasing her capabilities in a non-traditional sector for women.

Her message to women is clear: "don't be afraid to pursue opportunities in unconventional fields, even if it means going against societal norms". She encourages women to invest in learning, enhance their skills, and seek support from those around them to achieve their goals. Lavanya believes that financial independence is vital for every woman, empowering them to make their own choices and stand strong in their careers.





## 6. Remarks by Shri Bhupendra Singh Poonia, Commissioner-cum-Secretary, Skill Development & Technical Education Department, Govt of Odisha:

In his remarks, Shri Bhupendra Singh Poonia, emphasized the need to convert the rising momentum in female labor force participation into stable, formal wage employment. He stressed the importance of shifting the focus from admissions to sustained job conversion and retention. To achieve this, he highlighted the need for strengthening career counseling, deepening industry linkages, and expanding placement-linked training, with a special emphasis on increasing women’s participation in non-traditional and high-growth sectors.

The Secretary also underscored the ongoing efforts to build a comprehensive ecosystem for training and placements in the state. Shri Poonia called for collective action in working towards this important goal, as Udaiti and all stakeholders continue to drive forward the mission of improving women’s workforce participation and long-term employment outcomes.

## 7. Panel Discussion 1: Women’s Placement Outcomes in Odisha, Opportunities and Challenges

The panel discussion in Odisha focused on improving women’s workforce participation by addressing barriers in skilling, employment, and retention.

The panel discussion included **Rashmi Mohapatra**- CEO, **World Skilling Center**, **Prasanta Dash**, Chief, Field Office, **UNICEF Odisha**, **Swagatika Mohapatra**- Deputy MD, **Gram Tarang**,



**Smit Gade**– Sr. Director, **Good Business Labs** and **Shipra Nigam**, Senior Director, **Just Jobs Network** as the esteemed panelists. The discussion was moderated by **Kanika Singhal**, Lead of **Government Engagement** at **The Udaiti Foundation**.

The panel discussion brought out several interconnected insights on the challenges and pathways to improving women’s workforce participation and retention. **Rashmi Mohapatra** highlighted that retention challenges are often rooted in competing work and family responsibilities, particularly in the absence of adequate childcare support. He emphasized the importance of enabling infrastructure such as safe accommodation, reliable mobility, and creche facilities, alongside integrating soft skills with technical training and creating global exposure opportunities to build confidence and aspirations.



**Swagatika Mohapatra** focused on the key attrition points across the skilling-to-employment pathway, especially during family decision-making, relocation, and early job transitions, underscoring how safety concerns, social norms, and limited support systems continue to hinder retention. She stressed the need for interventions such as parental engagement, migration support, and post-placement mentoring. From a systems perspective, **Prasanta Dash** highlighted structural constraints shaping women’s participation, noting that even basic workplace provisions like functional washrooms can significantly influence retention. He also observed encouraging trends in Odisha, with girls increasingly outperforming boys in education and financial barriers to skilling being reduced, while exposure to international opportunities is raising aspirations among youth.



**Shipra Nigam** emphasized disconnects between training systems, workers, and industry needs, noting that gaps in workplace readiness and mismatched expectations often lead to early job exits, with many women dropping out of the labour force entirely after leaving jobs. She called for systemic solutions such as stronger career guidance, expanded apprenticeships, and deeper industry involvement in training and entry-level pathways. Complementing this, **Smit Gade**

shared evidence from a migrant support intervention, where a structured buddy system pairing new workers with peers from similar backgrounds led to improved retention, productivity, and wellbeing, including reduced anxiety levels, highlighting the importance of peer support and migrant-focused wellbeing initiatives.

In closing, the moderator reflected on the need for better alignment between skilling programmes and labour market demand, alongside a stronger focus on soft skills and confidence building. She also emphasized the critical role of family support, community engagement, and coordinated action across stakeholders in enabling sustained improvements in women’s workforce participation and retention.



## 8. Panel Discussion 2: Industry-Led Pathways to Increase Women's Participation in Formal Jobs in Odisha:



The panel discussion in Odisha focused on **Industry Perspectives on Hiring Women Across Service, Logistics and Hospitality Sectors**.

The panel discussion included **Sukirti Pattnaik**, Founder of **Indulge Salon (Odisha)**, **Sushmita Sarangi**, Commercial Director at **Taj & Jiva, IHCL**, **Kalpana Razdan**, Director of Product (Last Mile) at **Delhivery**, **Yashveer Singh**, Head of Sourcing and Hiring at **TeamLease** and **Arnav Kalia**, Associate Director at **GATI** as the esteemed panelists. The discussion was moderated by **Kanika Singhal**, Lead of **Government Engagement** at **The Udaiti Foundation**

The discussion highlighted sector-specific insights alongside common challenges in enabling women's participation in the workforce. **Sushmita Sarangi** emphasized the critical role of institutions like the World Skill Center in building a strong talent pipeline for sectors such as hospitality. While technical skills are increasingly available, she noted that the key gaps lie in confidence and exposure. Preparing young workers, especially women, to step outside them



home environments through a combination of technical and soft skills training is essential for career progression, with family support emerging as a crucial enabler. **Arnav Kalia** extended this perspective to international employment, highlighting that overseas roles require additional preparation, including language training, cultural orientation, and structured pre-departure support. He underscored the importance of safe migration pathways for women, such as secure housing and group placements, to reduce isolation and risk.



From an industry standpoint, **Sukriti Pattnaik** reflected on the growth of the beauty and wellness sector in Odisha, acknowledging improvements in the availability of skilled workers but pointing to persistent challenges around work culture, including high attrition and limited professional orientation. She stressed that stronger counselling and industry exposure during training can help improve retention and reduce job-hopping. **Kalpana Razdan** brought attention to logistics and last-mile delivery roles, noting that many women entering these sectors come from migrant or low-income backgrounds, where employment is often driven by economic necessity. She emphasized the need for training programs to better prepare women for the physical and environmental demands of such jobs, alongside improvements in infrastructure, safety, and workplace conditions to enhance accessibility. **Yashveer Singh**, drawing from large-scale recruitment experience, highlighted that women tend to prioritize workplace safety, accommodation, and overall work environment over salary, making them more stable employees when supportive conditions are in place. He noted that addressing migration-related barriers and improving awareness of job opportunities can help bridge the gap between labour demand and supply.



To close the discussion, the moderator reflected that while there is strong employer willingness across sectors to hire more women, social norms, migration barriers, and gaps in workplace readiness continue to shape employment outcomes. Key interventions include strengthening family support systems, building confidence and professionalism through training, and ensuring safe and supportive workplace environments. The discussion also underscored the importance of deeper collaboration between government, training institutions, and industry to ensure that skilling initiatives translate into sustainable and long-term career pathways for women.



## 9. Round Table Discussion on Industry–Engagement to increase women participation in Formal Jobs:

The roundtable discussion, chaired by Shri Bhupendra Singh Poonia and Shri Rashmi Ranjan Mohapatra, focused on identifying actionable recommendations to strengthen coordination between the Skill Development & Technical Education (SDTE) Department and employers to improve women’s workforce participation in the formal sector in Odisha.

### ***Key Insights:***

Participants emphasized that while skilling efforts have expanded, key gaps persist across communication skills, workplace readiness, mobility, and support systems. Sushmita Sarangi highlighted that strong communication skills are essential for women candidates, particularly in service–sector roles, and stressed that safe accommodation, travel support, and a supportive work environment significantly improve both joining and retention. Similarly, Sukriti Pattnaik pointed to a gap between theoretical knowledge and practical exposure, underscoring the need for industry–led training, out–of–state exposure, and stronger professional orientation to prepare candidates for real–world work environments and improve retention.

From a sectoral lens, Kalpana Razdan noted that logistics roles continue to see low uptake among women due to perceptions of low dignity and concerns around physical strain, calling for curriculum redesign aligned with industry realities. Yashveer Singh highlighted strong demand for women in assembly line and electronics roles but pointed out low awareness of career pathways and apprenticeship benefits, along with persistent communication skill gaps. Ravijot Singh emphasized mobility as a key barrier, suggesting the need to normalize migration through role models and counseling, while also highlighting effective retention practices such as structured onboarding support and cultural integration initiatives. Siddharth Sahu further reinforced the issue of low awareness among women regarding sectors, job roles, and employers, identifying safety concerns, migration challenges, and lack of local job visibility as critical barriers. He proposed solutions such as pre–joining familiarization, tech–enabled job visibility platforms, and migration–linked support systems, with accommodation emerging as a decisive factor in reducing dropouts.

From an implementation perspective, Swagatika Mohapatra highlighted the importance of building trust with families through pre–placement engagement, including video calls with candidates, parents, and wardens, alongside structured post–placement support in the initial 90 days. Shri Bhupendra Singh Poonia emphasized structural constraints such as inadequate accommodation in industrial areas and the need to prepare youth for mobility during training, alongside stronger industry–led integration and post–placement skilling to improve retention. He also noted that low starting salaries reduce women’s willingness to migrate. Complementing this, Shri Rashmi Ranjan Mohapatra highlighted that lack of clarity in salary

structures creates mistrust among candidates, while aligning job roles with core skill areas significantly improves retention and long-term job satisfaction.

Overall, the discussion converged on a set of actionable priorities, including strengthening communication and soft skills, enhancing industry-aligned practical training, improving accommodation and migration support, increasing awareness of job opportunities, and institutionalizing retention-focused interventions. These insights reinforced the need for coordinated action between government, training institutions, and employers to ensure that skilling efforts translate into sustained and meaningful employment outcomes for women.

## 10. Key Take Aways from the Consultation:

**a. Accommodation constraints in industrial areas remain a structural challenge:**

Limited availability of safe, affordable housing near industrial clusters continues to restrict women's ability to take up and sustain employment, particularly for those migrating from rural areas.

**b. Prepare youth for mobility during training itself:** Training programs must proactively build readiness for migration by familiarizing candidates with relocation expectations, workplace environments, and urban living conditions, helping reduce drop-offs at the transition stage.

**c. Ensure industry-led integration (cultural + economic):** Employers should play a stronger role in onboarding and integrating workers, through culturally sensitive practices, mentorship, and structured induction, so that women feel supported both socially and professionally.

**d. Promote post-placement training for retention:** Continued skilling and support after job placement can help women adapt better to workplace demands, improve performance, and increase long-term retention.

**e. Encourage industry-run skill centres:** Greater industry involvement in training delivery can ensure that curricula are aligned with real job requirements, improving employability and smoothing the transition from training to employment.

# Annexure

List of Attendees and Speakers		
1	Shri Sampad Chandra Swain	Hon'ble Minister, Skill Development & Technical Education and Industries, Odisha
2	Shri Bhupendra Singh Poonia	Commissioner-cum-Secretary, Skill Development & Technical Education Department, Govt of Odisha
3	Shri Rashmi Ranjan Mohapatra	Chief Executive Officer (COO), World Skill Center, Odisha
4	Shri Pinaki Pattnaik	Chief Operating Officer (COO), World Skill Center, Odisha
5	Prasanta Dash	Chief, Field Office, UNICEF Odisha
6	Swagatika Mohapatro	Deputy MD, Gram Tarang
7	Shipra Nigam	Senior Director, Just Jobs Network
8	Smit Gade	Sr. Director, Good Business Labs
9	Sukirti Pattnaik	Founder, Indulge Salon (Odisha)
10	Sushmita Sarangi	Commercial Director, Taj & Jiva, IHCL
11	Kalpana Razdan	Director of Product (Last Mile), Delhivery
12	Yashveer Singh	Head, Sourcing and Hiring, TeamLease
13	Arnav Kalia	Associate Director, GATI
14	Neetu Singh	Head of Programs, The Udaiti Foundation
15	Kanika Singhal	Lead of Government Engagement, The Udaiti Foundation
16	Seema Varma	Head - Project Operations, The Udaiti Foundation
17	Sagar Mahapatra	Senior Program Manager, Government Engagement,

		The Udaiti Foundation
18	Poorvi Chaudhary	Program Manager, Government Engagement, The Udaiti Foundation
19	Ruchika Mohanty	Program Associate, Government Engagement, The Udaiti Foundation
20	Prashant Singh Bhati	Associate, Project Operations, The Udaiti Foundation
21	Aanya Vinod	Associate, Communications, The Udaiti Foundation
22	Aman Yadav	Programme Associate, Private Sector Team, The Udaiti Foundation
23	Bishwajeet Roy Mukund	SIPT (ITI), Pattamondai
24	Sahoo Kahnucharan	Deputy Controller, SCTEBT
25	Das Nibedita	OCI - DTET
26	Mohapatra Ruhia	Training & Placement Officer, Govt ITI Bhubaneswar
27	Hansda	Lecturer, Govt Polytechnic Kendrapara
28	Leenu Das	Deputy Director BBI, Skill Development Department
29	Sumantini Behera	ATO - Electronics Faculty, MITI Choubwar Cuttack
30	Sumita Ghosh	SPM, Spandan
31	Sankalp Charan Murme	Joint Director (Skill Development & Employment), Directorate of Skill Development
32	Samya Ranjan Nayak	Training & Placement, Biju Patnaik School of Engineering
33	Gautam Aryabhushan	Senior Manager, Heifer India
34	Rohit Kumar	Student, KIIT Institute
35	Ghanashyam Shah	DSDEO Cuttack, SDTE
36	Biswajit Roy	ATO Welder, SIPT ITI Pattamundai
37	Tattwomasi Mohapatra	DSDEO, District Skill Development & Employment Office Dhenkanal

38	Aurobindo Ghose	Lecturer Stage-II Electrical & TPO, Govt Polytechnic Puri
39	Labanyabati Behera	Facilitator, Govt ITI Balugaon
40	Subhranshu Mahapatra	Srichandan DTO, Govt ITI Balugaon
41	Dr. Gitanjali Tripathy	Lecturer Stage-II, Govt Polytechnic Bhubaneswar
42	Mukesh Kumar Dalei	TPO, Govt Polytechnic Dhenkanal
43	Chinmayee Tripathy	Skill Development-cum-Employment Officer, DSDE
44	Sibasish Sahoo	Skill Development-cum-Employment Officer, Directorate of Skill Development
45	Pratyush Samal	Program Manager, Gati Foundation
46	Choudhury Manoj Kumar Sahu	DTO, Govt ITI Cuttack
47	Annapurna Swain	ATO (ED), Govt ITI Puri
48	Prabhudatta Mahapatra	Placement Officer, ITI Berhampur
49	Ajit Kumar Uttaray	DSDEO, Jagatsinghpur
50	Khwaza Gulam Zelani	Senior Executive, TeamLease
51	Subash Chandra Behera	District Skill Development & Employment Officer, Khordha
52	Sampad Pradhan	Deputy Manager HR, Centurion University
53	Deva Prasad Rath	Sr. General Manager, Gram Tarang / Centurion University
54	Manaswee Sethi	DSDEO, Nayagarh
55	Prajna Paramita Debata	ATO, Govt ITI Bhubaneswar
56	Manas Kumar Sahoo	OIC T&P, ITT Choudwar
57	Manoj Kumar Acharya	Government Consulting, Consultancy
58	Sarojini Sahu	Student, World Skill Center
59	Geetanjali Mahanta	Student, World Skill Center

60	Swadhina Panda	Industrial Automation, World Skill Centre
61	Gita Rani Nayak	Student, World Skill Center
62	Rasmita Behera	Industrial Automation, World Skill Center
63	Suchitra Baliwada	Senior Manager HR, Sapigen Biologix Pvt Ltd
64	Swagatika Nayak	Program Manager, Selco Foundation
65	Biswarup Swain	Program Manager, The Convergence Foundation
66	Prateek Kumar Das	Lecturer (Stage-II), Govt Polytechnic Jagatsinghpur
67	Indrashish	Senior Program Manager, The Convergence Foundation
68	Sayani Ghosh	PM, FED