

Skill Development for a new Rural Resurgence



Recent initiatives such as the National Skill Development Corporation have begun to address some of the needs related to skill development in various sectors. However, the needs of the rural areas, and those of agriculture/allied sectors are yet largely unaddressed. In this blog, Mr Girish G Sohani illustrates some of his thoughts on skill development for employment, self-employment and enterprise development in rural areas based on the experiences of BAIF Development Research Foundation.

India today faces a massive skills deficit compared to the tremendous demand generated within all sectors of the economy – industry, construction, infrastructure on the one hand; and agriculture and allied sectors on the other. In order to address emergent needs and challenges in rural areas, there is need for an approach based on skills development as an important strategy.



The approach

In our view an appropriate approach for skill development in rural areas should contain the following key elements. (We propose this approach based on our experiences in this area).

- Rural Focus: Skills development for employment, self-employment and enterprise development in rural areas.
- Coverage of both farm-based and off-farm sectors.
- Delivery of skills development close to the setting of trainees.
- Open school system for certification.

Over the last few years, the BAIF (BAIF Development Research Foundation) has worked upon skills development programmes in agriculture, animal husbandry and land and water resource management (Box 1).

Box 1: BAIF Approach

Over the last 40 years BAIF Development Research Foundation (www.baif.org.in) has worked on innovative approaches for livelihood generation in rural areas through Natural Resource Management and creating gainful self-employment through development of livestock, agriculture, horticulture and forestry. These programmes have positively impacted about 4 million families in a dozen States of India. Demystification of technology and capacity building of participants have been important planks of BAIF programmes. One important feature of BAIF programmes is the thrust given to participation of women, not as passive beneficiaries, but in active spearheading of development initiatives. The women are further organized into Self Help Groups (SHGs) which function as the social capital for development action.

BAIF programme have over 7000 SHGs (representing over 1 lakh families) and involved in micro-credit, contributing to better social security, absorption of technology and skills and promotion of enterprises. Through its programmes, BAIF team works with women SHGs as well as Common Interest Groups (CIGs) of farmers, which are further federated into second tier organizations which take up aggregate-level activities for supporting farming as well as engaging with markets. BAIF has been recognized as a study center by national and state level universities and open schools. For instance, BAIF is recognized as a Study Center for Natural Resource Management course under from Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) and has been undertaking various diploma and certificate level programs with Yashwantrao Chavan Mukta Vidyapeeth, Maharashtra.

In the recent past skills development programmes have been started in construction technology areas such as masonry and bar Bending. Other potential areas such as plumbing and the hospitality sector (through rural-/agri-/eco-tourism) are also being explored currently.

Sectoral Coverage

BAIF plans to leverage its existing knowledge base and experience in the above sectoral areas to put in place a skills-development programme focused on the rural sector (Table 1).



Table 1: Skills Development in Rural Areas: Scope and Levels (Illustrative Themes in BAIF Programmes)

Sr. No.	Areas/Themes for skill building	Skills for Service-Delivery / Setting Enterprises	Upskilling of Practitioners
A.	Natural Resource Management ·Water Harvesting and Management ·Watershed Management ·Watershed Development Technician	· Water Technicians (Turkey planning/installation of water pumping/application systems) · Water Technicians (Maintenance) · Handpump Technicians · Microclimate Management: Shade Nets/Poly houses	·Efficient Water Usage ·Improving Soil Health
B.	Agriculture / Horticulture ·Crop Planning ·Sustainable Agricultural Practices (SAP) ·Soil Health Management	· Grafting of Horticulture species ● Nursery Raising ● Nutrition Gardens ● Systems of Crop Intensification (SRI, SWI, SSI) ● Seed Production ● SAP Input Production (including organic fertilizer) ● Soil Health Monitoring and Advice ● IPM ● IPNM	·Farm Implements Maintenance ·Post-harvest handling of farm produce ·Crop Intensification /Diversification ·Soil Health Management ·Improved Fertilizer use efficiency
C.	Livestock Development ·Dairy Cattle Management ·Goat Rearing Management	● Artificial Insemination and Allied Services ● Buck-Rearing for Goat-Keeping ● Disease Diagnostics and Preventive Health Care ● Milk Handling and Preservation	·Feed/Fodder Security ·Economic Milk Production ·Clean Milk Production ·Reproduction and Nutrition Management of Cattle
D.	Forestry Based Livelihoods ·Planning for NTFP based livelihoods	● Management of Young Silkworm Rearing (chawki) ● Running Silkworm Granages ● Post harvest operations on Sericulture Cocoons ● Raising forestry Nurseries ● Lac Cultivation Mangement ● Seed Lac Production ● Honey Processing	·Sustainable Honey Harvesting ·Improved Silkworm Rearing
E.	Construction and other Appropriate Technology ·Assessment of Technology needs and Scope	● Operating “Building Centers” ● Fabrication and Maintenance of Agricultural Machinery/Implements ● Ferrocement Technology ● Bio-energy Technologies	·Basic Construction Skills-Masonry, Plumbing and Painting
F.	Community Mobilisation ·SHG Formation and Management	● Book-keeping for Small Groups ● Accounting of Enterprises/Farmer Organisations	

Roles

A skills-development programme in all the above areas will require work on

- Development of contents and pedagogy in partnership with key institutes.
- Setting up an Assessment and Certification system in the open school system.
- Organize the delivery through a hub-and-spoke model and using ICT.

Teams: BAIF proposes a core team at a central level (at Rural Resource Centre for Skill Development) and extended teams at the delivery end (skill development centres) to design and implement skill development programmes.



The resource center will provide technical knowledge base to other centers by shouldering responsibility of developing course material (in local language) for Instructors and demonstrators. The thematic experts (subject experts) at the central level will work on pedagogy of courses, develop a team of Instructors and demonstrators and also develop linkages with concerned universities and experts and involve them in developing the curriculum and certification of the course. They will organize:

Curriculum Development Workshops-

Through these workshop experts from the related fields are brought together to develop curriculum of each course. The course curriculum will be developed on modular basis, in line with NSDC or open school curriculum.

Development of audiovisual aids and training materials-

For effective transfer of knowledge, audiovisual aids will be developed as supplementary tool in training. They will be in the form of either standardized power point presentations, small 3-5 minutes films on good practices or processes or visual presentation. Considering the constraint of availability of uninterrupted electricity and internet connectivity, this material will be in the form of offline CDs. To supplement this, material in flex and print form will also be developed for each course.



Training of Trainers- A Core Faculty Team (CFT) will conduct Training of Trainers to suit requirements of various module. The duration may vary as per the course structure. The first batch of trainees in the first location can operate as Master Trainers (MT) for starting another center in new location.

At each Skill Development Center there will be one Center in charge who will take up promotional activities for sourcing of trainees and a small team for Instructors and demonstrators to impart training. The centres could develop partnership with the National Skill Development Corporation, the Open School System or similar other national level authority for assessment and certification of the courses offered.

Conclusions

The Skill Development Programmes should have a rural focus and should offer trainings on farm based and non-farm based trades. It should focus on up-scaling the skills of practitioners and creating a cadre of service providers or for self employment. Each skill development centre should be organized in such a way that it has the capacity to cater to 10,000 trainees per year. Each Skill Development Center should select the courses depending upon the agro climatic conditions and need and the list will be revised every year to suit the demand of the local area. Each course may have around 20% of theory and 80% of practical hands on experience and the medium of instruction should be the local language.

Having worked in livelihood creation for rural areas, BAIF has a small team of trainers at many locations who can be assigned this task. BAIF has strong field programmes in Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh and Punjab where the Skill Development Centers can be established in association with local institutes having training facilities. We look forward to engage with the rural skill development initiatives of the Government and other agencies in the coming days.

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