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***National Workshop on “Strategy  
Planning for Implementing RPL  
for Informal Sector”***

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***(Jointly hosted by NSDA & NIOS)***

***24 April 2014***

***Room No 707 Conference Room , (7th Floor )***

***NIOS A 24/25 Sector 62 NOIDA***



India has set a huge target of training 500 million people by 2022, which requires programs that are scalable, replicable and accessible. A large portion of the employment would occur in the lower segment of the skill pyramid. Predominance of unorganized employment has been one of the central features of the labor market scenario in India. The unorganized sector is heterogeneous in nature and cuts across all economic activities in rural and urban areas. The sector is dominated by workers employed in micro enterprises, casual laborers, migrant laborers, farmers and artisans in rural areas. These groups constitute the bottom of the skill pyramid with relatively low skills, poor productivity and low income.

Skill development for bridging the widening skill gap has become a priority in India. About 90% of the jobs in India are reportedly “skill based” and require vocational training. The current skill development initiatives of various government ministries and departments are focused on organized sector workers. Furthermore, initiatives for the organized sector have gained momentum over the last few years due to rapid advancement in the country’s manufacturing and services sector. On the other hand, there is no robust skill development framework for the unorganized sector, due to which a majority of workers employed in the sector lack any kind of formal skill development training.

Around 85% of the workforce in the unorganized sector does not imbibe any form of skill development, formal or informal. The formal training system poses entry restrictions in terms of minimum education requirements, which makes it inaccessible especially for workforce in rural non-farm sectors. Most of the skill formation in the unorganized sector takes place through informal channels such as family occupation, on-the-job training under master craftsman with no linkages to formal education training and certification.

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is a very important associated function of the NSQF,

especially in the Indian context where majority of the workforce has not received formal training. The NSQF will help individuals who have gained learning informally, such as through life, work and voluntary activities to have this learning recognized.

RPL will give an option for personal or career development or to gain credit towards other qualifications or learning programs to learners who have the skills but no certificate to prove it. It will help learners make clearer connections between the learning they have already achieved and future learning. Benchmarking an individual’s learning against the NSQF Level Descriptors will help them to identify the appropriate level of options for progression.

RPL is a tool that can assist such individuals to build on what they have already attained in order to progress still further. It is essentially a form of assessment, but aimed at people who do not come to assessment after a period of formal training. Using methods specific to this target population, RPL can identify the skills they have and the gaps in their skill sets; and it can give them formal recognition of the former which they can use to access further training. With the notification of the NSQF, NSDA has decided to take up pilot projects in select sectors for RPL, along with NIOS and other important stakeholders. Against this backdrop a National level Consultative Workshop was organized.

#### **Workshop Objectives:**

National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) and National Skill Development Agency (NSDA) organized a consultative National workshop on ‘Strategy planning for implementing RPL for Informal Sector workers’ on 24.4.2014 to develop an action plan for implementing RPL in the Indian context

The objectives of the consultative workshop were as below:

1. To understand the conceptual framework related to assessment and validation of the prior learning;

2. To gather International experiences on assessing prior learning in the context of developing labour force and education at all levels;
3. To gather the Indian experience from various stakeholders who have been engaged in RPL in India till date
4. To find out concern and issues related to related to assessment of prior learning and linking the same with the further learning continuum in a training and education set up;
5. To develop an action plan on RPL execution in the context of skill development and within the framework of NSQF in India;
6. To identify institutional responsibilities, including industries, on assessment and validation of the prior learning experiences in the context of developing empowered workforce.

## MINUTES OF THE MEETING

### SESSION I

**Dr. S.S. Jena (Chairman, NIOS)** provided a background to the development of the RPL framework by NIOS. He observed that while skills of unorganized workers should be assessed through RPL frameworks, the assumption that certification may lead to higher pay needs to be tested. Since RPL is in its nascent stage in India, he was of the view that the next course of action should be deliberated upon during the workshop. Dr. Jena raised questions pertaining to the potential benefits of RPL certification, especially factoring into account the costs involved. Some of the other issues raised by Dr. Jena were as follows:

- Next step for the assessment, validation and certification for the workers in the informal sector.
- Opportunity costs involved for daily-wage workers.
- Selection of sectors for the RPL pilot-studies.

**Mr. J.P. Rai (Director General, NSDA)** in his opening remarks stated that RPL is an integral component of the National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF). He highlighted the relevance of RPL in India- where around 85% of the unorganized workforce does not imbibe any form of formal skill development. He also stressed on the need to recognize the pre-existing skills of the workforce and recognize previous learning (often experiential) towards gaining a qualification. Mr. Rai raised some pertinent questions through the course of his presentation such as:

- Supposed benefits of RPL
- Funding the RPL exercise – will the cost vis-à-vis benefit encourage beneficiaries to pay for the certification?
- Modalities for recognizing and certifying prior learning?
  - Will it vary from sector to sector?
  - How do we determine what process for each sector?
  - What role can the open schooling system play?
- Issues related to bridging knowledge – when, how and at whose cost?
- Process for conducting pilot studies (4-5 sectors) and which sectors?
  - Terms of reference for these pilots
  - Test assumptions related to RPL
    - Will certification result in improved working conditions and bargaining power?
    - Willingness of informally trained persons to opt for RPL

### SESSION 2 : INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES

**1. Ms Bhardwaj (Pearson's U.K.)** presented a brief background of vocational education landscape in the UK. The SQA is the designated apex authority for vocational education. All awarding bodies in the UK (130

approximately) follow the policies and procedures laid down by the above-mentioned authority. The assesses is viewed and referred to as a learner under the UK model. The framework is designed to be a trust-based model in which internal evaluation is given preference by the institution. Furthermore, the learner is usually attached to a learning programme/institution at the time of registration thereby making it more inclusive in the mainstream learning process.

### **RPL stages in U.K.**

**Stage 1- Information, Awareness and Guidance:** is normally provided to training provider, candidate, institution etc. This is a well-documented process that has to be completed within specified timelines. Support is extended to the learners at this stage by analyzing the credits that he/she may have to complete to fulfill certification criteria.

**Stage 2- Pre-assessment:** This entails evidence gathering by the learner. Administrable evidence includes employer verification and/or endorsement, portfolio, etc. Each learner is prescribed an assessment plan or tracking document. All evidence collected at this stage must meet the standards prescribed by the certifying agency.

**Stage 3- Assessment:** Being a trust-based model, the assessment is carried out by the institution internally. If the evidence is found to be valid, transparent and reliable then the learner is provided with requisite certification. External assessment is resorted to only in exceptional cases. In such instances industry experts are usually invited as assessors.

**Stage 4- Certification Claims:** The training centre, on behalf of the student, makes the certification claim with the certifying agency. Post-formal registration, the RPL records are collected and maintained along with assessment records of the learner by the certifying institution.

**Stage 5- Appeals:** If RPL Application of a learner is rejected, he/she can appeal against the decision.

Ms. Kajari observed that RPL is time consuming, expensive and mostly used at entry level. The framework RPL in UK is publicly

funded and has been in practice since early 80's. Furthermore, bridge course for teaching/training on gap areas is also funded by state. She attributed mandatory licenses by professional bodies for working in UK as one the key factors behind RPL enrolment. Ms. Bhardwaj emphasized that one of the key successes of the system is that RPL learners are treated at par with mainstream learners.

**2. Ms. Melanie Chapman (NIOS New Zealand)** began with a brief overview of the education system in New Zealand- which has been rated sixth on the Human Development Indices (2013). This Index measures both the adult literacy rate and participation in the education system from pre-school through to postgraduate education. New Zealand is also ranked high in international assessments of technical and vocational education and training (TVET)- with the second highest entry rates and fifth highest achievement rates.

In the 1990s, New Zealand introduced TVET changes in response to economic restructuring. The emphasis of tertiary education sector reforms included stronger links between industry and labour market training policies, establishment of industry training organizations (ITOs) and a coordinated national qualifications system, with the new national qualifications body working with industry to develop National occupational standards across all vocational areas.

While apprenticeships were an established model in some trades, the 1990s reforms enabled a blended model of on-job and off-job training across a broad number of industries. The ITOs played an important role of managing the relationships between industry, provider and learners to ensure consistency, quality and learner success.

New Zealand officially views RPL and assessment against designated learning outcomes or standards as equal. An NZQA 2003 report says that 'an important principle of the National Qualifications Framework is that skills, knowledge and understanding gained outside formal education or training will be recognised'.

The main variables for RPL in New Zealand are the methods of assessment and the extent to which an institution will use RPL. For example some institutions have policies where only up to 80% of a qualification can be awarded by RPL. In NZ, RPL is more commonly and extensively used across ITPs and ITOs that use workplace assessment in their normal assessment practice. Ms. Chapman highlighted the merits and demerits of the assessment methods through case studies such as the Open Polytechnic of New Zealand (OPNZ) where the staff members are trained as RPL assessors.

#### **RPL process in New Zealand**

In the initial stage the assessors help students choose the most appropriate pathway. The assessor also guides the candidate determine unit standards (competency areas) they can meet as per the assessment process. The assessee is then expected to collate evidence, which should not be older than 2 years old. Once the unit standards have been collected, the assessee is informed about the remaining assessment parameters. Assessment takes place in 3-4 hour sessions. The assessment is conducted at the workplace and often evidence is gathered from the online learning environment. Since the assessor(s) are familiar with the work environment, they are also able to guide and assist the candidate in collecting appropriate evidence.

Under the OPNZ initiative approximately 20 staff members have been involved so far. Feedback from staff has been very positive and assessees are volunteering to take part in the process rather than being coerced.

#### **RPL for India - experiences from New Zealand**

RPL can be a robust method of assessment depending on how it is implemented. Apart from an assessment framework, RPL methods also induce learning. Ms. Chapman observed that assesses undergoing RPL processes testify to deep learning as they have had to understand the competence defined in the qualification, think through evidence from their past to support their achieving it, and work through this evidence one on one with assessors. She observed that changing

mindsets, especially educators', to recognize the validity of the process takes time.

While RPL for trades is a logical extension of effective workplace assessment practices in NZ, a lot more thought needs to be given to support mechanism for assesses in the RPL process. Ms. Chapman indicated that multimedia guidelines and intense mentoring would be keys to successful implementation. However, challenge of scalability will remain, as successful RPL models are labour intensive.

#### **3. Ms. Belinda Smith- ADB**

Ms. Smith presented case studies from Australia, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, and Bangladesh. She observed that defining RPL process is a very crucial step towards building a national framework. For example, the RCC framework encourages advanced learning by providing platforms to students to get certification by particular training institutes, thereby factoring a learning requirements as well. This is usually not designed into RPL frameworks that are designed only as certification processes.

#### **Australia**

RPL processes are difficult to implement and to access. Prospective students are usually disengaged from the education system and therefore unaware of the TVET options. In fact, many people remain unaware that recognition of non-formal learning as an option. Often, the language associated with RPL also discourages people from taking advantage of it. Ms. Pointed that students who have already entered the work force find evidence accumulation a very difficult process. Thus, ideally RPL Assessors should have high-level interpersonal skills, be able to support/facilitate recognition pathways of assesses, and have high credibility in their field. Ms. Smith stated that there is strong anecdotal evidence to suggest that encouraging candidates to reflect on their learning significantly improves their confidence and contributes to successful future learning.

#### **RPL at TAFE Australia**

Self-assessment of skills and development priorities is an important part of the RPL process at TAFE. The assessment is designed in a manner that it is reflective of the individual's interests, skills and needs. At TAFE,

supervisor's skills are developed to manage the learning of others. Ms. Smith observed that the students are supported in recognising their abilities and background achievements to help them during their certification assessment. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds, such as the aboriginals, find the process very empowering. These students are often motivated to upgrade their skills and knowledge with improved employment outcomes after RPL assessments.

#### **Colombo Dockyards Sri Lanka**

Under the Sri Lankan National System, assessment method varies with NVQ level and the occupation to be assessed. The Colombo Dockyards has an Agreement with the NAITA (Nat. Apprent. Instit. Trg & Ass) for RPL assessment. In a move to standardize the processes all the employees were made to undergo RPL certification. The assessment centre was established within the dockyard and all employees were given separate time to collect evidence. Evidence was collected through mobile phones and supervisors report. Employees found lacking in specific skills were provided training to specific to their needs. After assessment successful candidates were provided with a National qualification under the NVQF.

#### **Malaysia**

A Human Resources Development Fund has been established to provide financial assistance for recognition of employees' skills and experiences. RPL is viewed as a tool to up-skill existing workers and to increase productivity. Ms. Smith observed that in the Malaysian context, certification within the companies was found to be a more effective process. Employers are required to submit applications on behalf of the RPL candidate. A portfolio approach is followed to gather to evidence under the assessment. Training is also provided to assesses for compilation of evidence in the Portfolio.

#### **Bangladesh**

Section 13 of the National Skills Development Policy relates to recognition of prior learning (RPL). 21 National Assessment and RPL centers have been established to meet the National Skills Quality Assurance System (NSQAS)

criteria. National competency standards have been developed against which candidates are assessed. Assessors are also trained in conducting RPL assessment. BTEB is the implementation team for RPL. 1000 assesses participated in a UNICEF/BRAC/ILO partnership for RPL assessment and certification. Additional apprentices in the formal sector, some 3500 machine operators in leather sector and 200 welders in ship-building sector will also be seeking RPL.

### **SESSION 3: INDIAN EXPERIENCES**

**1. Ms. Gayathri Vasudevan (Labournet)** has completed RPL certification for approximately 50,000 learners (including 30,000 in construction sector) across job roles in 6 work sectors. The Labour net method is a holistic method which incorporates technical, management and soft skills. Ms. Vasudevan delved further into the design methodology, evaluation methods used both for theory and practical evaluation. Under the Labour net assessment method, the assesse is administered a set of questions, wherein the assessor checks for participant skills and abilities. The assessments have two type of questions: Firstly, *Observational Questions* which consist of checklist to be evaluated (as Yes/ No), based on observation of actions/ procedure followed by the learner. *Viva Questions* which are evaluated by the Assessor (as Yes/ No) etc, based on the responses shared by the learner. Ms. Vasudevan elaborated on the challenges faced such as job role standardization at work place, willingness of the employers to pay more, literacy levels of workers, availability of assessors, Time and resources for assessment, pathways for higher learning.etc. Ms. Vasudevan emphasized the need to streamline assessment methods within the RPL framework. She also observed that RPL assessment must also be cognizant of the multiple job roles that assesses undertake at their worksite.

**2. Mr. Partha S. Banerjee (DEFT)** outlined the research methodology of an ongoing pilot

assessment being carried out by DEFT in the sectors of Agriculture, Construction and Electronics. The sectors were selected on the following parameters: proportion of unorganized workforce, trades and job roles that have been in existence for at least two decades, existing Sector Skill Council, availability of Occupational standards and Qualification packs.

The core team is being supported by SSC to identify and mobilize the RPL candidates. Assessors have also been identified for each sector, and trained on RPL processes. Further validation of assessment tools and content will be on the basis of SSC provided Qualification Packs. The assessment is envisaged to be carried out as follows: (1) Two day orientation for each candidate. (2) Assessment process to collect artifacts/ evidence of his prior learning. (3) On site assessment for a day: short written exam, practical and orals. Assessment tools will use visuals and will be in regional languages. (4) Besides scoring, assessors to document areas of deficiency for each candidate.

Dr. Banerjee highlighted some of the key issues that need to be addressed through the study:

- Willingness of the assesses to pay for RPL certification
  - How will daily workers be compensated during assessment period?
- Possibility of including non-SSC linked sectors?

**3. Dr. Shaju K. Albert (IGCAR)** shared his experiences from the welding sector. Since most welding in India is carried out manually, Dr. Albert was of the opinion that welders need not have formal education and usually acquire skills on the job. However, he observed that RPL in this sector could help the welder to progress from only level to another level at work based on his skill acquisition. within the company for the welders. Variety of skill requirements (process, positions, materials etc.). Most of the previous experiences tend to be around simple processes like OAW, MMAW. Variety of quality, code requirements (some call for welder to perform many other checks).

**4. Mr. Raj Gilda (Lend – a Hand)** provides skill training to school students in village communities through Diploma in Basic Rural Technology (DBRT) course of NIOS. Under the programme trainers are selected from within the village community and are encouraged to get a certification for the same. The training fees for the assessment is provide by Lend-a-Hand. Mr. Gilda shared some observations with respect to the trainers in the field:

1. There is a certain amount of unlearning involved when the trainer moves from the workshop into the classroom.
2. The trainers find it extremely difficult to maintain records.
3. There might be challenges in involving such trainers within the formal system.

**5. Mr Rajat Khawas (Manipal City & Guild)** touched upon the major aspects of the approach to the Quality Assurance of Assessment. This was done in the context of a joint study between Manipal City and Guilds and Labour net.

There was detailed discussions after all the presentations followed by selection of sectors for the RPL pilot study.

**The five sectors selected for the pilot are**

- i. **Construction –**
- ii. **Domestic workers**
- iii. **Jem’s and Jewellery**
- iv. **Agriculture**
- v. **Capital Goods**

The participants were divided into five groups. Each group deliberated on the following in points:

- Objectives
- Job Roles
- Study methodology
- Timelines
- Costs

The workshop was concluded with presentations by each group.



## Way forward

Pilot studies will be carried out in the following sectors:

1. Construction
2. Domestic workers
3. Gems and Jewellery
4. Agriculture
5. Capital Goods
6. Health

The Sector Skills Councils/Working groups have to submit the proposal by 12<sup>th</sup> May. The proposals should not exceed 2000-3000 words. It should include the following heads:

1. Objectives (hypothesis to be tested in the pilot)
2. Methodology
  - a. Job roles
  - b. Target population
  - c. Geographic location
  - d. Sampling procedure
3. Timelines
4. Stakeholders involved
5. Financial costs.

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