

PIONEERING NEW APPROACHES TO RURAL AGRI-ENTREPRENEURSHIP SKILLS DEVELOPMENT IN JHARKHAND, INDIA

Key achievements

1,202 community service providers assessed as Trainers and Master Trainers under the National Skills Qualification Framework for the JOHAR¹ project by the Agriculture Skill Council of India.

Context

Agriculture and allied sectors in India are amid rapid change with growing urbanization leading to shifts in consumption patterns from cereals to high-value commodities². Specific commodities underwent rapid growth, leading to an increase in agricultural exports over the past decade. However, skills training approaches (to increase competitiveness and employment in income generating commodities of agriculture and its allied sectors) have been mostly unsuccessful in targeting rural producers and rural youth. While the percentage of skilled workforce

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in developed countries is 60–90 percent of their total workforce, in India only 5 percent of its workforce (in the age group of 20–24 years) has formal vocational skills³.

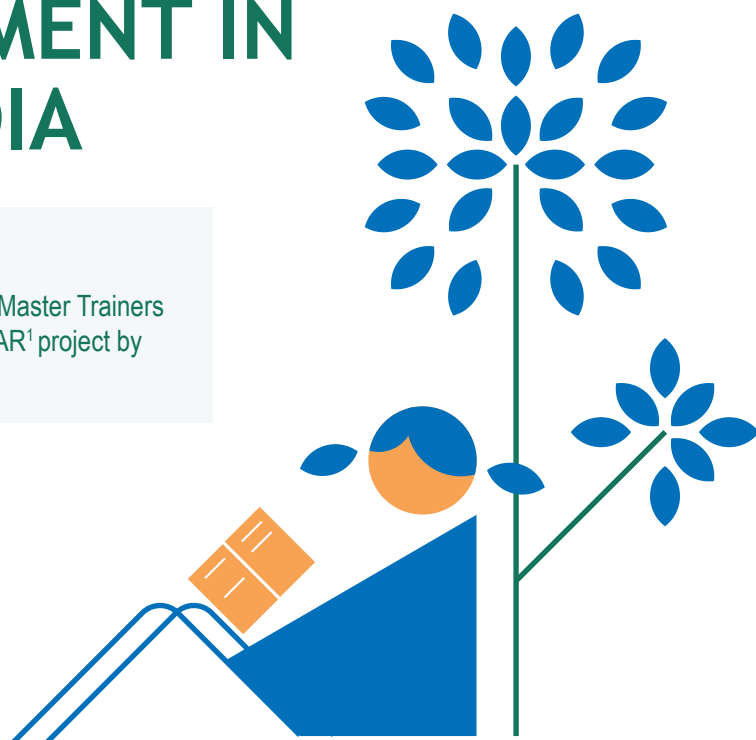
It is imperative for India, with median age of population at 29 years and 64 percent in the working age group as of 2020, to build a skills base, ensure robust skilling for better wages at entry level, and facilitate the need for training and certification to have qualified, trained human resources.

Any initiatives on skill development and entrepreneurship across the country have been highly fragmented and constrained by poor knowledge and limited skill-sets of on-ground community service providers (CSPs)⁴, reflecting inadequate capacity.

Jharkhand has a large proportion of marginal and small landholders (84 percent), who mainly practice rain-fed⁵, single-crop subsistence farming, cultivating a low-yielding variety of paddy.

A vast majority of these rural producers are unable to transition to high-value commodities⁶. The average landholding per farmer is 1.17 hectares. Of the 3.43 million hectares of cultivable land, only 2.23 million hectares (65 percent) is being farmed leaving nearly 35 percent of cultivable land fallow. Small livestock rearing and fish farming in catchment farm ponds, tanks and reservoirs could be important potential sources of livelihood for these rural households. Collection and sale of non-timber forest produce (NTFP) contributes substantially to incomes of forest dwellers and inhabitants of hamlets surrounding forest areas, who are mostly disadvantaged and landless communities belonging to ‘particularly vulnerable tribal groups’.

This note explains the skilling and rural agri-entrepreneurship approach, process design, learnings, and the way forward of the JOHAR skilling initiative.



1. Jharkhand Opportunities for Harnessing Rural Growth.
2. High-value commodities include fruits and vegetables, dairy, fish, eggs, pulses, and small ruminants.
3. “Skilling in Agri-Sector for Growth & Sustainability - Mapping of Institutional Arrangements in the area of Education and Training in Agriculture” — CSIR NISTADS.
4. First-level CSP and Senior CSP are jointly referred as CSPs or cadres in this note.
5. Jharkhand is a rain dependent state and the changing weather patterns with drying up/vanishing water bodies, are accentuating problems for rural producers and tribal households (<https://www.downtoearth.org.in/news/agriculture/drought-but-why-jharkhand-staring-at-food-insecurity-63484>).
6. Refer to Note 10 in this series. Leveraging community institutions to support agri-business and livelihoods in Jharkhand, India.

Government of India's Skilling Landscape

The skillingⁱ landscape in India has undergone massive change in the past five years with revised strategies and modelsⁱⁱ such as the creation of a separate Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, revised policy on Skill Development and Entrepreneurship 2015, robust focus on convergence, formation of National Occupation Standards and Qualification Packs and declaration of new schemes like Startup Rural Entrepreneurship, Micro Units Development & Refinance Agency Ltd (MUDRA) and formation of sectoral Skill Council. In addition, schemes of Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana and Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY) for skilling India have been rolled out. The National Rural Livelihood Programme (NRLM) provides significant support to the institutional building of community institutions in rural/tribal areas, while the Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP) as a subcomponent of NRLM focuses on capacity building of rural women concentrating on entrepreneurship development. National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC)ⁱⁱⁱ was set-up as a public-private partnership to stimulate private sector participation in the Indian skill development sector.

- i. India is among the countries facing the greatest skill shortages. Source: Manpower Talent Shortage Survey via OECD
- ii. Government-funded programs that fully or partially subsidize training/apprenticeships, market-led trainings (where trainees pay for the course), market-led apprenticeships and industry-led/on-the-job training and long-term development finance. A core role of the NSDC is to provide long-term development finance to profit and non-profit organizations to build for-profit vocational training initiatives.
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Jharkhand State Livelihoods Promotion Society (JSLPS)⁷, under the JOHAR project is developing and nurturing about 7,000 CSPs with expertise in high-value agriculture (HVA), fisheries, NTFP, livestock, irrigation and agri-entrepreneurship. These CSPs are providing skilled technical services to tribal and rural women, producer groups (PGs), and agro-producers across the JOHAR project areas. CSPs are self-employed and earn user fees on the provision of services, and also incrementally increase their income as they gain experience and broaden their knowledge base through continuous interactions with the community and other stakeholders. Over the past few years NRLP, through

CSPs, has provided technical support services (to HVA, NTFP and livestock producer households) as well as on-ground capacity and institution building support to community institutions.

JSLPS has collaborated with the Agriculture Skill Council of India (ASCI) for training, assessment and certification of trainers (Sr. CSP), certification of training centers and assessment and certification of trainees (first-level CSPs) under the relevant Qualification Packs (QPs) and National Occupational Standards (NOS) (for additional information concerning skilling landscape in India, refer to the box above). Under this agreement, ASCI is responsible for the training of trainers, assessing and

accrediting training centers based on the recommendation of JSLPS, and assessing and certifying trainees/technical para-professionals for promoting HVA, livestock, fisheries, NTFP and irrigation.

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Interventions

Structured two-tier system of CSPs. For training and capacity building of farmers of PGs, a two-tier system was developed at the village level. Each PG (approximately 40 to 50 farmers) received guidance and support from a first-level CSP. Ten such first-level CSPs were guided and supervised by a Senior (Sr.) CSP in the field. These CSPs collectively worked to

execute the various field activities of the PGs.

The Sr. CSP was a ASCI certified trainer and responsible for imparting training and developing skill-sets of first-level CSPs in respective areas. Afterwards, first-level CSPs trained farmers of their PGs and developed their capacities.

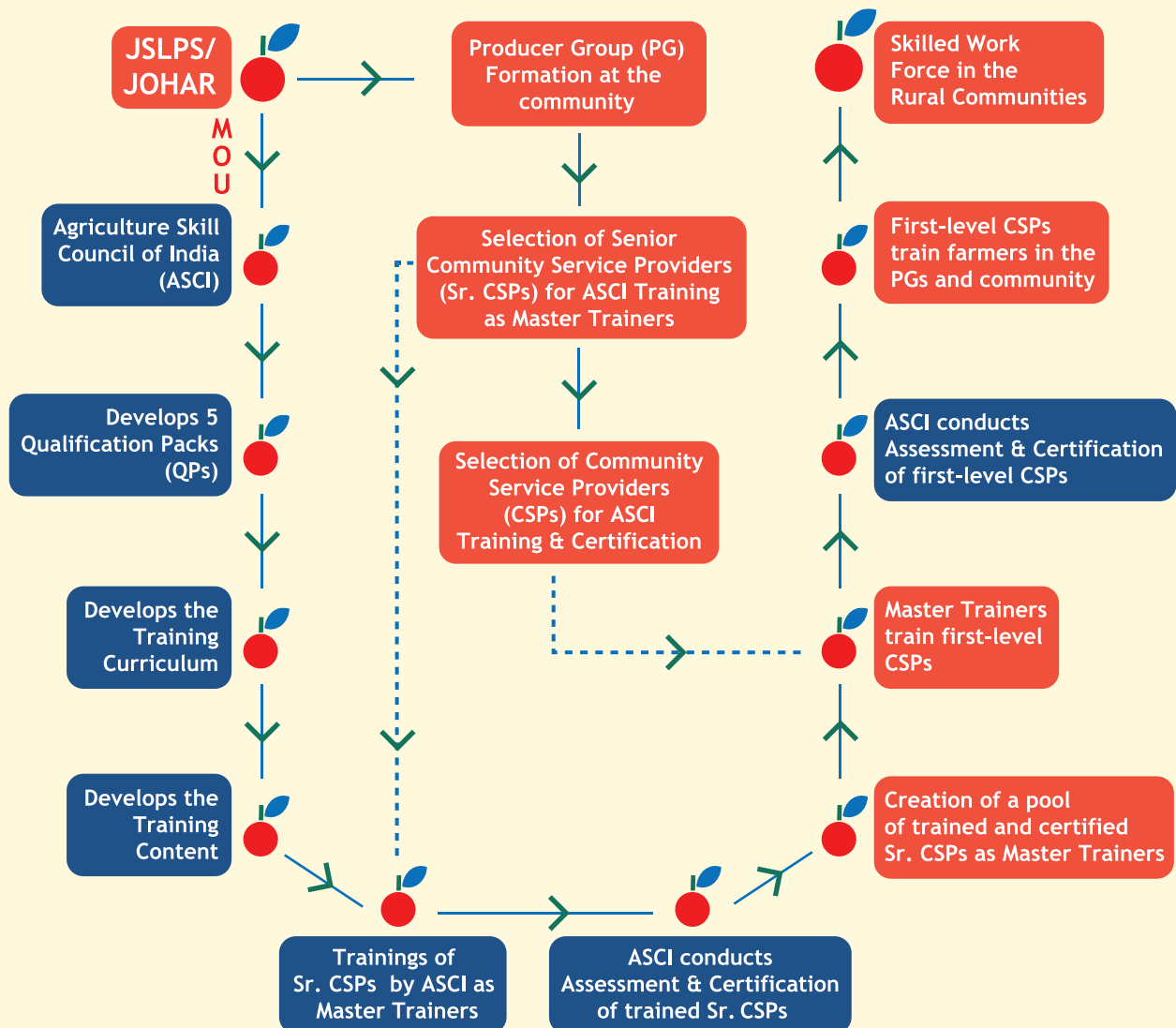
Domain wise designation of CSP. According to the QPs, CSPs had certain designations/technical titles, that were used to define their actual skills and roles while searching for additional jobs. This process of standardization of job roles in rural areas helped develop confidence among those who received such trainings. The table on page 3 elaborates this point.

7. JSLPS, through the implementation of development and economic transformation projects (such as JOHAR, NRLM and NRLP), recognizes the need to skill rural producers, introduce them to new technologies and best practices. These will enable them to adopt new techniques, multiply the production of HVA, such as horticulture and other cash crops, and generate revenues. It is also facilitating opportunities in livestock and NTFP to make them more remunerative. It is, thus, essential to develop new mechanisms and strengthen existing ones to provide regular training and on-field handholding support to producers in agriculture and allied sectors..

Domain	Sr. CSP	CSP	Technical name as per QPs
HVA	Sr. Ajeevika Krishak Mitras (Sr. AKM)	Ajeevika Krishak Mitras (AKM)	Agriculture Extension Service Provider (AESP)
Livestock	Sr. Ajeevika Pashu Sakhi (Sr. APS)	Ajeevika Pashu Sakhi (APS)	Animal Health Worker (AHW)
Irrigation	Para irrigation Engineer (PIE)	Technical Service Provider (TSP)	Irrigation Service Technician (IST)
Fisheries	Sr. Ajeevika Matasay Mitras (Sr. AMM)	Ajeevika Matasay Mitras (AMM)	Fisheries Extension Associate (FEA)
NTFP	Sr. Ajeevika Van Mitras (Sr. AVM)	Ajeevika Van Mitras (AVM)	Non-timber Forest Produce Collector (NTFPC)

JOHAR Skills Process Flow

The flowchart explains the process of training and skilling of the CSPs under JOHAR, achieved in collaboration with ASCI.



Key Learnings

The JOHAR project has taken concrete steps towards developing a skilled cadre base in agro-allied sectors through its community-centric approach of capacity building of CSPs and offering work opportunities with compensation to gain valuable experience and earn livelihood in the process. Besides, these cadres are helping the project by building the capacity of PGs and exposing them with new learnings, which has a direct application on the production, increase in productivity, marketing, and sustainability of the project.

Successes

Creating a pool of trainers. The model of training CSPs, their assessment, certification, and enrolment on the Takshshila⁸ platform served multiple purposes: (i) It built a skills base oriented towards training and certification of qualified human resources. (ii) CSPs received work opportunities and gained work experience, that was remunerative as well, which ensured their motivation to work, self-belief and proactive engagement with communities and local officials. Further, as CSPs travelled for work, they get exposed to newer environments, came across new work opportunities and accepted new training assignments. Overall, a pool of cadres will contribute to the project areas beyond the life-cycle of the project.

Acceptance of QP based skill training in the agro-allied sector.

Awareness and training programs helped PG members understand the importance of skill training and certification. It will prompt many educated and semi-educated farmers or farm workers to undergo such training and certification. They can become self-employed and diversify their livelihood opportunities.

Challenges

Research and appropriate training modules development.

59 percent of the country's total workforce is employed in agriculture in India. Building skills, creating job opportunities, and



Image Credit : Rohit Jain

increasing productivity in the agro-allied sector is critical but challenging. Training provisions, capacity building and ecosystem in terms of QPs and training contents relevant to rural occupations and livelihoods are weak, requiring new research and appropriate training modules. Further, mapping of additional job roles and existing modules or package of practices need to be included in the National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF)⁹.

Sourcing of candidates to train as a community service provider.

JOHAR project requires a pool of trainers and master trainers for the dissemination of knowledge among the rural communities. But, a significant challenge is the identification of the right person from the community who possess the right ability and attitude to execute the knowledge transfer effectively with the perspective of career growth.

Addressing eligibility criteria of CSPs to be Trainers and Master Trainers.

There is a considerable eligibility gap in the selection of suitable CSPs across the agro-allied sectors as per existing NSDC requirements. As per NSQF, job roles of the service providers defined in the table in the interventions section requires the minimum qualifications like Diploma, Graduation and Masters in respective domains such as agriculture, fisheries, mechanical forestry. The cadres

who belong to PGs and are from the rural community do not possess the requisite degree which impedes in building a trained workforce.

Conducting round-the-year refresher training is crucial for the CSPs for their up-skilling, new learnings, and contribution towards the effective implementation of the project. Convergence with State Skill Development Missions and NSDC should be explored in which a structured training mechanism can be designed to strengthen the sustainability and qualifications of the CSPs.

Planning beyond project life-cycle. Currently, as part of the project design, CSPs are paid by the project itself. This ensures an average income of INR 5,000–6,000 per month. The impetus for CSPs to work hard and find additional work on their own is less as the project provides a specific complacency, which limits the scope for engaging in entrepreneurial endeavors.

Enhancing focus on entrepreneurship. A need-analysis in coordination with the domain leads needs to be carried out to explore the agro-entrepreneurship avenues in the program and the project areas and engage with the trained cadres to take up entrepreneurial activities.

8. Takshashila is an initiative by NSDC under the Skill India mission. The portal serves as a dedicated online platform for the management of trainers and assessors of the Indian short-term skill ecosystem, functioning as the central repository of information concerning development of quality trainers and assessors.

9. NSQF is a competency-based framework that organizes all qualifications according to a series of levels of knowledge, skills and aptitude.

A journey of a Master Trainer

Aarti Devi is 35 years old and lives in Banaidag village of Angara block in Ranchi district. She joined Sakhi Mandal in 2012. She was selected as Aajeevika Pashu Sakhi (APS) and was given training by JSLPS in 2013. After the completion of the training cycle, she started providing her services in her village and received some honorarium. Because the honorarium and her husband's income were inadequate for the family, she began seeking opportunities to enhance her income.

Fortunately, the introduction of the JOHAR project in 2017 provided her with a tremendous opportunity. Recognizing her commitment and efforts as an APS, she was selected as Senior APS (Master Trainer) in the JOHAR project. She received a comprehensive 200 hours of training administered by the JOHAR Livestock team and Asset & W with the support of the skills team.

The training consisted of four modules: (i) aadharshila (foundation), (ii) bakari palan (goat rearing), (iii) suar palan (pig rearing) and (iv) murgi palan (poultry farming). These training modules are aligned with national QPs approved by the NSDC. After completion of the technical training (200 hours), Aarti received an additional 10 days of TOT (Training of Trainers) through ASCI.

After the completion of the all trainings, she appeared in the examination conducted by ASCI wherein she scored 80 percent marks leading to her selection as Master Trainer. Further, with her name registered on the NSDC national

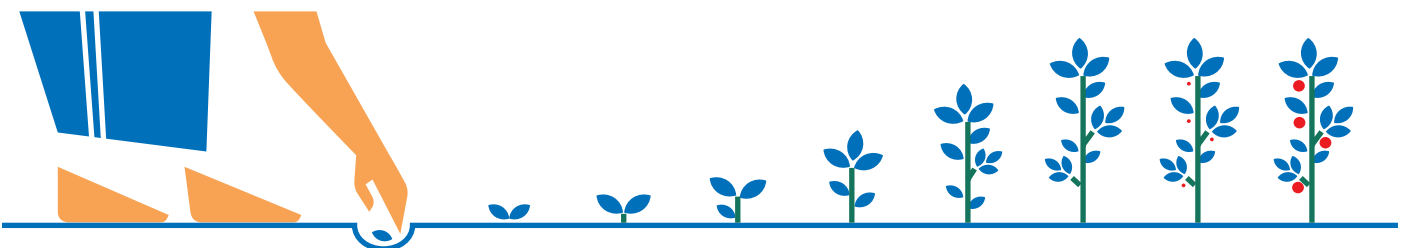


Image Credit : Rohit Jain

portal – Takshashila, she became a duly certified Master Trainer. With her certified skill-sets, she is now capable of providing training and services in Jharkhand and beyond, which is a great achievement for her.

Since July 2018, she is working as a Master Trainer and provides module training as well as TOT to the Pashu sakhis in various districts of Jharkhand. For each training, she receives a daily honorarium of INR 750 and conveyance charges. As a Master Trainer, she is engaged for eight to ten days of training every month. Additionally, she provides her services as an APS in the village. Together with her Master Trainer services and APS honorarium, Aarti earns around INR 8,000–10,000 monthly, which is a significant improvement over her earlier earning of just INR 15,000-20,000 annually.

Narrating her transformation, she says, “I always wanted to financially support my family and have my own identity, as well. Therefore, immediately after joining the Sakhi Mandal, I became an APS. However, the meager honorarium, along with my husband's income, was hardly enough to sustain my family. But getting selected for the Master Trainer was like a dream come true. Now, I am being hired to provide APS training in different districts, and my earning has increased manifold. Further, I can send my children to a good private school in Ranchi, and my family now enjoys a decent quality of life. Most importantly, not only my villagers but people of different districts recognize me and look at me with respect. My confidence has improved a lot, and I'm proud of my achievements”.



Way Forward



Ensure appropriate training infrastructure. This would include the need to:

- perform new research and needs assessment for developing training contents relevant to rural occupations and sustainable livelihoods.
- create a pool of CSPs with opportunities beyond the life-cycle of the project.
- ensure training of competent experts/ service providers: to comprehensively

cover a large dedicated zone on multiple job requirements; to take on a cluster approach in terms of coverage of cadres as well as households; and provide trainings in various job roles round the year.

- ensure that the project does not stress on skilling in various job roles that are not yet approved under NSQF.
- ensure training of CSPs in multi-modules to cater to various geographical areas and domains.

Explore avenues for including people with limited education but extensive farming experiences by re-examining qualification criteria.

- In rural areas, most of the people do not study till college and a good majority study till 10+2 only or below matriculation. Higher educational qualification is a major preventive factor and excludes people with limited education. Therefore, if the NSDC or NSQF re-examines educational qualification requirements and lowers the bar for eligibility, then more people can gain access. This process will ensure

that many more become eligible and receive instruction, increasing the pool of trained workforce in rural areas.

- Increase access to higher education for rural youth.

Access to new technology platforms and convergence with Krishi Vigyan Kendras.

- Multiple new technology platforms/ jobs sites (such as Baba Jobs, Youth4work) are available where CSPs can enrol themselves to seek further work opportunities. Such avenues need exploration within the purview of the project. However, there may be constraints if these job sites are not addressing agriculture and allied sectors.
- Converge with Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs)¹⁰ and other such agencies that impart training to farmers, rural youth and grass roots level extension workers in broad-based agricultural production systems. JOHAR can converge with KVKs for skilling and refresher training courses, as well as engage in strategic deliberations with job sites to create work avenues to its trained CSP cadres beyond Takshshila.

10. KVKs are agricultural extension centers for imparting vocational training to practicing farmers, school dropouts and field level extension functionaries in the rural areas.

ABOUT THE DISCUSSION NOTE SERIES

This note is part of the South Asia Agriculture and Rural Growth Discussion Note Series, that seeks to disseminate operational learnings and implementation experiences from World Bank financed rural, agriculture and food systems programs in South Asia.

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