

Proceedings of the 7th Annual National Conference of Skills Training For Advancement in Rural Societies (STARS) Forum

Theme: Entrepreneurship and Self-Employment Opportunities for the Economically Backward

Dates: 10th& 11thDecember, 2016- Conference, 12thDecember 2016 - Field Visit

Venue: CORD Training Centre (New campus), Sidhbari, Dharamshala, Himachal Pradesh.

Skills Training for Advancement in Rural Societies (STARS) Forum was established by a board of volunteers in 2010 with the objective of constituting a common platform for NGOs and individuals and other stakeholders working in the area of knowledge-transfer of relevant marketable/vocational skills in rural and tribal populations and also among the urban poor anywhere in India, for mutual support and to advance this field by providing a forum to dialogue, problem solve, and facilitate sharing and evolution of best practices & innovative approaches so as to reach as many needy people as possible through practical, relevant and cost effective ways. More detailed information about STARS Forum could be found at www.starsforum.org.

Conference Objective:

The overarching objective of this conference is “to serve as a catalyst to create & enhance livelihood opportunities for the most vulnerable populations in the country by bringing together people from different parts of the country and sharing experiences of substance”.

Speakers were invited to cover a range of topics with this objective in mind. Accordingly, the talks covered the following major themes:

- Challenges and opportunities in forming and scaling enterprises
- Skills Development – innovations that leverage new technologies and devices
- Role of traditional occupations as well as exploring emerging ones (e.g. in renewal energy)
- Farm and Allied Sector opportunities and innovations
- Livestock related livelihood development for small and marginal farmers
- Exploring the role of technology in addressing the demographic scale

21 Speakers and 91 participants representing 44 organisations from 15 states of India took part in the conference. The Conference facilitated the need for (and the power of) networking and exploring collaboration opportunities.

Inaugural session: Day 1 (Saturday, 10th December 2016)
Session Chair: Dr. Kshama Metre, National Director CORD

The conference was inaugurated with the lighting of the lamp by honorable keynotes speakers Shri Ulhas Kamat CEO of I Create India, Shri Krishan Kumar, DANICS, Director-Education, Delhi Government, Dr. Kshama Metre, National Director of CORD, Dr. Yogesh Kulkarni - Chairperson of STARS Forum and Dr. Sudhir Prabhu – Founding member and Secretary of STARS Forum. Invocation prayer by Balvihar children followed this.

After the formal inauguration of the conference, the chair of this session Dr. Metre thanked to all the participants for coming to this conference, and said all the participants are “stars” in their respective fields.

In his welcome address, Mr. Kulkarni welcomed all the guests and the participants and gave a small introduction about the STARS Forum. He said that this STARS Forum was established in 2010 a collaborative body and got registered as an entity in 2013. The organization has been almost entirely driven by voluntary efforts and the fact that this has continued to attract



practitioners and leaders, is indicative of the value they have been able to derive from the Forum. He also gave his thanks to the CORD team for giving excellent support in hosting and organizing the conference and to The Hans Foundation and Sai Engineering Foundation for their sponsorship of the conference and supporting CORD.

Dr. Sudhir Prabhu, founding member of STARS Forum, gave introductory speech and narrated the journey of Forum. He said that when we do come together on a common forum we could create an impressive effect on the society. He said that this organization has been registered as a public trust, with a very eminent Executive Committee. He also discussed about the opportunities with STARS Forum and invited everyone to be actively involved. He invited all organisations to join the Forum as its Affiliates so that they can avail of the platform and its services, as well as offer their own expertise and services to others in the sector.

This was followed by a video message from Dr. G.V. Rao, Executive Director of The Hans Foundation, which sponsored the conference. Dr. Rao offered full support from The Hans Foundation for the Forum and its affiliates to chalk out innovative ideas and constructive plans to uplift the economically backward.

The first plenary session started with the speech of Key note speaker Shri Ulhas Kamat, CEO, I Create India (www.icreateincorporated.org) on the subject: “**Entrepreneurship Development Support.**” He defined entrepreneurship and development and said that entrepreneurs must be problem solvers. Further he added that his organization I Create India provides technical support to individuals who want to become entrepreneurs in their respective fields. He also assured the participants that his organization will share all of its content and methodology so that they too can propagate, mentor and handhold entrepreneurs.

The next key speaker Shri Krishan Kumar, DANICS, Director-Education, North Delhi Municipal Corporation, that policies made by the government often are not designed to get feedback from the field. Hence conscious effort needs to be made on both sides to make policies and schemes effective. He urged the STARS Forum to help in this process.

Session- 1: Scalable Social enterprises

Session Chair: Shri Shekhar Potnis, Vice Chairman, STARS Forum

Name of speakers: Dr. Vanitha Viswanath, Independent Researcher and Advisor, Shri Ajay Kumar, founder of TeachForGreen, and Shri. Ashish V Chavan, co-ordinator at Gram Vikas Tantra Niketan, near Wardha (Maharastra).

Dr. Vanitha Viswanath, addressed the issue of “Livelihood to Entrepreneurship - why a paradigm shift is necessary”. She shared a view that it is very challenging for the very poor from SHG groups to create enterprises. With greater access to technology – especially for girls – a different possibility is emerging that can be cultivated to create enterprises. The educated and not-so-poor can be encouraged to create enterprises involving their family members, thereby not only derisking but also enabling a greater degree of support and cohesion. This can connect well with many of the skill, entrepreneurship and micro-financing schemes launched by the government.



Shri Ajay Kumar - Founder of TeachForGreen a social enterprise, said the aim of his organization is to foster reusable energy related livelihoods in various parts of the country. TeachForGreen (www.teachforgreen.org) provides training in assembling, repair and maintenance of solar lights, fans, solar mobile charges etc. A practical approach that focuses on school children creates not only awareness, but also the capability to provide local services for renewable energy devices. He has organized 150 workshops in various states of India, in the last 6 months alone.

Shri Ashish V Chavan of Gram Vikas Tantra Niketan, Pipri near Wardha, discussed about Community Development through Polytechnics (CDTP) scheme of the MHRD. Various enhancements and refinements were made to the CDTP model at Pipri and the centre was renamed as Gram Vikas Tantra Niketan. He noted that most CDTPs are not functioning well but the experience of the Pipri centre can be freely used to improve them. Apart from describing the various skills related activities at the centre, he also covered various challenges facing rural

entrepreneurs and rural entrepreneurship, and discussed the solutions to these innovated at his centre.

Session –II: Skill Development

Session Chair: Shri Ashok Kalbag, Member – Managing Community, Vigyan Ashram

Name of speakers: Shri B. Ganesh - Founder & CEO, Skill Train, Ms. Ritika Pandey of Digital Green and Shri Vaibhav Kaley CEO of Wonder Grass, Nagpur.

Shri B. Ganesh described the hybrid model innovated by his organization Skill Train



(www.skilltrain.in) to enable skills training at lower cost, with higher effectiveness and easier access to rural students. Anyone can access the content through YouTube or via the SkillTrain Android apps. Students can avail practical training at nearby, SkillTrain appointed centres by booking one-hour slots costing just around Rs. 30 per hour. He mentioned that till date over 50,000 people have subscribed to his channel from around the global. With an anticipated 300 million internet users in India by 2020, he feels that this model will

be more effective than a purely brick-and-mortar model in reaching larger numbers of people in a cost effective manner, and welcomed organisations that would like to partner with SkillTrain.

Ms. Ritika Pandey from Digital Green (www.digitalgreen.org) spoke about its digital approach for improving agriculture, nutrition and health. She spoke of the use of videos created by local farmers that can be utilized to improve farming techniques. They found that farmers were willing to participate and were excited to be on video, assisting their fellow farmers. In these videos agricultural practices and how to improve household development was mentioned. To address a large number of farmers across the country, these videos are available today in multiple languages.

Shri Vaibhav Kaley's talk covered opportunities in bamboo-based construction. Wonder Grass (www.wondergrass.in) is company launched on Nagpur, incubated at IIM Bangalore. The mission of the company is to assist people in rural areas in India construct their houses from Bamboo. The company has set of designs for houses that their customers can choose from, including toilets and housing extensions. Via the use of their pre design kits the customers get to choose what they want and thereafter they construct the homes for the people. In the context of the sanitation drive of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, Mr. Kaley talked about the immense opportunities for constructing toilets using Bamboo.

Session – III: Traditional Occupations & Renewal Energy related livelihood opportunities for the Economically Backward

Session Chair: Shri B.R. Venkatesh, Regional Director of I Create India

Name of speakers: Shri Atul Jain Secretary - DeenDayal Research Institute, Shri Anand Raj - Shree Ladwa Gaushala and Smt. Svati Bhogle - Founder & MD, SustainTech & TIDE

Shri Atul Jain (www.chitrakoot.org) spoke about the need for reviving traditional occupations. He spoke of the importance of traditional wisdom given via traditional, cultural and economic profiles. He spoke about the effects of traditional wisdom and its effects on people, in today's society. He spoke about achieving the 5 zero policy viz. zero poverty, zero illiteracy, zero unemployment, zero disease and zero conflicts and stated that this can be achieved via volunteers and "social architect" couples.



Shri Anand Raj from Shree Ladwa Gaushala addressed the topic of livelihood opportunities with seva of stray cows. He stated that his company has helped farmers in terms of organic farming activities using cow manure and urine collected at their centre. His organization has also revived age-old medicinal formulations and has set up treatment centres. More information is available at www.shreeladwagaushala.org.

Smt. Svati Bhogle founder & MD of SustainTech (www.sustaintech.in) & TIDE discussed about the technical training curriculum for renewable energy products and services for woman self-help groups. She spoke of upgrading skills in people and of re-training of these skills to enhance their livelihood, and sustain their families.

Day 2 (Sunday, 11th December 2016)

Session – 1: Farm and Allied Sector

Session Chair: Shri Krishnavatar Sharma, Cofounder & Program Director, Aajeevika Bureau

Name of speakers: Shri Rupesh Rai of Green People, Shri Shrikant Pohankar of Pohankar Foundation, Dr. Harender Raj Gautam from Horticulture University Solan and Shri. Sanjeev Tagade of Jnana Prabodhini, Pune.



Shri Rupesh Rai spoke about the need to protect micro cultures, and said that goat is the oldest domesticated animal in the world. Through the "goat village" he is trying to develop rural tourism to create job opportunities for the rural people. He further mentioned that in goat village, he started *Bakri Vivah* in order to attract the tourist and carry out cross breeding from different villages.

Shri. Shrikant Pohankar spoke of upliftment of farmers in different states of India with the help of innovative experiments. He explained the importance of sea salt in farming activities, and explained how sea salt can be applied for horticulture crops. He spoke of the multiple benefits of sea salt in farming methods as well as other innovative ideas such as new models of treadle pumps, motorcycle tractor, bicycle based harrows which has reduced labor costs in Marashtra. He also spoke about the unique opportunities in extracting valuable aromatic oils at low cost, and shared successful experiments that to address the rat menace and stray animals that destroy crops.

Dr. Harender Raj Gautam from Dr. Y S Parmar horticulture University Solan spoke of local bio resources for enhancing the family income, by dramatically reducing input costs. With appropriate support and guidance, he believes that a lot of entrepreneurship opportunities can be created across the country to create such bio-resource based farm inputs and make them available to farmers.



Shri. Sanjeev Tagade from Jnana Prabodhini (Pune) introduced various practical vocational trainings such as electronics, car repairs etc. conducted at their centre. He spoke about their experiences in offering and promoting entrepreneurship to students, and offered to share their expertise with other organisations as well.

Session –II: Livestock livelihood development for small and marginal farmers

Session Chair: Dr. Yogesh Kulkarni Executive Director Vigyan Ashram

Name of speakers: Shri Sanjeev Kumar - Founder & CEO of The Goat Trust Lucknow, Shri Jeet Ram Kaundal - Secretary Kaamdhenu Milk Society, Shri Nityanand Dhal - Team Leader, Pradan



Shri. Sanjeev Kumar from The Goat Trust Lucknow (www.thegoattrust.org) shared about their business model in goat rearing, issues, challenges and sustainability for the livelihood of poor people in rural India. He emphasized on importance of vaccination and management of goats through community business model.

Shri. Jeet Ram Kaundal from Kamdhenu Milk Society (Bilaspur Himachal Pradesh) shared about collective efforts on dairy through milk selling and diversification of products to benefit 3000 marginal and smallholder farmers in the hill region in district Bilaspur, Himachal Pradesh.

Sh. Nityanand Dhal from PRADAN (www.pradan.org) deliberated about their experiences on backyard poultry as a business opportunity and food and nutrition security for household under integrated farming for the marginal and small farmers in rural and backward areas.

Session –III: Livelihood related interventions of the poor

Session Chair: Shri. B.R. Venkatesh, Regional Director, I Create India

Name of speakers: Shri JoginderWalia Society for Technology & Development, Shri Kh. Chinglen Singh from SEVA, Manipur, Shri Narender Paul – COO, CORD Sidhbari.



Shri Joginder Walia from Society for Technology and Development, Mandi shared his experience on various units established by them in horticulture processing and preservation for livelihood improvement.

Shri Chinglen Singh spoke about livelihood creation done by his organization in Manipur and some of the special schemes they launched such as the Farmer Loyalty Cards. He spoke about educational programs and vocational training for

farmers

Shri Narender Paul shared CORD's model in comprehensive integrated rural development to bring poor people to the center stage of development and entrepreneurship and development in agriculture and allied sector with special importance and example of CORD with 3500 marginal and small women farmers' empowerment in hill agriculture.



Session –IV: Open Session on Leveraging Technology for rapidly scaling skills development efforts

Moderated by Dr. Sudhir Prabhu – Founding Member of STARS Forum



In this session members of star form discussed how the uses of technology could impact the society in which we live in. Mr. Sanjeev Kumar spoke of how the Goat Trust shared key update on goat's related knowledge by information technology. He also mentioned a device developed to find out sex of chicks, in early stages of their lives. This was important for adopters of poultry in know the composition of the breed and hence the income potential. Shri Ganesh mentioned that with advances in video technology, access to good

Internet and mobile phones, it is becoming easier for trainers to create videos as well as for people to access skills knowledge online. However without good quality content and appropriate pedagogy, this technology by itself will be of ineffective. The use of Pico-projectors with pre-loaded training videos can be used in areas with low connectivity. Members also acknowledged

that while MOOCs are becoming popular, the dropout rates are very high and there are inadequate ways to test proficiency of students learning through such courses. Other members talked of how they were using mobile technology applications for collecting data from the field in offline mode even when data connectivity does not exist or is lost.

Session V: Feedback & Suggestions Session with the participants

Session Chair: Panel of STARS Forum Executive Committee



In this session, attendees shared how the STARS Forum could help improve the sector in the following years. Many suggestions were received in how the Forum can leverage technology to help connect NGOs across the country, help NGOs share not just success stories but also challenges, failures and lessons learnt. The Forum can help distill process improvements and help replication of these processes in appropriate settings. Many social entrepreneurs also expressed the need to demystify as well as promote social

entrepreneurship as a very exciting career and growth opportunity. Suggestions were also received on how the STARS Forum website (www.starsforum.org) can be enriched with content from the conferences, making it more interactive so that affiliates can search for opportunities to collaborate.

