

MODULE 12

PILOT PROJECT IN RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING FOR DOMESTIC WORKERS

1. BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF PILOT EXPERIENCE CARRIED OUT BY THE NATIONAL SKILL DEVELOPMENT AGENCY 124
2. KEY CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EACH COMPONENT 126

1. Summary & Observations on the Recognition of Prior Learning – Pilot for Domestic Workers

To date, the NSDA RPL pilot project has assessed 920 domestic workers in the NCR with an 80% pass rate. These participants will soon be given certificates and a tracer study will begin that tracks the participants post assessment at weeks 5, 15 and 25. Until the tracer study has been completed it will not be possible to provide complete and conclusive results. However, some important observations can be made that will be useful as the soon-to-be-approved SSC for Domestic Workers begins its important work.

As this RPL pilot pre-dated a formal and approved SSC, it was necessary to first create National Occupational Standards so as to have some standard competencies to use for the assessment process. The NOS used was created using the collective experience of the consortium members, several of whom have been training domestic workers for many years. The training courses held by the consortium members over the years had all been designed to meet specific market requirements. They were all demand-led and were created as viable working models at the request of clients, both private and corporate (as in the case of facility management companies). In the absence of any government sponsored training programmes for domestic workers, these organisations responded to repeated requests for training by creating original curriculum and developing methodology that was designed specifically for the domestic workers. The cost and length of the courses are aligned with the amount the employer/employee will pay and the length of time the worker can be free to take the course. The methodology of each training course used as a base for the NOS created for this pilot is unique and designed to take into account the specific characteristics of the individuals being trained including their lack of formal training and low level of literacy.

The very fact that the courses offered by the consortium members are in constant demand even today and create small profits for the organisations points to the fact that there is an identifiable need in the market for trained domestic workers and that training domestic workers can be a viable financially for an organisation if the course matches the market need. This is important for the SSC to consider as it will be essential to find ways to

make the SSC financially viable in the years ahead. The NOS used for the pilot is a combination of these original curriculums and measures the competencies identified for an experienced domestic worker. The assessment tools created for this pilot have their origins in the courses run by the consortium members. In essence thus RPL assessment marks the difference between an absolute beginner who has never stepped foot inside a home to work and someone who has worked as a domestic helper for at least a year.

There are important lessons and observations that can be drawn from the pilot and these will be useful in helping the SSC as it comes together. The observations will help the SSC understand what the market can bear at this early stage and will also inform future RPL assessment programmes. It is also important that the findings of this pilot are taken into account when creating policy around RPL where it affects the informal workforce. There can be no doubt of the necessity and urgency of putting an RPL assessment process in place for the domestic workers. The RPL process, as it develops will provide excellent data which will help to identify the job roles and competencies and it is an excellent starting point in the journey to create a complete market map and to formalize and legitimize this sector. Even if the results of this pilot do not show immediate increases in income for the workers or provide further mobility or legitimacy at this stage (as per the hypothesis set at the beginning of the pilot) the consortium remain convinced that these benefits will come in the future as awareness and understanding about the assessment process grows. Furthermore, lessons learned from the Domestic Workers RPL pilot will inform RPL assessment programmes for other informal workers in the unorganised sector. Independently employed plumbers, carpenters, electricians, domestic drivers, rickshaw pullers and street vendors are amongst those whose work environment mirrors that of domestic workers. The challenges of mobilisation, literacy and scale will be very much the same.

Much thought will need to go into creating RPL assessments for the informal workforce and the RPL process will necessarily look quite different than it does for the organized sector. However, it is the informal workforce who has the most to gain by having their skills recognised and certified. It will be the first crucial step to creating an aspirational career path and, through this process they will, for the first time, be able to understand that there is a journey ahead that will allow them to increase their income, improve their work environment and develop their skills. Improving literacy and creating a

bridge to formal education will be the final step to helping domestic workers join the organized sector.

Some observations drawn from the pilot are listed below as well as a detailed analysis on the key challenges faced during the pilot and some specific recommendations on how these challenges could be overcome.

- From the outset it was clear that the participants understood the value of the assessment and were keen to obtain the certificate. Everyone who came to the centre wanted to go through the process and obtain a certificate even if they were not working in the domestic industry. Those participating clearly communicated that the process was interesting and were confident that the certificate would lend them legitimacy in the job market. Further to this, they believed that having the certificate increased the likelihood of obtaining a job and that showing it to potential employers was likely to help them gain a higher salary. The tracer study will show if these assumptions on the part of the worker are borne out in the market.
- In order for RPL assessment to help the domestic workforce it is essential that at an SSC for Domestic Workers begins the process of mapping the NOSs so that training programmes and RPL assessment tools can be developed in line with these standards. It is imperative that the NOSs reflect the current market environment and that access is given to both live-in and live-out workers. Specific NOS must be developed for live in and live out candidates.
- Gathering evidence of prior learning was a major challenge and yet it forms an essential part of the RPL process. The assessment process was able to go some distance to gathering the information but the lack of other support evidence in the form of employer feedback or past work certificates proved impossible to obtain. Employers were uninterested in helping the workers and unwilling to take the time to fill in the feedback form even though the questions asked were very basic. Finding ways to obtain additional evidence would increase the credibility of the RPL assessment process.
- A nation-wide awareness campaign is required to legitimize the domestic work force and, as mentioned above, to increase employer engagement. As there are no major industrial players in this segment a method for reaching individual employers must be devised. Technology could play a part in this goal

through the development of easy-to-use apps. The awareness campaign could include some degree of education for the employer, advocacy for the basic rights of workers as well as provide information on standards, available courses and RPL assessment centres

- Literacy cannot be assumed in this community. Training programmes, NOS and assessment tools must all be developed with this fact in mind. Lack of literacy is only part of the issue. Domestic workers lack any formal training and as a result lack the behaviours and discipline to sit through long sessions. It will be essential to understand how members of this community learn and all resources and tools must be designed to gather the most accurate information in order to help formalize this sector.
- It is important to recognise the importance these workers place on their independence and to find ways to create/support a more formal employment environment while retaining their personal freedom. It is unlikely that large organisations will be employing these individual and therefore most will continue working as free agents. Therefore, RPL assessment will be the main way in which we are able to map the current skill levels and the data gathered will inform the design of future training programmes. Going forward, up skilling or training programmes aimed at improving their negotiating skills, life skills and increasing their level of engagement and accountability will be important. Teaching them to take care of themselves, their families and their finances will ensure they remain productive members of society.
- Physical resources are essential to carry out RPL assessment and subsequent up skilling. Central and State government can help by identifying unused infrastructure that can be turned into support centres offering RPL assessment, training and education in each community. Developing simple technology-based solutions for RPL assessment and training will ensure inclusion across the country.
- The professional development of freelance of trainers and assessors and their inclusion on a national database is essential to ensure consistent and high quality delivery. The role of these individuals' needs to be mapped and standards to be created. Specializations, such as working with the semi-literate need to be identified and modules for training to be designed.

2. Key Challenges

Mobilisation

Key Challenges Faced

- **Reaching potential participants:** In RPL assessments where there is a recognised industry and specific industry bodies, reaching the participants is relatively straightforward. Participants can be accessed by meeting them at their place of work. However, given the nature of the domestic workers industry, where the workplace is individual homes the task was much harder as the potential participant base was widely spread across various communities. Added to this was the fact that employers were reluctant to give their workers time off to attend the assessment centres. In some cases, a door to door approach was required to gain trust and identify workers for the pilot. NGO's and community groups were central and extremely helpful yet ultimately the success of the mobilisation process came down to individuals deciding to take part and finding a way to attend the sessions.
- **Gaining trust in the communities:** Many of these domestic workers and communities suffer from overexposure from black market agents as well as well-meaning NGO's. We found the potential participants skeptical and wary and it took time to gain their trust even when working with the team from the Domestic Workers Union.
- **Time required to register, counsel and assess was significant.** As workers could not get away from the jobs for very long, the project board decided to register, assess and provide life skills workshop in one session
- **Participants were only available on Sundays:** Sometimes they could not attend at all due to employer demands
- **Accessing appropriate mobilisers:** Finding committed and responsible mobilisers who would work with the project consistently was a real challenge. The work of mobilising in this industry is not considered dignified and the working conditions are challenging as they necessarily need to operate in low income communities. This time of year the heat and access to water proved a particular challenge. Ideally individuals from the same communities would be used as mobilisers but there was too little time to develop a sufficient number of these individuals who could commit to the entire project

- **Lack of time to properly train mobilisers :** the training course was only 4 hours long and was not really sufficient to help the mobilisers understand (and therefore be able to communicate) the importance of the assessment process.
- **Participants did not possess identification:** (particularly true of migrant live-in workers). This made documentation difficult and there were concerns about the integrity of the data as there was no way to verify the individuals undergoing the assessment.
- **Everyone wanted to participate:** Although it is a good sign, the challenge was that informal workers of all types wanted to be assessed so as to obtain the certificate. This created some issues with crowd control.

Recommendations

- **Permanent community/support centres:** These could be set up (in partnership with NGOs already working in the area) in the colonies where there are large numbers of domestic workers. These centres could double as assessment centres, training centres and advocacy centres and would help to access large numbers thereby eliminating the need to go door to door. It is essential that the assessment centres are very local as participants do not have time to travel far to gain certification. Permanent assessment centres would help lend credibility to the process and go some distance to increasing trust in the community. The mobilisers and assessors would also have a base to work from which would help improve their skills through peer to peer learning as well as help them feel that the role has dignity by having a office-type base to work from.
- **Allocate time and resources:** It is normal for a pilot to be short of both. However, in future RPL assessment programmes it will be important to lay careful groundwork on which to build the systems required for a complete RPL process. Considerable time is needed to build teams that are able to mobilise, counsel and assess consistently and to build community awareness. Once RPL assessment becomes a permanent part of the skill ecosystem it would be sensible to ensure due time is given to build teams, systems and processes. Building a solid base will ensure the assessment process actually serves the purpose for which it is intended and the inclination to simply chase the numbers must be avoided. The quality of the assessment is central to ensure the process really leads to the inclusion of the informal worker into the organized workforce.

- **Extensive Awareness Campaign:** An extensive city-wide awareness campaign needs to be mounted to educate workers and employers. Success stories from workers achieving the certification and explaining the subsequent benefits would be most effective here.
- **Incentives:** These would help increase the number of participants attending the session and could be in the form of a meal, reimbursement of transport costs or loss of income support, up skilling.
- **Immediate Assessment:** Is it essential that assessment takes place with two days of mobilisation given the mobility of the workforce. The consortium found that workers would not return on the second day early on in the pilot which forced the decision to register, counsel, assess and train all in one day.
- **Mobilise for multiple job roles:** There were challenges in separating the general (level1) domestic worker from others with more specialized experience. Everyone wanted a certificate even if it was not for a job they were currently doing. Therefore, it would be more efficient to run several RPL assessments for multiple job roles from the same centre to avoid workers from other segments attending the assessments just to receive the certificate.

Assessment Centre

Key Challenges Faced

- **Finding a centre easily accessible to the community:** Given the participants paucity of time the assessment centre needed to be near to their homes and places of employment. Participants would not travel beyond 1-2 km to attend the sessions.
- **Safety of the project team and equipment in the premises:** There were concerns that women working on the pilot could not be left alone on in the assessment centre and locking up the equipment was essential and represented a challenge as the centres used did not have locked cupboards.
- **Size and composition of the centre:** Finding the right amount of space was a problem. Minimum space requirement was 300cm². Time constraints meant that there were 25 participants per assessment group. Participants usually brought their children and their families so space was used up by non-participants.
- **Lack of basic infrastructure and costs associated:** Lighting, water, fans, electricity were sporadic

in most of the communities. The cost of putting infrastructure in place was prohibitive.

Recommendations

- **Create permanent community centres:** These centres, located in communities with a large number of domestic workers, could be used for RPL assessment, training and up skilling, advocacy and empowerment of the local community. Funded by Central or State Government, these centres could be administered in partnership with NGOs already operating effectively in the area and could double as migrant support units (funded by State Govt possibly?). Basic infrastructure could be provided and each activity given a locked space to hold equipment. An outdoor area could be created to hold families and children and medical and welfare camps held on a monthly basis

NOS & Assessment Tools

Key Challenges Faced

- **Lack of SSC:** The lack of an SSC for Domestic Workers meant that NOS had to be drawn up specifically for this project. The project board's market experience informed the process but testing out the RPL assessment on new and untried NOS was not ideal. At the outset of the pilot it was widely felt by the project board that the assessment was too basic and did not draw enough of a distinction between a completely unskilled worker and a worker at Level 1.
- **Constraint of time and resources to create the tools:** Original, sector-specific images would have enhanced the effectiveness of the assessment tool but there was neither time nor funding within this pilot to do this.
- **Process was labour intensive:** Total time required per participant was 5 hours not including mobilisation. Registration/counseling - 2 hours: Assessment - 1 Hour and Life Skills Workshop – 2 hours. Time also dictated how the assessment tool was designed and utilized. Given the time frame the tools were designed to be 80% visual/written (keeping in mind the very low level of literacy) and 20% practical demonstration. It was agreed by the consortium that this was the only way to get people through the process in a few short months. In this sector a more hands on assessment would be optimal therefore these numbers should be reversed but this would make scale impossible. Added to the challenges of

assessing practical skills the participants lack of experience with formal learning & assessing environments meant that it took more time than expected and required the assessors to be particularly sensitive to the participants which translated into extended training for the assessors. Participants were skeptical and anxious when they first arrived at the Centre and time was required to put them at ease. Prior to using the assessment tool, the assessors had to explain all aspects very carefully and were required to demonstrate even how to mark “Xs” on a page.

Recommendations

- **Creation of standardised NOS :** These will urgently need to be created by the SSC in order to have an effective RPL assessment process and it is crucial that they reflect the job roles as they exist in the market today. The NOS will also need to be generic enough to be utilized across the country and in both tier 1 & 2 cities. Once the NOS are approved, an assessment tool for each will need to be created. The NOS used by the pilot could be adapted and elaborated and separate NOS and assessment tools created for live-in and live out domestic workers. Competencies around the use of some basic household equipment would need to be included in the NOS going forward. It will be key for the SSC to focus on the need for visual and practical tools given the low levels of education and literacy so prevalent in this sector
- **Basic & simple Technology:** Through the use of video images and software specially created for the sector a larger segment of the workforce could be more easily accessed. By using simple software and taking some time to teach participants how to use a computer mouse, objective and standardised assessments could take place faster and for many more participants per day. Create one assessment tool that can be used and adapted across the country.

Assessors

Key Challenges Faced

- **Freelancers:** Free-lance assessors were used in the pilot. They were graduates who had worked in the industry. Although they approached the project in the right spirit, their lack of exposure to the informal workforce was a challenge. Because the assessors were free-lance there was a lack of continuity and

assessors were coming and going throughout the exercise which may have compromised the integrity of the process

- **Role of the assessor is not aspirational:** The role of an RPL assessor is currently not aspirational so motivating the assessors to adhere to the process and to be consistent was difficult.
- **Working Conditions:** The working environment of the assessment centre with its lack of infrastructure was a challenge. Safety was a concern and accessibility of the centre sometimes challenging. The environment did not help when recruiting assessors and often acted as a deterrent to finding the right candidates for the job.
- **Training Programme too short:** The assessors underwent a 4 hour training session but it was felt that at least 8 hours of training was required to help the assessor gain sufficient understanding of the sector and sensitize them to work within the domestic community.

Recommendations

- **Job Role Development:** Ideally the assessor and skills trainer job roles are fully developed and become aspirational. In order for these jobs to be considered important and aspirational a career path needs to be drafted out. The roles could be interchangeable between skill training and assessing and training modules need to be created for each specific role. Where possible outstanding candidates from the community being assessed should be put into a longer term training programme to become trainers and assessors. Evidence suggests that when trainers originate from the sector and community they emerge as leaders and give participants a view of what can be achieved with commitment and hard work. If the tools used are appropriate, they can become manage the assessment correctly their understanding of the community allows them to accurately gather data and assess skill sets.
- **Database of experienced RPL Assessors:** A centrally held database of certified RPL assessors and skills trainer would help SSC and organisations source skilled individuals that match their requirements and allow for trainer/assessor mobility.
- **Assessor Training Time Increased:** At least 8 hours of training is required as stated above. The time required will vary from community to community and depend on the level of formal training or education the community has previously received.

FURTHER READING

- European Commission, Cedefop and ICF International. 2014a. *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning: 2014 update*. www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/validation-nonformal-and-informal-learning/european-inventory (Accessed 16 April 2015.)
- European Union. 2012. Council recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning. *Official Journal of the European Union*, C 398/1. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2012:398:0001:0005:EN:PDF> (Accessed 16 April 2015.)
- Rubenson, K. 2001. Lifelong learning for all: challenges and limitations of public policy. *Proceedings of the Swedish Ministry of Education and Science European Conference, Adult Lifelong Learning in a Europe of Knowledge*, March, pp. 23–5.
- SAQA. 2012. Government notice. no. 802, Policy and criteria for the recognition of prior learning. Pretoria, SAQA.
- Singh, M. Forthcoming. *Global Perspectives on Recognising Non-formal and Informal Learning: Why Recognition Matters*. Dordrecht, Netherlands, Springer Open.
- Singh, M. and Duvekot, R. 2013. *Linking Recognition Practices to National Qualifications Frameworks: International Benchmarking of Experiences and Strategies on the Recognition, Validation And Accreditation (RVA) of NonFormal and Informal Learning*. Hamburg, Germany, UIL and Inholland University of Applied Sciences.
- UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL). 2012. *UNESCO Guidelines for the Recognition, Validation and Accreditation of the Outcomes of Non-formal and Informal Learning*. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002163/216360e.pdf> (Accessed 16 April 2015.)