

# LIFE SKILLS TO LIVELIHOOD: THE JOURNEY TOWARDS EMPOWERMENT

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**ABSTRACT**Article DOI URL: <https://doi.org/10.36713/epra3192>

*Much of the Indian subcontinent lives in the rural areas and is considered economically marginalized. The Indian government encourages and conducts many upliftment programs for youth from such marginalized sections that empower them to attain profitable employment. However, it is seen that there are challenges faced during the implementation of such programs, which often revolve around the inability of the youth to adapt to the demands of a job, thus depriving them of an opportunity of growth. This paper assesses the necessity of life skills among the rural Indian youth to gain a sustainable livelihood.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Life skills, Livelihood, Training, Empowerment, Rural***1. INTRODUCTION**

As per the 2011 Census in India, 68.8% of its population of 1,210,854,977 is rural. Also, it is noted that as per the demographic data of the 2011 Census, 56.29% of the population was between the ages of 5 to 34 years, which would mean that as on date, (not considering death rate) 56% of the Indian population falls within the probable workforce. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2011\\_Census\\_of\\_India](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2011_Census_of_India)), ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics\\_of\\_India](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_India)) The Indian government has constituted very many schemes for the upliftment and empowerment of rural youth. However, such schemes do not reach their full potential due to an opposition posed within the rural youth to successfully embrace opportunities. A focussed training in life skills, combined with training of technical skills may enable the youth to gain sustainable livelihood. This paper assesses such possibilities.

**2.OBJECTIVES**

- a. To identify challenges faced when empowering rural Indian youth
- b. To list the ways in which training in life skills will enhance employability of rural Indian youth

**3.METHODOLOGY, SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS**

The research is based on the study and qualitative examination of relevant secondary data taken from peer research and websites. The paper identifies areas wherein the WHO listed life skills contribute towards the sustainable

approach. (Dange, 2016), (Narula, Magray, & Desore, 2017)

Certain selected case lets of development of skill sets aligned towards the goal of employment and related issues are also listed as a part of this study.

India being a “young nation” with 56% employable workforce, the paper can guide the researcher, Non Government Organization (NGO) and Project Managers of programs directed towards rural upliftment. The research is generic and can be extrapolated even in case of change in environment. However, the research related to the 21<sup>st</sup> century Indian rural population only.

**4. REVIEW OF LITERATURE****a.About life skills**

Life skill is the ability of an individual to rise up to challenges and be a productive citizen. It is also known as psychosocial competency. The UNICEF United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) has enumerated that psychosocial and emotional skills drive well being just as much as literary and numerical skills. Life skills are a product of synthesis of many sub skills (including the art of critical thinking and the clarification of values) gained in varied ways (e.g.: “a sense of humour” may be developed by practice).

([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Life\\_skills](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Life_skills))

World Health Organization (WHO) listed the following ten cross-cultural areas of life skills:

**Cognitive Skills**

- Critical Thinking: The ability to analyze information and experiences objectively and derive usable conclusions

- Creative Thinking: Having novelty in one’s thought process, which could be further broken down to fluency in getting ideas, flexibility in changing perspective, originality in traversing a new path and elaboration of other ideas
- Decision Making: The ability to take decisions that lead to results. This involves rational thinking.
- Problem Solving: The individual should have the ability to think critically while resolving issues that come up in personal and professional life

**Social Skills**

- Self awareness: A recognition of one’s weaknesses and strengths, desires and needs; the ability to reflect and retrospect
- Empathy: The ability to understand a situation from another person’s perspective and in the process win his understanding
- Inter personal relationship skill: An individual needs this skill to deal positively with other individuals that he comes in contact with. An individual with this skill can relate positively to interactions with all other people
- Effective Communication: The ability to express oneself as deemed appropriate to the situation

**Negotiating Skills**

- Coping with Stress: An individual should be able to continue with a productive and progressive life even if stressed by displaying resilience in mind and attitude
- Coping with emotions: An individual should recognize that emotions have an impact on behaviour and also vice versa. He should respond appropriately to conflicting emotions(Dange, 2016), (Kumar, 2017)

In their paper, V & Pillai, 2015, conducted an experiment with 30 samples in experimental group and 27 samples in control group, each of size 57 in a school at Kerala. The study revealed a significant impact on life skills training on the well being of adolescents. (V & Pillai, 2015)

Life skills empower cognitive, emotional, personal and interpersonal skills that promote mental and social well being. Life skills enable an individual to adapt to difficult situations in life. Life skill education ensures: Promotion of mental wellbeing and the ability to cope with the challenges of life; Positive social behaviour and the ability to face changing social circumstances; Enables the individual to take responsibility; Protects from behavioural abuse and substance abuse; Increases self esteem and self confidence; Promotes healthy inter personal relationships. (Moral development includes the development of certain moral attributes like Humanity, Intelligence, Courage, Respect, Responsibility, Loyalty and Humility). Life skills education enables the individual to attain moral superiority, which enhances his chances of getting a profitable livelihood. Also, the environment is continuously changing due to technological advances and globalization. In this climate, life skills such as the ability to deal with stress and frustration takes priority.

(Kumar, 2017), (Dange, 2016)

It may also be noted that competition between business entities create a sense of employment uncertainty among youth and only those skilled can retain or progress in suitable employment. (Singh, 2016)

Many candidates are unaware of their rights at the workplace and are victims of a weak law enforcement mechanism. Life skills training along with an awareness of rights and responsibilities, instills a sense of confidence as it teaches the candidate how to combat such fears. (Shah, 2017)

The WHO listed set of 10 life skills are correlated and their relationship could be shown in Figure 1; the use of the arrow being that “if X ! Y, then X impacts Y. (Dange, 2016)

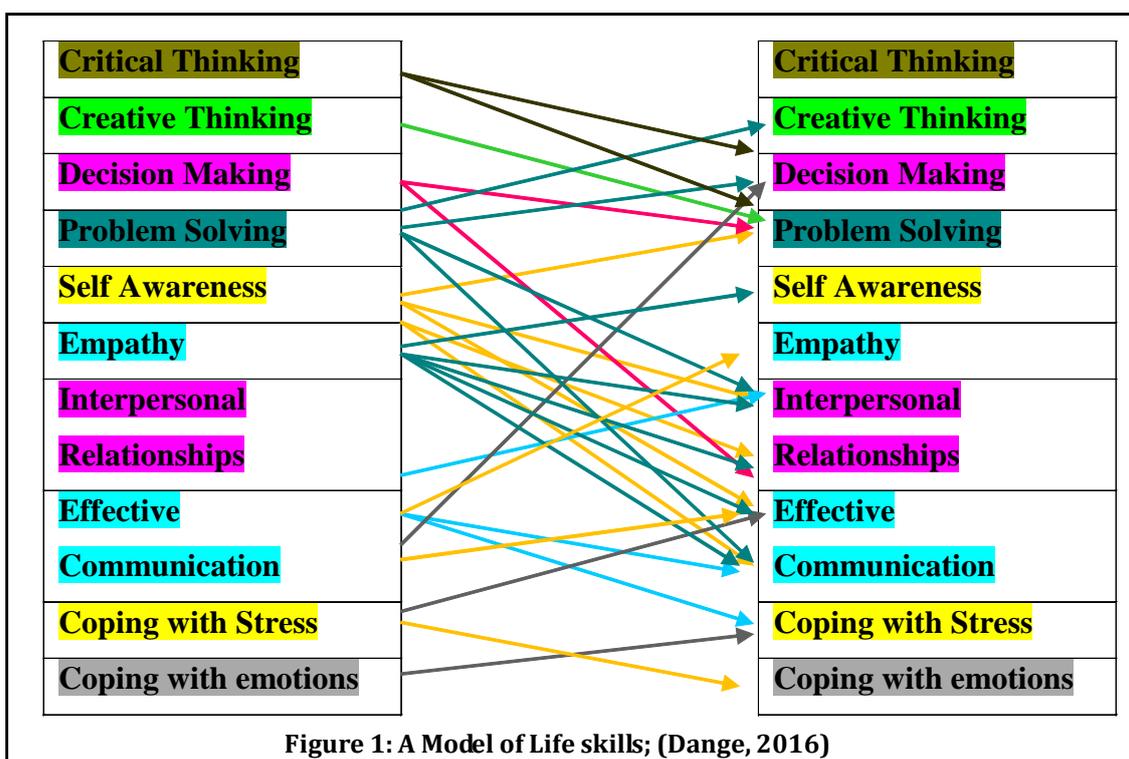


Figure 1: A Model of Life skills; (Dange, 2016)

**b.About Livelihood**

The basic necessities of a person are food, water, shelter and clothing. A person’s livelihood is a means to acquire the same in a sustained and continued fashion. The livelihood encompasses the capabilities, assets (stores, resources) and activities that are required for a means of living. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Livelihood>)

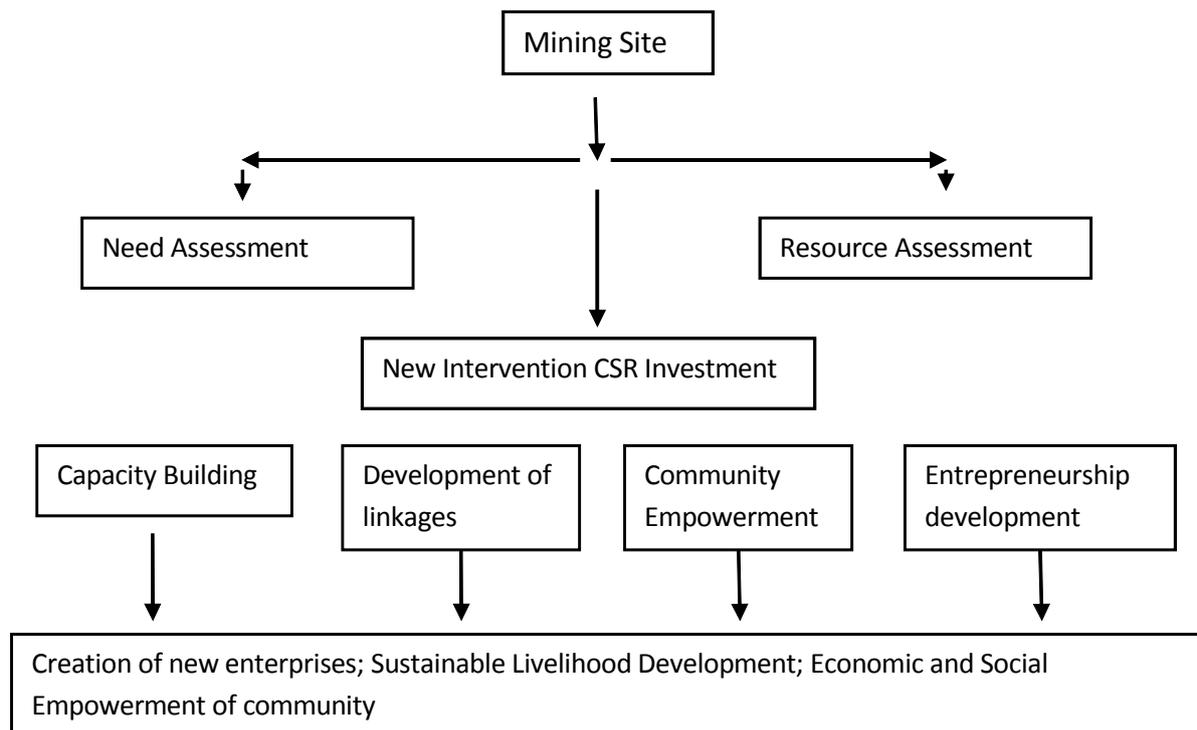
Sustainable livelihood is a means of poverty eradication. A sustained livelihood enables the person to cope with stress and shocks and provide for the next generation by making a living ensuring food security, shelter, health, reduced vulnerability to climatic, political and economic shocks and the ability to control one’s destiny. Sustained livelihood ensures that the individual has equal opportunity as that of others, grows economically and is thus away from social vices that individuals deprived of the basic necessities fall prey to. Livelihood Interventions are conscious efforts by an agency or organization to promote and support the livelihood opportunities of large groups of people. Livelihoods can be enhanced in ways that include increase of income, provision of food security and enhancing of money that circulates within the local economy. (Livelihood Promotion – Key Concepts and models ), (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Livelihood>)

Sustainable Livelihood Approach (SLA) has 7 guiding principles which are: People Centered: People’s Livelihood Assets and how they change over time; Holistic Approach: Take into considerations all factors including government policies; Dynamic nature of livelihood; Build on people’s strength and opportunities; Promotion of micro-macro link an highlight that the policies need to be formed based on the needs of the poor; Encourage partnerships of the private and public sectors; Aim for sustainability.

(Livelihood Promotion – Key Concepts and models )

Many companies have used their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) strategy towards skilling the youth and relevant development of livelihood. 90% of the top 100 companies had at least one program on skills and livelihood development between 2013 and 2016, with a median CSR budget allocation of 12.7%. Maharashtra, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu have seen maximum such CSR initiatives and the North East would do with an increase of CSR footprint. (Menon, Menon, & Parekh, 2016)

In their paper Narula, Magray, & Desore, 2017, studied literature from the mining and livelihood domains to realize a link between CSR, skill development and livelihood opportunities. They developed a Sustainable Livelihood Framework, as shown in Figure 2. (Narula, Magray, & Desore, 2017)



**Figure 2: A Sustainable Livelihood Framework for CSR in Mining; (Narula, Magray, & Desore, 2017)**

Life skills education can be imparted through classroom discussions, organization of group tasks with maximum student engagement, educational games, role plays, debates, brainstorming and generation of ideas and case studies. (Kumar, 2017)

**c.Discussion on the contribution of Life skills to the building of Livelihoods**

Benefits of Life skills education could be classified under three heads as follows:

- **Benefits for the individual:** The development of life skills among the youth makes them find ways of solving problems, make sounder decisions, take responsibility for their actions, communicate effectively, appreciate others and develop a sense of self-awareness.
- **Benefits for employment:** Life skills education teaches the youth how to be a good team player, how to manage peers and adversaries, how

to manage time effectively and how to lead by example and by influence. It also teaches the youth to be adaptable and flexible to meet varied commitments.

- **Benefits for society:** Life skills education develops a culturally aware and responsible citizen. Such a person respects diversity and allows creativity. He also has the ability to positively network and contribute to the society. The main benefit is that a good society is made of amicable responsible citizens. Thus Life skills education which generates such a sense of virtues among youth will benefit society.

(Dange, 2016)

There is a value chain of skills and livelihood development comprising of pre training, training and post training stages. The pre training stage must aim to bridge the gap between trainee expectations and what the job requires and delivers. A youth must know in advance of stepping into a livelihood what exactly to expect in terms of his role and in terms of what the role serves. Post training and post the beginning of participation in livelihood activities the company must track the progress of a candidate for at least six months, providing support as and how required. After picking up a livelihood, a youth needs support to cope with the new work environment, especially if the socio economic background is challenged. (Menon, Menon, & Parekh, 2016)

In their paper Nowak & Caulfield, 2008, studied the cases of women and livelihood in post tsunami India and Aceh. It was noted by them that though much training was provided to the women there was little follow up and lack of life skills training. Thus the women failed to reach their full potential. (Nowak & Caulfield, 2008)

Skill development in India is the need of the hour. However this is faced with many challenges, which include attitudinal challenges on the part of the youth. They demonstrate a lack of mobilization and motivation to take up profitable employment. Often they do not have the mindset to migrate and also are unable to come to terms with low entry level salaries. (Maqbool & Khan, 2019)

Skill development is both formal (technical schooling and college) and informal (short term employment oriented courses and life skills) There is a need to form a channel of skill development (technical skill development, with the learning of life skills) to ensure that the rural youth reach their potential in terms of sustainable employability. (Singh, 2016)

Skilling helps the youth to achieve success in life. However, many other issues affect an individual's ability to earn profitably, such as family values, mental pressure and lack of job security. Thus an education in life skills is important as it enables the individual to use the technical education imparted to him. Individuals who are happy within themselves as well as with others have a positive approach towards challenges thrown by life, irrespective of the background they come from. Sustainable happiness is the happiness that contributes positively to individual, community and global well being. Life skills education is capable of generating a state of sustainable happiness. (Kumar, 2017)

As per the Census Report (2011) the urban population has grown from 10.85 to 31.2% as many youth migrate from village to city due to lack of employment. Even within the city, they are mostly underemployed. This happens due to

the fact that they are unable to sustain themselves with a possible agri entrepreneurship as they lack the necessary life skills to be guided and take necessary risks. (Tripathi & Singh, 2017)

Education, supported by skill development, will enable the youth of a village to innovate and seek sustenance by way of agri related entrepreneurship. The advancement of technology ensures the perennial change in the requirement of technological skills. This is only possible with relevant development of life skills. (Tripathi & Singh, 2017)

Youths trained in skill development (the context could be extended to life skills) contribute to their family and society by indulging in income generating activities and transforming society. Human capital is important as it enhances production possibility. Human capability (generated by skill development and life skills education) as it allows the individual the freedom to lead a sustained productive life in a manner of his choice. A capable individual transforms the rural economy. (Pasa, 2017)

There is an emphasis on lifelong learning, a concept that transformed the learning experience into much positivity and sustainability. Here, the acquisition of skills is a continued process from birth till death; thus also making the individual ready for challenges in employment and personal life. One of the barriers to Lifelong learning is attitudinal, which is a sense of inertia towards learning as a concept, growing out of a lack of confidence and lack of motivation. (Terziev, 2019) *It is to be noted that Life Skill education will contribute positively to this concept of lifelong learning as it requires the individual to combat stree and take challenges as they come. (Researcher's observation)*

Though gainful employment ensures empowerment, it is seen that individual change (brought about by the enhancement of technical and life skills) ensures larger social and community progress. A skill enabled environment positively impacts a youth towards developmental change. Also, adequate skill training not only prepares a candidate for a job, but it also ensures social inclusion of the candidate. (Shah, 2017)

Job linked skills training did ensure placements but retention issues do come up in case of candidates who are unable to adapt to the demands and rigour of the job. Focus on technical skill development will not achieve gender parity as many youth, especially rural girls are reluctant to move out of the village and embrace better opportunities. (Shah, 2017), (Menon, Menon, & Parekh, 2016)

Despite gaining vocational skills much of the youth from a challenged socio-economic background fared questionably when introduced to livelihood participation. Thus soft skills, communication skills and life skills take priority along with necessary vocational skills and enhance coping ability of a candidate. However, most skilling companies focused mainly on vocational skills. (Menon, Menon, & Parekh, 2016)

It has been noted that companies that train in vocational and life skills to enhance livelihood opportunities largely ignore people with disabilities. (Menon, Menon, & Parekh, 2016)

The outcome of soft skills and life skills training is difficult to measure and quantify (making it a most credence attribute) and is dependent on behavioral make up of the candidate. Most skilling authorities lack knowledge of effective skilling models and good practices. Many authorities were unable to find partners to develop life skills and communication ability. All support including local and political

is required to make a skilling program a success. Companies working in the same geographical Area must have a collective development model and work in synergy towards development in that area. The company could also support a temporary hostel accommodation in a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) for life skills and vocational training. Companies that participate in the development of life skills and vocational skills could also involve the same youth as contractual manpower, in their supply chains and prioritize undertakings with them as micro entrepreneurs and vendors or suppliers of business products and services. (Menon, Menon, & Parekh, 2016) In their paper, Narula, Magray, & Desore, 2017 suggested that skilling and livelihood activities be linked with CSR of reputed organizations, especially in India where CSR is mandatory. (Narula, Magray, & Desore, 2017)

#### **d. Some interesting stories that teach**

Livelihood research on the disadvantaged sections is connected to and impacted by livelihood research on sections that have progressed. (As a corollary, we may deduce that when imparting life skills education to enhance livelihood opportunities, we must narrate success stories) (Murray, 2001)

#### **Kamarpukur, west Bengal**

The local people of Kamarpukur, West Bengal live in religious and developmental harmony. They observe two festivals: the Durga Puja and Ramakrishna's birthday. During such festive gatherings, the Ramakrishna Math undertakes lectures and discussions regarding religious harmony and spiritual upliftment for the societal development. Such lectures contribute towards the life skills of the local population and the results show when much of this population successfully indulge in livelihoods related to rural tourism and spiritual tourism. (Ray, Das, Sengupta, & Ghosh, 2012)

#### **Rajasthan Mission of Skills and Livelihoods**

iLead, a project of the Rajasthan Mission of Skills and Livelihoods building the capacities of youth and empowering them to take up suitable employment. They emphasized that the importance of the development of personality alongside the technical skills is a requirement. It may be noted that life skill education enables the development of personality. Various life skills like personality development and grooming, behavioural needs and requirements, time and money management, spoken English and familiarization with computers is developed. (Ananth & Mahajan)

#### **Dreamcatchers**

Dreamcatchers has labeled itself as "a foundation course to build inner agency to unlock a youth's full potential". It has recognized the need for the development of soft skills and interpersonal skills to enhance employment opportunities of youth from socio economically deprived social strata, post noting that trainees face a diminished perception of themselves and are yet unaware of their strengths. It thus works on these lines closely with a project known as Pune City Connect Lighthouse Project. The foundation course is forty hours long and has a strong interest inventory consisting of the RIASEC: m Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, Conventional. (Menon, Menon, & Parekh, 2016)

#### **Quest Alliance**

QUEST (Quality Education and Skill Training) Alliance is an NGO that was started with help from the United States Agency for international Aid (USAID). Focusing on soft skills, life skills and digital skills, QUEST Alliance works closely

with 165 Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs), 60 NGOs and 30 colleges to enhance your employability. (Menon, Menon, & Parekh, 2016)

#### **Vikalp Kriya**

Vikalp Kriya and Godrej Consumer Products Ltd. Initiated a life skills development program and has created space and opportunities for the trainees (in the field of personal care and grooming) to come together and engage in a process of assess-analyze-act. The module is like a journey and much emphasis is on the value of self esteem and dignity. (Menon, Menon, & Parekh, 2016)

#### **Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana**

A centrally sponsored program, the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM) was initiated to eliminate rural poverty by the promotion of multiple livelihoods in every poor rural household. This is achieved by incorporating a woman from each household in Self Help Groups (SHGs), creating a social mobilization towards micro livelihood initiatives and empowerment. This program enables the poor to fight three kinds of exclusion: Social, Financial and Economic.

Rural Self Help Training Institutes have been introduced and they have noted that the hand holding support post training enhances chances of livelihood and empowerment in rural population, especially in districts with high poverty and a questionable banking infrastructure.

The key recommendations of the study include a micro econometric approach (using Structural Equation Modeling) providing a quantitative measure of the impact of DAY-NRLM on seven variables including Women's Self Esteem, Personality Development, Reduction in Social Evils, Social Cohesion.

(Independent Assessment of Design, Strategies, and Impacts of Day-NRLM (Executive Summary))

### **5. FINDINGS**

#### **a. Challenges faced when empowering rural Indian youth**

Many organizations and NGOs are involved in the skilling of rural youth. Some challenges are posed within the system. Many such organizations are focused on the development of vocational and technical skills and lack the knowledge and expertise to execute such programs correctly, especially in the case of the physically challenged. There is also inadequate support of stakeholders for such programs.

Skilling could be divided into three phases: Pre-Training, Training and Post-Training. The needs felt are as follows:

- **Pre-Training:** The individual should be adequately prepared to know what to expect from the training.
- **Training:** There are some attitudinal issues related to lack of motivation of the individuals. Some individuals, especially women, are averse to migration for employment. The individuals also need training in soft skills and communication skills.
- **Post-Training:** There are issues with retention at the job and an innate inability to adapt to the rigours and demands of the job

#### **b. Ways in which training in life skills will enhance employability of rural Indian youth**

We could (as in (Dange, 2016)), classify the benefits of Life skills education in the following manner:

**•Benefits to the individual**

- Critical thinking can enable the individual to solve personal, professional and social problems
- Enhanced cognitive, emotional and mental well being leading to a sustained sense of happiness
- The individual takes responsibility for his actions and has strong values, thus developing moral superiority
- Enhanced soft skills and communication skills
- An adaptability and flexibility to face changes in life
- An enhances self awareness

**•Benefits to the employed individual**

- Enhanced interpersonal and negotiation skills make him a sound team player
- Creative thinking may drive innovations at work
- Enables the individual to take responsibility
- The ability to adapt to changes caused by business completion and technological advancement
- A positive approach to continued learning and the up gradation of skills
- An awareness of rights at the workplace

**•Benefits to the responsible citizen**

- Enables positive social behaviour
- Keeps the individual from social and behavioural vices and abide by the law
- Makes the individual socially citizen

**6.CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is seen that skilling the rural youth effectively does have a positive impact on the level of youth empowerment. Vocational and technical skilling needs to be adequately supported by training in necessary Life skills (as listed out by WHO).

Organizations conducting such skilling programs should be assisted and guided by experts. They may partner with a company or a company's CSR as there is a link between CSR, life skills education and livelihood. They need to bolster support from all stakeholders and environmental entities such as local people, politician, religious and demi-religious groups who are in a position to influence people and their attitudes. Skilling organizations within the same geographical area may share their resources, model and synergy. Also, there needs to be a definite model of effective skilling (life skills and technical skills), connected with a sustainable livelihood framework, to follow based on cultural values and demography of the region. Many attitudinal problems encountered during training could be faced by involving peers, already trained youth as guides within the program. The company must be with the trainee for significant time, post employment.

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