

Yuva Junction - Empowering Rural Youth

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The Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (India) is a non-denominational, non-government development organization. AKRSP (India) works as a catalyst for the betterment of rural communities by providing direct support to local communities to promote activities and develop models for sustainable natural resource use and development of human resources. AKRSP (India) is active in over 1900 villages in three environmentally challenged and economically vulnerable regions of Gujarat: the tribal block of Bharuch - Narmada, Surat, Dangs, Tapi, coastal salinity affected areas of Junagadh - Porbandar and the drought prone Surendranagar - Rajkot. Since 2004, AKRSP (India) is working in the remote and tribal blocks of Khandwa, Khargone, Burhanpur, Badwani and Dhar districts in Madhya Pradesh. And since 2008, AKRSP (India) has initiated work in the flood prone districts of Muzzafarpur and Samastipur in North Bihar. AKRSP (I) operates in incredibly remote, rural and tribal villages where income from agriculture and agricultural labour have been the predominant source of livelihoods. Due to limitations associated with small landing holdings and access to markets, increasingly income solely from these sources is quite a challenge. For younger generation, the need to diversify income sources is becoming increasingly apparent, which has led to shifting from agriculture to industry and services.

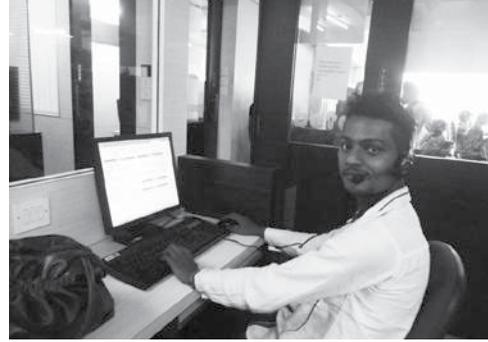
This shift has led to growing frustration among the younger generation due to the rising rate of unemployment and a skills and employability mismatch that skews and exacerbates the problem. This has been fuelled by the rapid fluctuation in available jobs and demand for skills given the changes in industries and technology and demands of the “new economy”.

Appropriately, to meet up with the need of the hour AKRSP (I) started an initiative that provides youth between the ages of 18 and 35 an opportunity to explore more diverse sources of livelihood beyond traditional agriculture through its “Yuva Junction” programme by not only producing appropriately skilled human resources but also for skills development to address the challenge of inclusive growth. What makes “Yuva Junction” unique is that it enables trained individuals to realize their potential by providing necessary support post training, through AKRSP (I)’s placement and entrepreneurship development initiative, for utilizing and applying their newly acquired skills to

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various facets of their lives and enhance their quality of life and opportunities. The programme also ensures that the benefits of skills training reach the lowest rung of the community and that the community optimizes the training received to enhance their quality of life.

I met Keshu Parmar, 22 year old from Mander village in Porbandar district who attended one of Yuva Junction's seven training centers in Gujarat. Keshu represents the typical profile of Yuva Junction's trainee. He is from a family of five. His family does not own any land and survives on farm labour. Their average annual income is about Rs. 1.2 lakh. Keshu had dropped out of school after completing 12th standard due to



poor finances and had to do labour work to support his family. Keshu got information about the training from one of his friends in the village. With a hope to change his future, he quit labour work and decided to try his luck by joining Yuva Junction which is being offered free for Below Poverty families. He successfully completed his three month modular training on Domestic BPO from Yuva Junction wherein he picked up the nuances of Spoken English, Life Skills, Work Place Readiness, and Computer along with basics of Domestic BPO. As fortune favours the brave he was selected as customer care executive in one of the reputed call centers in Ahmedabad with a starting salary of Rs 6500 at his first attempt. Keshu was very determined to use the opportunity to build a career outside of anything he could have imagined for himself. Initially he found it very difficult to understand the verbatim of call centre and the nature of work. Answering calls and helping customers with their problems is his responsibility and he does it quite efficiently. When his friends decided to call quits and return back to village, he was determined to stay on. He was constantly guided by his facilitators at Yuva Junction Centre. His perseverance has today yielded results. He has been awarded for being the best customer care executive. His voice quality has also been adjudged the best. He currently earns Rs. 7000 per month inclusive of allowances within a span of 4 months. He is now an inspiration to the new joinees. In his words "If Mr. Narendra Modi can scale heights and become Prime Minister from tea vendor then nothing is impossible. Our economic condition should never deter our dreams. Never say die. Preserve, just follow them, and you will become what you want."

Similar is the inspirational case of Pravin who was the first boy to step out of the village to advent in job of retail business. When Pravin Arjanbhai Vadher, a young boy from Itali village of Junagadh district decided to take up retail course in one of the Yuva Junction Centres, many of his friends tried to discourage him by saying that it was not worth it. Pravin was determined to come out of the drudgery of labor and uncertainty

of income. His parents are not literate and did labour work for earning their livelihood. When his father was taken ill, Meniben, Pravin's mother had to take the responsibility of feeding the family from the meagre income earned by doing labor work. Things changed when Pravin decided to take up the skill upgradation program of AKRSP (I). Pravin feels very proud in saying that, "My parents never forced me to quit studies for earning an income. They always wanted us to study well and take up a job." Pravin's father echoed same feeling: "We have spent our lives struggling to make a living but our children should get something better in their life."



Pravin's father learnt about the course in one of the regular meeting held by Yuva Junction Centre. His father was curious and asked Pravin to visit the Centre. Pravin joined the retail course there. After 3 months of rigorous training, he was selected at Café Coffee Day as crew member with a starting salary of Rs. 6500.



He is now working as a team member at Cafe Coffee Day outlet at Maliya (Miyana) block of Rajkot district since February 2015. Initially, he found it difficult to adjust to the new conditions and place of living. In his own words, "I was afraid to talk to customer in English, but gradually I overcame my fear." Attending to customers, taking orders, making coffee and accepting payment, are all his responsibilities. He now, feels confident in talking to customers and capable enough of managing the cafe single handedly. There are two shifts running in the cafe, morning 8 to 4 and 4 to 12. Alongside this salary, he earns an incentive of Rs.100 for meal per day. His ambition is to become the manager of the cafe one day.

The change in Pravin is visible and noteworthy, says Meniben, mother of Pravin. She says "Earlier, he used to be very shy, would not talk much or go out on his own. When he asked for permission to join this course, we were worried about how he was going to cope up. We are happy to see his progress. We are very thankful to the organization for giving guidance to my child. Our status in the village is enhanced. We feel happy when people know us as parents of Pravin."

Pravin feels more confident than before. Those who were discouraging him from taking up the course are now inquiring about the procedure for taking admission for it. Other parents take lesson from Pravin's example and are convinced to send their children to cities for job. Pravin is happy to set a good example for youth of his village and the support he provides to his parents. His zeal for studies is not affected by job. He is determined to complete his graduation for a better future.

*Another person who inspired me is Ketan Vasava. Ketan belongs to the village of **Racchwada in Sagbara** tehsil of Narmada district of Gujarat. He is 20 years old. Ketan's father had always been struggling financially. Therefore Ketan was unable to pursue education after he completed schooling till Grade 12th.*



*After a meeting with Ketan and his parents at the Selamba Centre, he was convinced to join the skill development programme in order to become eligible for a job with sustainable and exponential salary. Ketan joined **Yuva Junction** with great spirits and aspirations. His motivation to earn money as quickly as possible made him a fabulous listener, learner and in later stages, led him to perform extremely well in his job. He took his training as seriously he could. It did not come as a surprise to everyone that he cracked his interview in the very first attempt.*

These days, Ketan works at KFC at the Adajan outlet in Surat. When he first joined, his initial salary was only INR 5,500 but just in a matter of 8-9 months he has managed to get successive increments which makes him earn INR 9,000 a month as base pay. In addition to this, he also gets multiple benefits from the company and additional pay for finishing off various sections of the outlet.

Ketan is a very shrewd saver too. With all his planned savings he has recently bought a top-notch bike (Yamaha FZ) which costs nearly INR 80,000. Ketan financially contributes financially to support his father.

*Ketan is just steps away from becoming a manager at KFC and is only to finish one more section before he becomes eligible for the post. The way in which Ketan's career has progressed so far suggests that it would not take him long to do so. His present manager informs that customers fall in love with Ketan because of the warm relationship he maintains with them. He is a great role-model to all who undertake training at **Yuva Junction** today.*

Ketan, Pravin and Keshu are few of those who have faced odds but with their sheer determination have become role models for the community. The Centres, infuse a

sense of hope and courage, and hence have become more conscious of their roles that impact the future of youth.

It was heartening to learn that the skills training initiative of “Yuva Junction” had snow ball effect not only at the community level but also at the village level. One such example is that of village Kolvan. A sleepy village in Narmada district of Gujarat located on the border of Gujarat and Maharashtra, it is quite untouched by the happenings in the cities. This village has a total population of 3294 comprising predominately of Scheduled Tribes. Literacy rate is 69.88%. Kolvan’s mainstay livelihood is farming and cattle rearing. Most of the villagers migrate to nearby district as the farming is largely rain fed. In spite of being educated, the youth from Kolvan migrate for labour work for lack of better options. The information about skill training of “Yuva Junction” reached the villages through a parent’s meeting. Subsequently, six girls joined the training in Selamba Yuva Junction Centre and completed 3 months as Retail Sales Associate. On completing their training, they got selected by Jubilant Food Works to work at Dominos Outlet with a starting salary of 8300/-. This was the first step for the girls out of their village to earn a decent livelihood.

1. About Yuva Junction

“Yuva Junction” began in the year 2007 with the initiative called “Computerji... jode Duniya se” with an intention to bridge the urban and rural divide by making technology accessible to rural youth through computer training. Using a low cost model of utilising old computers donated by companies, it reached out in remote villages to train more than 20 thousand youth through a hub and spoke model. These centers also started disseminating information based on the needs of the community and hence doubled up as village resource centers. Services included provision of information on government schemes, examination results, job opportunities and market price of agriculture commodities. These centers also undertook to educate the local communities on their rights as citizens. This helped the community to avail basic services like power, transport and regular visits by government nurse and postal services through grievance redressal mechanism of Right to Information Act.



This initiative used a strong mobilisation strategy to take spread the awareness to the villages. Street plays, songs, posters, and pad yatras were organised in and around the villages to spread the word. Initially, computers were carted

to the villages but now a days most things happen using mini projectors. All it requires is just a press of a button.

Villagers were also enthused to see these centers as their own facility which can be used as per their need.

Job placement emerged as a demand from many of the youths and placement services were added to the portfolio. Over a period, this programme metamorphosed into “Yuva Junction” in year 2012 which strives to “Inform, Educate and Employ” the rural youth to hone skill based training and help them get employment. “Yuva Junction” has seen an organic change in its offering from “supply based approach” to “market oriented approach”.



To ensure this change, a systematic approach was adopted from mobilisation to job retention to ensure that the rural youth are absorbed by the market after the training. Real-time and dynamic market scans of both, destination cites for Yuva Junction’s job placements, as well as local markets were organised. The market scan report suggested demand in trades like hospitality, retail and financial services. It also emphasises on opportunities available in entrepreneurial trades. Focus group discussions were organized with the rural youths to understand their aspirations and challenges. This discussion helped to understand the barriers affecting the youths in getting employment. It was realized during the discussion that the rural youths feel that that the jobs are often unattainable or undesirable and they continue to be farm / unskilled labourers in spite of being educated as they have constraints in getting access to counselling, information, education and services that will support them in preparing for and being placed in suitable jobs.

To suit the requirements, the market oriented training pedagogy was adapted. Role plays, digital tools for learning basic English, Life Skills and workplace readiness, along with interaction with employers became an integral part of the curriculum. The trainings now occur in trades such as Retail Sales, Domestic BPO, Computer Hardware, and Accounting using Tally along with

trainings on cross cutting skills like Computers, Life Skills, Spoken English and Work Place Readiness. The curriculum and duration of trainings varies by trades, and adhere to the selected assessment and certification standards for each trade. The trainings on mobile repairing, sewing and stitching along with entrepreneurship training is also offered to populace more focussed on enterprise development. The trainings are recognised by certifying bodies like National Council for Vocational Training and Usha. This holistic approach to training has helped these rural youth bridge the urban rural divide in terms of employment opportunities.

Placement drives are organised at the training locations for candidates who have completed their trainings. Placement Day is also organised in Ahmedabad along with training partners to provide a wide array of opportunities to trained youths to help them explore a new world. Job fairs are also organised regularly at block level to provide equal opportunity to the rural youth. Employers like Eureka Forbes, Dominos, Café Coffee Day, Big Bazaar, Vodafone, Raymond, Strategic Management Private Limited have recruited trained candidates with an average salary of 84,000 per annum. Each candidate usually has at least 2 job offers which gave them the choice of best employer.

Given the geographies, Yuva Junction placements largely call for migration to slightly larger nearby cities. However, Yuva Junction actively scope out local employment opportunities for youth who do not wish to migrate. Yuva Junction maintains existing partnerships with employers and proactively scope out and engage with potential employers, both in local and destination cities. Yuva Junction partners only with responsible employers that place trainees in jobs that provide a conducive and healthy work environment, as well as potential for upward professional mobility. The process guidelines can be referred for more information.

The programme understands that most of the trainees are first time migrants and migration causes intense day to day challenges at the workplace for the youths and their family. Loneliness, fear about performance, concerns over pay levels until the first pay check arrives, pressure from friends and family back home, difficulty in adapting to a structured workplace and numerous other factors may result in the youth deciding to return back to home. In acknowledging the difficulties and challenges that arise with job-related migration, especially given the profile of the youth that the programme works with, the programme undertakes several measures that allow for ease of transition and job retention. Exposure visits, pre-placement talks and parents meetings have been embedded in their curriculum. Parents and alumni are actively involved in creating an ecosystem that enables youths to explore their potential, and in so doing, explore the world beyond what they know of it.

In addition to the above measures, Yuva Junction has also started migration support center in Ahmedabad to provide accommodation assistance and counselling services to support the first time migrants, especially girls to adapt themselves to new workplace and environment. It has a capacity to accommodate 30 girls who will be supported till they adjust to their new work place and environment. It also ensures the physical and mental health of the girl candidates.

An IVRS toll free help line “75678 75679” also has been launched to guide the rural youth on issues related to education, career and job related options. The calls are recorded and the queries are answered by a counsellor who provides the rural youth with career assistance.

Yuva Junction has a mandate to work in rural geographies with economically poor population who are limited in their ability to pay. There are special batches of BPL candidates whose fees has been subsidised by the government, whereas others have to pay a nominal token amount. This cross subsidization helps the centers to generate revenue. Some of the employers also pay a token amount when the candidates have been retained in jobs for a minimum period. The programme will not achieve complete financial sustainability through training fee. However AKRSP (I) is in position to sustain the programme through grant partnerships with donors and partners from corporates, foundations and support from overseas. The programme is projected to attain approximately 33% cost recovery.

The initiative continues to be supported by corporates like Microsoft who gave initial support to nurture the programme in 2007. Later in year 2012, it gained support from Quest Alliance. The partnership with Quest Alliance plugged the gap of training quality through blended learning approach where the learners and facilitators were supported through a combination of high quality digital tools on curricula. Quest Alliance support also includes work books, digital lessons, and weekly tests, to create an environment to share and learn. Regular Training of Trainers also ensures that the trainers are graduated as facilitators to help the trainees to take empowered decision of life.

The concentrated and structured approach of imparting skill based training to rural areas has helped AKRSP(I) to garner support in Gujarat from Ministry of Rural Development - Deen Dayal Upadhyay Grameen Kaushalya Yojana that supports youth from BPL families to get skill based trainings and later support them with employment opportunities.

Yuva Junction has won eINDIA 2010 Jury award for Skill Development initiative of the year in 2010.

2. Organisational Structure

Currently, AKRSP(I) has 12 Yuva Junction centers – 8 in Gujarat, 1 in Madhya Pradesh and 3 in Bihar and plans to scale up to include trainings in new domains. These centers are managed by 50 enthusiastic professionals who support trainings, mobilisation and placements. Management team consists of Skill Development, Placement Manager and MIS Officer at Central Office. Each Region is headed by Project Coordinators and is supported by Placement Officers. This regional team support the day to day activities of the centre.

3. Progress till date

Till date, 32536 youths have been trained under Yuva Junction, and it has been able to facilitate meaningful employment for 5346 youth. 173 youth have started their own enterprise. In the year 2015, Yuva Junction has enrolled 1015 youth, trained 804 and 211 are undergoing training. Out of 804 youths, 400 have been placed and are in jobs while 317 have been offered jobs but are looking out for better prospects. The youth who have been placed work at entry level with leading service providers like Vodafone, Airtel and various retail outlets like Big Bazaar, Café Coffee Day, Dominos, and KFC with an average salary of Rs. 7000 per month.

4. Future

Skill Development is the national priority and many private companies as well as non-profit organisations have entered this arena. While private agencies capitalise on skill development initiatives as part of their corporate social responsibility, non-profit organisations take a different view point. Though it is a tough balancing act to undertake development initiatives with targets to meet, the operating norms if modified can resolve this dilemma.

I am sure Yuva Junction through AKRSP (I)'s support will leverage on its existing long-term relationship and access to rural community. Yuva Junction will continue to build on its ability to work with a niche population of “hard-to-train”/ “hard-to-place” youth. This gives us hope that youth like Keshu, Ketan and Pravin and all the trail blazers Yuva Junction has created and continues to enable, will create an ecosystem that will bring a little bit of rest of world to their homes.

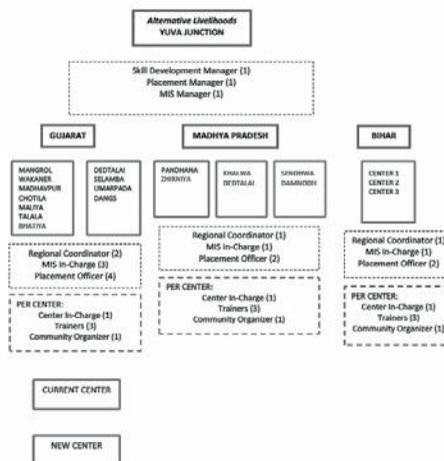


Figure 1

Annexure 1

Skill Development Value Chain



Figure 2

This section highlights Yuva Junction’s planned work in each component of the skill development value chain identified below.

1. Sourcing and Enrollment

Yuva Junction will enroll youth between the ages of 18 to 35, irrespective of caste, religion and other socio-economic affiliations. A 30% female enrollment rate will be ensured across all Yuva Junction geographies. The recruitment strategy hinges on leveraging existing Yuva Junction and AKRSP (I) relationships and infrastructure (e.g. SHGs, Women’s Federations, Panchayat and local leadership support) for community mobilization.

Trainees will be sourced from villages in approximately 20 km radius of the Yuva Junction Centre. Mobilization will involve the dissemination of information regarding the programme through community and falia meetings, followed by door-to-door campaigns for target groups. On-field registration of interested parties will be followed by an assessment and enrollment process at the Yuva Junction Centre. Building from its experience in niche geographies, Yuva Junction will ensure parental involvement at defined stages of the skill development value chain as a crucial aspect of its strategy. Trainees will undergo an aptitude test that will provide a baseline assessment of skills after which a joint determination of suitable trades will take place.

Certain pre-training services, such as the setting up of trainee bank accounts, counseling on training objectives, awareness of benefits and challenges of job-related migration, and timelines will be shared and agreed upon to ensure programme success. Parental consent will be acquired and training fees collected before training commences.

2. Training

Yuva Junction will ensure high quality training that is holistic in nature. In addition to their selected trades, trainees will simultaneously receive trainings in basic digital literacy, English and life skills to enhance overall employability and job readiness.

While the mode of delivery and duration of training will vary based on the selected trade, Yuva Junction's core offerings will predominantly be classroom-based and will employ teaching pedagogy that is interactive, engaging, and one through which an on-going assessment of trainees can be made. The trainings will comprise digital lessons, theory-based lectures, role-plays, presentations, and on the job training, when applicable.

Highly competent local trainers will be selected from communities around the training center. It has been Yuva Junction's experience that trainees benefit from trainers who are familiar with the local language and context. When a trade calls for it, outside trainers will be seconded to Yuva Junction Centers on a part-time or permanent basis. Trainers will play a part in curriculum development by adapting to context-specific needs, as required. The programme will remain committed to building trainers' capacities by conducting regular Training of Trainers by third-party experts on subject matter and/or teaching pedagogy.

3. Assessment and Certification

Yuva Junction will align itself to and keep updated with sector-wide efforts towards standardization of skill development training, assessments and certifications. The programme will adopt curricula and assessment guidelines prescribed in the National Occupational Standards and Qualification Packs in the different Sector Skill Councils (SSCs) set up by the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) and endorsed by the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship. In sectors where these are still under development, the Modular Employable Skills (MES) curriculum approved by the National Council for Vocational Training (NCVT) will be used (as is current practice). In both cases, trainees will bear the costs associated with third-party assessments that lead to certification (Approximately INR 1000-1500).

Yuva Junction will develop an operational strategy to implement the transition from the current MES curriculum and NCVT certification to the new SSC certification.

4. Placement

Given the geographies that Yuva Junction works in, placements will largely call for migration to slightly larger nearby cities. However, Yuva Junction will actively scope out local employment opportunities for youth who do not wish to migrate. Yuva Junction will maintain existing partnerships with employers and proactively scope out and engage potential employers, both local and in destination cities. The programme will aim to attain a 75% placement rate.

In acknowledging the difficulties and challenges that arise with job-related migration, especially given the profile of the youth that Yuva Junction works with, the programme will take several measures that will allow for ease of transition and job retention. These measures are highlighted below:

- Yuva Junction will only partner with responsible employers and place trainees in jobs that provide a conducive and healthy work environment, as well as potential for professional upward mobility. Yuva Junction will seek out and favor employers who provide extended support (housing, meals, etc.).
- The programme will provide counseling services to both parents and trainees so that trainees can better anticipate and respond to migration-related challenges.
- Yuva Junction will create a network of “Yuva Junction Ambassadors” that will include alumni students and parents who will engage in the programme as speakers during trainings, in community mobilization, as well as in job preparedness activities so as to create an ecosystem of support.
- As part of training, the programme will offer a self-dependency and problem resolution module. The module will be experiential in nature, drawing from learnings from previously placed alumni of the programme and from programme trainers and personnel. Importantly, the module will introduce trainees to potential scenarios they may encounter when they enter the workforce and coping strategies, introduction to managing personal finances and budgeting, as well as suggestions on personal care, safety and time management.
- In certain geographical and social contexts, self-employment may make more sense. In those instances, Yuva Junction will also support entrepreneurship through assistance in helping secure start-up funds, technical assistance and enterprise incubation service.

5. Post-placement Support

Given their niche population, Yuva Junction is committed to enhancing job retention rates through the provision of awareness-raising and preparatory services to both, trainees and their parents through training, as well as through post-placement services.

Yuva Junction will engage with graduating candidates for six months after completion of training through Migration Support Centers that will be instituted at strategic destination locations to provide trainees with logistical and emergency-related information and assistance. The centers will enable a strong network of support through active alumni engagement and linkages between alumni and recent graduates.

6. Market demand assessments

While not included as a separate component in the value chain above, the annual market demand assessments will be a cross-cutting feature of Yuva Junction's activities. The dynamic and real-time assessments of market demand (both local and at destination cities) will inform the trades offered at Yuva Junction Centers and link skill requirements, both current and those in the pipeline, to trainings offered. The assessments will also enable partnerships with potential employers. The programme will adapt and react to these on-going assessments in a timely and efficient manner to ensure the provision of ample and relevant job placement options.