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International  
Labour  
Organization

# Recognition of Prior Learning: Background and Proposal for a Pilot in India

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January 2014



## Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	1
2. Literature review.....	2
2.1. International Case Studies.....	2
2.1.1. Australia.....	2
2.1.2. France.....	2
2.1.3. United Kingdom.....	4
2.2. Association of Plumbers of South Kivu (APSKI).....	5
2.3. ILO Research- Recognizing the skills of returning migrant workers, development of regional model Competency Standards.....	6
2.4. Indian initiatives leading towards RPL.....	7
2.5. Skill Development Initiative Scheme (SDIS), Modular Employable Skills.....	7
2.6. AICTE-SKP scheme.....	9
2.7. LabourNet.....	10
2.8. National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS).....	11
2.9. National Skill Certification and Monetary Reward Scheme (STAR).....	12
3. Activities Undertaken.....	13
4. Action Research Design.....	15
5. Project Management.....	18
6. References.....	19
7. Annexure	
7.1. Annexure 1- List of interviews/meetings conducted for the study.....	20
7.2. Annexure 2- NIOS guided RPL Assessment Process.....	21
7.3. Annexure 3- LabourNet RPL Assessment Model.....	22



## Acknowledgements

The ILO country office for India would like to thank Mr. Partha Banerjee of DEFT Advisory and Research Private Limited for preparing this report. The author also wishes to thank Paul Comyn for providing technical inputs and to Anjana Chellani for project support.



# 1. Introduction

1. India is currently witnessing a nationwide concerted effort for skill development of its workforce - both present and prospective. Under the aegis of newly formed nodal bodies like National Skill Development Agency (NSDA) and National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), ambitious vocational training targets have been assigned to various ministries, industry bodies and the state governments. The overarching vision is to meet the Prime minister's target of 500 million persons trained by the year 2022, a pre-requisite to reap benefits of the demographic dividend and to sustain the India Growth story.
2. Up-skilling or right skilling of the present workforce is an essential component in the scheme and offers potential quick-wins to achieve the training targets for the first few years. The Indian economy comprises a large no. of small 1-5 employee establishments that largely operate in the unorganised sector. More than 80per cent of Indian workforce is employed in such informal or unorganised professional sectors, agriculture being the major. In these industries, job qualifications are not strictly laid out. No formal training is provided and Minimum wage, social benefits etc. are often not followed. Consequently, 79 per cent of the informal or unorganized sector workers belong to the poor and vulnerable groups managing at very meagre family income. Recognition of Prior learning (RPL) is a possible step to enhance the employability, mobility and income of those unorganised sector workers who have acquired and honed their skills on the job mostly under the guidance of more experienced peers.
3. While the rationale for RPL is undisputed and attempts to put it in practice have been on-going globally for quite some years but in practice, most of these attempts have faced numerous challenges and varying levels of success. We shall attempt to examine some of these as case studies to elicit relevant learning that could be utilised in the Indian context.
4. RPL in India is still very nascent. The earliest instance of a skill development program for existing workers in the unorganized sector is the Modular Employable Scheme - Skills Development (MES-SDIS) conceived by Ministry of Labour and Employment. Whilst the scheme primarily offers open-entry, short, flexible training modules but it also has a provision for direct assessment and award of National Trade Certificates (NTC), under the aegis of National Council of Vocational training (NCVT), if the candidate clears the examination.
5. Another such initiative is the Skill Knowledge Provider (SKP) scheme propagated by All India council of Technical Education (AICTE) and operationalized in 2013. The scheme provides for full mobility between formal and vocational streams of education and the job market with multi point entry and exit. The various modes of learning as well as skill acquisition are linked using the National Vocational Educational Qualification Framework (NVEQF). A student who has acquired the skills through work experience can also enter the vocational stream at an appropriate level provided he is assessed for the acquired skills by a registered SKP. Simultaneously he is enrolled in the formal college, undertakes only the courses required to complete the credits and is then awarded a certificate by the Technical board or the University.
6. A separate RPL initiative pursuant to the launch of NVEQF was also taken up by Ministry of Human Resource development via National institute of Open Schooling (NIOS). NVEQF is designed to support attainment of qualifications through diverse routes - informal learning

being one of them. So NIOS designed a holistic national RPL framework to assess the competencies acquired by the learner through prior formal and informal experiences and culminating in NVEQF awards. The framework has been designed to serve as the guideline for RPL adoption in various industry verticals. The framework is yet to be operationalized.

7. The various experiments till date in India which can lead towards adoption of RPL in the country have been somewhat disconnected. Neither they were RPL pilot projects in the true sense, nor were they linked to the National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF) or the industry approved National Occupation standards (NOS). Such experiments have also not been very effective in attracting the target population which got excluded from the formal vocational education setup.
8. This research study will target design of a pilot RPL implementation, closely linked to the Sector Skill Council (SSC), set up under the aegis of NSDC, based on the approved NOS. The design shall include choice of sectors where it should be pilot tested, rationale for the same, identification of relevant job roles and actions required from each stakeholder. The study will also attempt to validate the plausible economic benefits of the RPL exercise to the candidate who gets certified and the subsequent value addition to the industry.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. International Case Studies

#### 2.1.1. Australia

1. RPL in Australia comprises a set of national common principles and operational guidelines that can be applied to any of the four education sectors – senior secondary school, Adult and Community Education (ACE), Vocational Education and Training (VET) and higher education. Common national RPL principles and operational guidelines ensure over all consistency still providing each sector with the scope needed to implement RPL in a way that is consistent with sector missions, funding arrangements and accreditation systems. Likewise all Australian states are part of the national VET system but they differ in their approach to providing a state-wide policy framework for RPL implementation.
2. Australian RPL implementers discovered that there is a no straightforward process of ‘translation’ between the student’s prior learning and the learning outcomes or competency standards. Even preparing a successful RPL application requires high levels of knowledge of formal education and training contexts and the language used in education. So, students need mentorship and support in acquiring the skills they need to participate in RPL, in the same way they need support to learn to undertake other forms of assessment, for example, how to write essays or sit exams.



3. One of the key drivers for RPL in Australia was its perceived capacity to socially include those who have not had the opportunity to participate in post-compulsory education and training, but who nonetheless have much learning that is relevant to qualification outcomes. However, the take-up of RPL is still low for this section. Ironically those who have benefited most are who do not come from socially disadvantaged groups and have undergone post-compulsory education and training.
4. Another useful takeaway from the Australian experience relates to the fee / funding for RPL. A commercial RPL service priced to ensure full cost recovery attracted almost no customers. It is impossible to recover complete cost of the RPL operations from the assessee, therefore industry and the government need to devise innovative funding mechanisms to factor in the broader economic and social consequence of not recognising skill levels and thus living with lower productivity and slower social improvements.

### Learning from Australian experience.

- Common national RPL Principles but state level implementation framework.
- Sector-wise accreditation standards and funding.
- High focus on orientation and mentoring.
- Cost of assessment borne partially by industry and the Government

#### 2.1.2. France<sup>1</sup>

1. RPL practice in France was established by the 2002 Law named Validation des Acquis-de l'Expérience (VAE). This law establishes an individual right to the recognition of professional experience in the acquisition of an academic title or a diploma.
2. The VAE process enables an individual to get all or part of a certification (based on his/her professional experience. This experience, which must be related to the intended certification, is validated by a panel. The diploma obtained has exactly the same validity as a diploma obtained by an ordinary path. The VAE legislation also doesn't limit the number of certifications obtained by a particular person. In France, it is hence possible to get up to the master level without having any formal academic qualification ever.

### Learning from French experience.

- RPL law passed in 2002.
- Enables one to get all or part certification based on professional experience.
- Minimum 3 years relevant experience; no limit on number of RPL certificates
- Jury proposes bridging courses /internships in case competencies are partially met

<sup>1</sup> "Recognition of prior learning and the role of quality assurance agencies. Accreditation of prior learning in France (VAE) as a case study", Teresa Sánchez Chaparro, Commission des Titres d'Ingénieur (CTI), France. (teresa.sanchez@cti-commission.fr)

3. Steps and actors in the VAE process are similar to the ones proposed for Indian RPL framework.
  - Regional and national structures have been constituted to provide general information on the procedure and orient the candidate towards a suitable certification.
  - Once the certification is chosen, first check is on the admissibility of the demand (mainly the verification of the candidate having the 3 years of relevant experience required)
  - After passing the admissibility check, the candidate must prepare an application which will be finally examined by a mixed panel composed of academic and professional members.
  - The panel may issue a full or a partial validation. In this last case, the jury can propose the necessary bridging courses or internships. There is no time limit for obtaining these additional competences.
  
4. The challenge faced by the French approach was a persistent debate that whether the work experience path to acquiring certificates could really be equivalent in terms of methodological skills and analytic capacity. It undervalues the experiential dimension associated to formal higher education which plays a role in building a student's competence profile. On the other side, legal obligation for all higher education institutes in France to establish VAE process has displayed a significant benefit by institutionalising the competence-based approach within French HEIs.

### 2.1.3. United Kingdom

1. UK has a well-established further education system. UK skills development policy also ensures to engage employers and provide training for progression in the workplace. One of the flagship programmes UK has is the apprenticeship programme which combines academic learning and key skills with employment. UK therefore tackled RPL with two specific objectives - more flexibility to further education colleges and to design a vocational system that enables people to move from vocational to academic learning and back again.
  
2. Accredited Prior Learning (APL) – NVQs and SVQs are for learners who are already in the workplace and want to achieve a qualification to prove their standard of work. NVQs and SVQs are based on the agreed National Occupational Standards (NOS), which are developed by the relevant sector skills organisation with guidance from employers. There are five levels of NVQ in England ranging from level 1, which focuses on basic work activities, to level 5 for senior

**Learning from British experience**

- NVQs decided by industry led sector skill organizations
- Applicants compile portfolio of evidence, external assessor interviews and verifies evidence
- Regular self-assessment by TPs, external audits by awarding body for quality of assessments done by verifier.
- Time and Cost involved in the whole evidence collection process became prohibitive hence not continued.

management. N/SVQs can also form part of an apprenticeship.

3. To achieve their qualification, learners usually compile a portfolio of evidence to show that they have met the standard of ability required. This is assessed by an external verifier who may also observe or interview them in the workplace.
4. Quality assurance of this system is based on inspection and accountability. If training providers seek government funding to deliver qualifications within the existing qualification frameworks of UK they are required to undergo external inspection. Training providers are encouraged to submit self-assessment reports to their funding body every year. This report is based on a detailed self-appraisal of the quality of teaching and learning, and also provides information on qualifications attained by their learners in comparison with published national averages.
5. Awarding and professional organisations also have a role in validating the training providers that offer qualifications. They employ external verifiers to visit centres regularly to audit the quality of assessments carried out by staff.

## 2.2. Association of Plumbers of South Kivu (APSKI) <sup>2</sup>

1. APSKI is a plumbers' association, founded in 2008 in Kivu (Africa). In 2011, this plumbers' association decided to introduce skills assessment for their members. Before creating the new system of skills assessment, the plumbers had an informal system of releasing their apprentices: the master would follow his apprentice to a work-place and check his abilities. When he was convinced that the apprentice is ready, he gave him a "plumber's key" and declared him a plumber. Now, the plumbers organise a qualifying training for their members as well as for their apprentices. This training concludes with a final examination and the handing over of an officially recognised certificate.
2. Need for skill testing – Too many self-declared plumbers without adequate skills were having negative effects on the market. Emerging practice of many public clients and international organisations to ask for professional badges before placing an order. Thus, the plumbers without badges would often miss out on important orders.
3. Assessment - The testing combines a theoretical questionnaire and practical exercises, whereby the candidate chooses his test-questions randomly from a codified list. Theory testing takes place in the training centre while practical tests are conducted on building sites.

### Learning from APSKI (Africa) experience

- Need articulated by Association of Plumbers of South Kivu: seen as a quality differentiator
- Mix of theory and practical tests; conducted orally for illiterate persons
- Jury panel comprises industry, training provider and Govt. representatives.
- Govt. certificate raised the pride/ perception for the plumbing jobs

<sup>2</sup> Draft unpublished compilation of case studies of Skill assessment initiatives in Africa and India. ILO, 2013

There is also the option of testing conducted orally for illiterate persons. The jury is composed by 2 representatives of the plumbers' association, 2-3 persons from the training centre and 1-2 Government representatives (technicians or engineers sent by the Ministry of Education).

4. Lessons learned: The fact that the testing and certification is recognised by the Government has raised the status of the plumbers. They reported a sense of pride and social recognition. In addition, the plumbers are now in a position to receive contracts from registered companies/ organisations or participate in public tenders. Another effect of linking this certificate with the training has been that more young people feel attracted to this trade that they formerly considered 'simple, dirty and for old people'. The practice has triggered a cascading effect on other trades e.g. the electricians and the floor tillers in Kivu now want to replicate.

### **2.3. ILO Research – Recognizing the skills of returning migrant workers, development of regional model Competency Standards**

1. Recognition of the skill level is suggested while departing and returning of a migrant worker to provide a supportive mechanism for these workers to effectively negotiate when they seek employment. The ILO SKILLS-AP programme has conducted several workshops in the area of skills recognition, and supported member states to develop and endorse the RMCS for different sectors and thus contribute to simplifying the skills recognition and assessment process nationally and for the Asia-Pacific region.
2. Some “lifestyle” pre-departure training would be very valuable, especially for low-skilled workers who may be about to encounter hard manual labour in difficult circumstances and with minimal personal support. Training in language, culture (and work culture) and occupational safety and health is essential. Workers should take with them a record of their current skills and qualifications. This may require an assessment of those skills and a record to be provided prior to departure.
3. To promote skills recognition upon the return to their home country, particular services were proposed for departing migrant workers: Provision of skills development with formal skills recognition in all overseas contracts. A skilled worker is more likely to be a high performer and contribute more in productivity and in the mentoring of other workers. The formal recognition may, at its simplest, be a document signed by the trainer or employer.
4. The provision of advice or training before departure to encourage the regular collecting of evidence of skill development while overseas so that the raw material for skills recognition is available when the worker returns. The collecting evidence should not be made onerous but be simple to carry out. Returning migrant workers (who may have departed as manual labourers) bring back new skills and knowledge, international work experience and any accumulated capital additional to remittances already sent home. These benefits from worker migration can be enhanced if a country has in place systematic policies and procedures to ensure successful reintegration of migrant workers into decent employment or self-employment that takes full advantage of their new knowledge and skills.
5. Regional Model Competency Standards (RMCS) define the essential skills required to work in a particular industry or sector, providing a flexible framework that enterprises can use,

regardless of location or size. The structure is deliberately simple so that they can be easily understood. Additional elements can be added as required. The standards are grouped functionally and not as jobs or occupations. Capacity-building training is required so that governments and social partners make good use of the RMCS.

6. The RMCS were designed to assist both employers and workers and can be used to make the recognition of the skills of returning migrant workers an easier and more achievable process. The RMCS are simple and flexible and can be customized to suit the skills recognition systems in different countries. The ILO has published the RMCS in a simplified format so that they can be used in discussions among governments, employers, workers and training organizations. Receiving countries can use the RMCS to specify clearly their skill requirements; migrant workers returning home can use them to describe their new skills and knowledge.
7. As per information available with the ILO, RMCS are already being implemented in Philippines and Sri Lanka, two nations seeing significant out migration for livelihood. Skill recognition of migrant workers is also expected to be focussed through Gulf Cooperation countries in 2014-16, a region with a large inflow of migrant workers.

#### 2.4. Indian initiatives leading towards RPL

1. India's VET has no fully functional RPL scheme so far where the prior learning of an individual is assessed and recognised. Even the ones that exist differ in the assessment standards, certification authority and recognition resulting in limited mobility for the candidate and ambiguity in the industry while comparing certificates from various boards.
2. Only in September 2012, Ministry of HRD, Government of India has initiated action on RPL as a part of the National Vocational Education and Qualification Framework (NVEQF). The NVEQF supports attainment of qualifications through diverse routes. RPL Manual prepared by National Institute of Open schooling (NIOS) provides a framework to assess the competencies and skills acquired via informal learning leading to NVEQF awards as per the level of competency attained. NVEQF also defines mapping between the levels acquired via RPL and through formal education. This additionally provides the student an option to switch between the two forms of education. But Till date the framework has not been adapted by any industry or assessment body.

#### 2.5. Skill Development Initiative Scheme (SDIS), Modular Employable Skills

1. The SDIS was launched by the Ministry of Labour and Employment, GoI in 2007-08 with the objective of meeting growing requirement of skilled manpower in the industry through short-term courses. It aimed to train 1 million persons on demand-driven vocational skills by 2012-13 and 1 million each year after that to support skills training, certification and up-gradation in the unorganized sector.
2. **The Objectives are:**
  - a) To provide vocational training to school leavers, existing workers, ITI graduates, etc. to improve their employability by optimally utilizing the infrastructure available in Govt., private institutions and the Industry. Existing skills of the persons can also

be tested and certified under this scheme. b) To build capacity in the area of development of competency standards, course curricula, learning material and assessment standards in the country.

**3. Stated Beneficiaries of MES**

- Workers seeking certification of their skills acquired informally
- Workers and ITI graduates seeking skill up-gradation
- Early school drop-outs and unemployed
- Child labour and their families

**4. Key features of the scheme are:**

- MES provides the ‘Minimum Skills Set’ which is sufficient for gainful employment or self-employment in the world of work.
- Existing infrastructure is utilised to make training cost effective.
- Flexible delivery mechanism (part time, weekends, full time, onsite) to suit needs of various target groups.
- Different levels of programmes (foundation, skill formation and upgradation)
- Courses are available for persons having completed 5th standard and onwards.
- Includes testing of informally acquired skills of an individual and award of NCVT certification on success full assessment.
- Independent assessing bodies such as FICCI, CII, etc. are engaged to ensure an impartial assessment
- Vocational training certificate from NCVT is nationally and internationally recognized in Government as well as private sector.

5. A National Project Management Cell (NPMC) in DGE&T Headquarters and six Regional Cells in Regional Directorate of Apprenticeship Training (RDAT) are responsible for implementation as well as monitoring of the activities of SDI/ MES Scheme in the country. The NPMC and RDAT are under the administrative control of Directorate General of Employment and Training (DGE&T) in the Ministry of Labour & Employment, which is the coordinating agency and the highest authority.

6. Despite exceeding the stated target of one million skill development through MES, there exist some areas of shortfall which need to be addressed to improve the relevance and effectiveness of the scheme in current times. Presently, there is a large gap between the completion of training and assessment because of inavailability of assessors. This requires increasing the quantity and quality of assessors by defining clear eligibility requirements, and designing of training modules for this profession. Promotion and national level marketing campaign to publicise the scheme features and successes is also necessary in order to meet the increased target of skilling one million each year.

7. The ILO worked closely with DGE&T and had undertaken a detailed assessment and review of the MES-SDIS scheme in 2013 with a view to strengthening the implementation of this scheme. In a workshop<sup>3</sup> conducted in Bhopal during the same review, participants and respondents keenly felt there was a need for the SDI-MES scheme to adapt to the emerging skills ecosystem. As the NOS and curriculum developed by SSCs become available, SDI-MES course curriculum, VTPs and assessors need to be in tune with the benchmarks set by

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<sup>3</sup> Field Feedback report, MES SDIS Evaluation study for India, ILO (July 2013)

SSCs. Aligning the MES scheme with the NSQF would also help in tying together various training programmes offered by different agencies in order to ensure uniformity and avoid duplication.

8. During the interview with the MES - SDIS senior leadership, it also emerged that direct assessment of individuals with prior learning has been stopped under this scheme since the option was more popular with fresher's and young men from non-MES training who directly wanted a certificate for employability. It is important that the RPL component be operationalized again with very clear candidate screening criteria and aligned to NSQF.

## 2.6. AICTE - SKP scheme

1. All India Council of Technical Education (AICTE) is a national level statutory body responsible for planning and coordinated development of the technical education and management education system in India. AICTE has initiated a scheme called Skill Knowledge Provider (SKP). The scheme hinges on a methodology to co-build skills and general academics to create a credit-based approach to vocationalise higher education.
2. It first created a national vocational qualification framework (NVQF) which includes seven certificate levels beginning at the ninth standard. First two levels refer to standard IX and X at school level. Each level requires approximately 1000 hours of education and training taken together per annum. These hours shall have both vocational and academic component. The vocational component increases as the level of certification increases.
3. Multiple paths of exit and entry levels into vocational and normal education are provided to the student. So one get a vocational certificate in the 10th standard, then at the 12th standard and then at 13, 14 and 15 leading to a Bachelor's degree.
4. The scheme also allows prior learning. So if someone has skills and has also done his 10th standard exam he can go to a skills knowledge provider, and get his skills assessed to get a certificate. The scheme is being launched in 12 identified sectors - IT, telecom, banking, tourism, automobile, finance, marketing, entertainment, construction and so on. Industry has been involved in development of curricula, assessment tools and has also committed to participate as SKPs.
5. The student completes the skill modules while on-job learning with the SKP. On acquiring the necessary skill credits from the SKP Partner she submits the same to the Institute where she is registered for a Diploma or a Degree. Vocational skill credits are transferred to the Technical Board or the University as the case may be, which compiles the Vocational Skill credits and the Formal Education credits and if all needed credits for the desired certification level are attained, then the Technical Board or the university shall award the Certificate.
6. The candidates may enter the job market after each certification level or may continue to acquire additional credits in part time / full time mode in order to complete the requirements of Vocational Diploma or a Vocational Degree.

## 2.7. LabourNet

1. LabourNet is a social enterprise that creates sustainable benefits for school drop outs and workers in the informal sector. They build end to end solutions focussed on bridging the gap between skill demand and supply by initiating industry relevant VET for various age groups, including the unorganised sector.
2. LabourNet imparts skills training through its unique model implemented across schools, multi-trade skill training centres and on-site "earn and learn" platforms. LabourNet aims to provide easy and institutionalised access to jobs, and enhance the incomes of over one million workers in India in the next 5 years.
3. As a first step towards its goal LabourNet conducted a registration drive based on which it could provide workers with the most basic needs such as an identity card, a bank account and insurance cover for a small fee. It also has strong links with industry. It has developed its own training curricula and content modules through in-house and contracted teams of industry experts, subject matter experts, instructional design experts, school teachers and both onsite and off-site trainers.
4. LabourNet has focused particularly on the construction sector. 11 of the 14 training programmes it offers currently relate to the construction industry (the others being Tailoring, Electrician and Beauty related courses). Within the construction industry LabourNet chose to develop assessment tools for four trades (masonry, carpentry, painting and plumbing), taking into account content availability, subject matter availability, number of workers in the pipeline.
5. LabourNet recognises that a fully effective RPL programme depends on the existence of a supportive policy and regulatory environment. LabourNet is working closely with both industry and the Government in trying to define and push for acceptance of occupational standards.
6. Some distinguishing characteristics of Labour Net RPL experiment:
  - This experiment was operative in a sector where no recognised occupational standards existed as a result gaining acceptance of the assessment results by stakeholders outside of the RPL programme, such as contractors, companies in the construction industry, and training institutions was an impediment.
  - An iterative process was therefore used to develop assessments. This involves a core team working with industry experts, subject matter experts, instructional design experts and content writers who are contracted by LabourNet as and when necessary;
  - Assessment drives are conducted together with worker registration drives for the LabourNet programme, and are delivered with the support of labour coordinators who assemble workers for assessment.
  - Assessment is conducted on-site. Delivery of tests is outsourced to a survey team.
  - Evaluation of the tests is conducted centrally at LabourNet's offices. Report cards are prepared and mailed/couriered to labour coordinators for distribution to the workers.
  - Assessments and any follow up training are currently offered free of charge to workers.



7. Labour Net experiment does not provide a clear evidence of the outcomes related to impact on career trajectories of the workers that were tested and certified or whether it resulted in improved access to further trainings. This aspect must be investigated in subsequent RPL pilots.

## 2.8. National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS)

1. NIOS has developed an assessment system and has researched to evolve a process of certification to offer recognition of prior learning to disadvantaged individuals who prematurely opted out of the formal education system because of any socio-economic reason. The process attempts to facilitate integration of formal and informal acquisition of skills and offers a career progression and skill up gradation path to such workforce.
2. Key stakeholders of the RPL process as defined by NIOS:
  - Applicants - Employees engaged in self-run or family run businesses and have acquired skills for livelihood through their years of experience.
  - Assessors - Organisations that carry out the actual assessment by evaluating the RPL claims and the submitted evidences. These organisations need to be suitably staffed and accredited to ensure a fair and diligent RPL assessment.
  - Mentors - will be personnel well versed with the complete RPL process. They will support candidates with information on RPL process, benefits of undergoing RPL, selection of the course / certificate best suited to the candidate's skills and experience, advice on gathering the correct evidence.
  - Awarding body - This organisation will be responsible to ensure that the assessing organisations and assessors sufficiently understand the occupation standards and possess the infrastructure, personnel and systems needed for a fair and independent assessment of the applicant's competencies.
  - External Authenticator - shall ensure consistency and compliance with national standards.
3. Some best practices adopted from the experience of other nations in India's RPL are- Applicant can prove attainment of skills through various direct and indirect evidences such as through pictures, videos, direct demonstrations, showcasing products/reports/ documents worked on by the applicant in his workplace, recommendations or endorsements from senior professionals and even self-assessment statement in some cases.
4. The process shall be flexible to be taken up in stages. If the candidate is not able to meet all the criteria in one go, he can be provided certificate of attainment for the competencies proven and can come back to the remaining ones later once he has prepared the needed evidences.
5. NIOS recommends that RPL guidelines be interpreted and if needed slightly modified in the context of specific sectoral requirements and constraints. On-ground implementation of RPL could be taken up by the sector skill councils or the relevant departments in the state government. One of the key success factors in RPL will be to tailor the approach for the educational, cultural and economic realities faced by the applicants.

## 2.9. National Skill Certification and Monetary Reward Scheme (STAR)

1. Launched by the Finance minister on 16 August 2013, the scheme is being propagated as STAR (Skill Training Assessment and Reward) scheme. The objective of this Scheme is to encourage skill development for youth by providing monetary rewards for successful completion of approved training programs. Candidates completing skill training and assessment by authorized institutions will be awarded a certificate and average INR. 10,000 (Rupees Ten Thousand) per candidate. It is targeted to benefit one million youth at an approximate total cost of 10 Billion Indian rupees. The monetary reward is wholly funded by the Ministry of Finance, Government of India, and is disbursed through direct bank transfer to the beneficiaries' accounts.
2. NSDC is the implementing agency for the scheme. While the Scheme intends to cover all job roles in all sectors, it is initially targeting a limited number of high-market-demand Job Roles in specified economic sectors from Levels 1 to 4 in the NSQF. National Occupational Standards (NOSs) and Qualification Packs (QPs) for these roles are being prepared by the respective SSCs (sector skill councils). A select list of training institutions to offer these courses is approved for the purposes of this scheme. Each training course they propose to offer under STAR scheme has to be aligned to SSC endorsed NOS and QPs of the target job roles and has to be approved by the SSC. Assessment and training bodies for all purposes of the Scheme have been kept separate to maintain transparency and objectivity. All assessment agencies are pre-screened and approved by the SSCs and their details updated on the Skill Development System (SDMS).
3. SDMS is a centralised data repository developed to measure and report the progress made under the STAR scheme. It is accessible to all stakeholders of the scheme. Data for all candidate enrolments, training partners and assessment agencies is updated in the system. This enables the stakeholders and public to monitor the scheme progress. As per figures collected from the SMDS on 8<sup>th</sup> Dec 2013, training courses have been approved for 166 job roles in 17 different sectors. 6690 candidates have been trained under this scheme of which 1306 have completed assessment.
4. The scheme offers an improved and more effective VET implementation - monetary incentive to ensure interest of the beneficiary, alignment to NSQF, demand led training modules, a more objective assessment process and enforcement of monitoring systems. But in its present avatar, this scheme excludes RPL candidates because it mandates training. "By definition, the scheme is applicable to any candidate who a) undergoes a skill development training by an approved training provider and b) successfully completes assessment to get certified by an approved agency during the scheme period."
5. If we agree, that there is a socio-economic case to move people from informal sector to formal employment opportunities, this scheme offer the best possibility to bring aboard the informally trained candidates onto the formal NSQF ladder. The STAR scheme document states that

"Training programs will be for a **minimum of 30 days duration** and will include training on social skills like health, hygiene, communication skills etc. It will be ensured that assessments are planned by SSCs only after completion of the training. The duration of training may also **include On the Job training, Internships etc.** if required."

6. If the candidate's on job training / experience can be endorsed in lieu of the 30 day mandatory training, it can widen the eligible population base to include RPL candidates. The scheme is already preparing an ecosystem of private and public assessment agencies equipped with the assessment tools and assessors qualified to test against the SSC approved NOSs and QPs. The same setup can be utilised for direct assessment of RPL candidates possibly preceded by a one week orientation cum social skills refresher module.

### 3. Proposal Development

1. The Project team from Deft in discussion with ILO identified all stakeholders relevant to the RPL in India and personally met many of them to gain understanding of the subject from various perspectives. From a policy and national strategy perspective, we have met the senior most officials from National Skill Development Agency and National Skill Development Corporation to discuss potential linkages and significance of RPL assessments to the overall National Skill Development Mission. These meetings have lent a sharper focus to our research study by identification of sectors where RPL can offer maximum potential and also enriched the research objective to include assessment of economic benefit accruing to the RPL assessee.
2. The team also had fairly detailed discussions with some agencies already involved in RPL or skill assessments at the very basic level. Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) is a certified assessing body for the Modular Employment Scheme running under the aegis of MoL&E since 2006. We met with Director and Deputy Director Skills and assessment who gave us interesting perspectives on the challenges related to implementation and motivating the labour / workers to participate in skill development and certification schemes. They have also agreed to allow us to observe the actual assessment process in the near future.
3. In National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) we met the chairman Prof S.S. Jena and Dr. Mamta Srivastava. They were able to throw light on the finer details and rationale of the National RPL guiding framework provided by their team. Who bears the cost of assessment they thought was the prime factor that could impact the rate of adoption of RPL. It emerged from their practical experiences with disadvantaged RPL candidates that self-actualisation or the enhanced social esteem associated to a certificate was also a strong enough incentive for them to participate in RPL.
4. Sector skill Councils are significant as for their industry they have been made responsible for creation of occupational standards, empanelling assessors, quality assurance in training and assessment and progress monitoring. All these functions are also intrinsic to RPL. The team has met 4 skill councils out of which three were shortlisted for the RPL pilot owing to existence of traditional job roles and informal employment in these sectors. These are Agriculture, Construction and Electronics.
5. Col. N.B. Saxena of Construction SSC agreed on the need and relevance of RPL to this sector and committed support for the project. The team subsequently attended (as an observer) the CSSC's 2nd national assessor's training session at the L&T CSTI in Pilkhuwa, Uttar Pradesh. Further, we also attended a full day's entry level skill assessment session (based on the approved NOS) on 1st November conducted at their Uttar Pradesh premises. The assessment

comprised practical exercises in the yard and oral viva assessment in the regional language. The nuances of the assessment process where the assessor while scoring has to be sensitive to the desired certification level and the cultural background of the assessee were observed.

6. Besides these, the team also had brief meetings with international agencies DFID, AusTrade and GIZ to seek knowledge support from their repositories and from their experience with RPL implementations in other countries. Telephonic interviews were done with Labournet and Skillsonics - micro initiatives in Prior Learning assessments conducted by private players in south India. Their assessment efforts have been fairly successful but the actual benefit to the assessee and acceptance of the attained certificate still remains a challenge for them. The complete list of our meetings is tabulated below.
7. Continued interactions with SSCs: during the next phase of work, the team plans to visit the assessment centres and physically observe the assessment process being followed by authorised assessors for the Agriculture and the Electronics sectors. Contacts have been established with the help of NSDC. Actual dates shall depend on their forthcoming assessment schedules.
8. Assessment agencies will be the key operational partners for the pilot RPL assessment. The team therefore got in touch with the assessment agencies identified by the three sector skill councils. Consultations were held with them to develop the operational details of conducting the pilot assessment such as tentative locations where the assessment will take place, tools available to facilitate this operation, availability of assessors, assessment cost etc. All these inputs have been factored in the design of the pilot.
9. A consultative workshop based on the focus group discussion (FGD) method was also conducted to validate the findings and recommendations. The group comprised 15 persons from the above listed stakeholders, most of them we had earlier met for individual discussion. The proposed research design was presented to the group. This was followed by a very participative, comprehensive and fruitful discussion over trade selection, assessment modalities and the cost factors. The discussion outcomes, now incorporated, have been useful in strengthening the pilot design. The exercise was also beneficial in evolving a group which was convergent in acceptance that RPL implementation for India is worth attempting and were keen to participate and lend support for their own benefit from this cause. It emerged as a starting point to collaborate to make RPL a real and effective human development tool for India.

## 4. Action Research Design

1. Action Research can be construed as work in progress which attempts to address many unanswered questions and many unresolved debates by shaping practices, defining goals, in articulating the theoretical frameworks to support research objectives and in discovering ways to utilise the shared commitment of research community. The approach will involve stakeholders like learners, assessment bodies, certifying agencies, employers, industry representatives, policy makers, vocational education, training and skill providers to go through the pilot and critically reflect on the appropriateness of the adopted RPL methodology.
2. The team proposes to engage with three sectors for the phase -2 research activities and the pilot assessment. Three factors were considered while selecting the sectors a) use of traditional skills that have been around for decades b) existence of large number of informally trained labour in the industry and its capacity to deploy them in organised sector jobs post certification c) availability of approved NOS qualification pack for entry level job roles.
3. Effective RPL implementation has its foundation in standards that are proposed and validated by the industry and are subsequently approved as National Occupational Standards. Action is on-going to strengthen this area under the aegis of various skill development councils in India. For this research, we have selected 3 skill councils from sectors that employ significant numbers of informally trained workforce and have also published NOS for a few roles. These are:

**A**griculture Sector Skill Council of India (ASSCI)

**C**onstruction Skill Development Council of India (CSDCI)

**E**lectronics Sector Skills Council of India (ESSCI)

As depicted above, **Project ACE** emerged as the most intuitive and apt name for the planned pilot assessment in the shortlisted sectors. Key job roles at and below NVEQF level 1 and 2 will be shortlisted from their respective list of approved NOS for the pilot RPL assessment.

4. Jobs and locations for the pilot were consultatively elected with support from the respective SSCs and the assessment partners. Selection criteria of the job role besides the traditional skills also included availability of (or work in progress) approved National Occupational standards and qualification packs as well as trained assessors for the role. Pilot RPL assessments would be conducted in three disparate locations for each of the three sector skill councils. In all, the 9 Assessments thus conducted would present a pan- India experience of RPL implementation in the chosen sectors. Location decision also ensured a high demand region for the selected job role and availability of assessment facilities in the region.
5. Agriculture Sector - Tea Plantation worker, Banana plantation worker and Warehouse Operator are three RPL relevant job roles identified for the sector. All these roles are traditionally being performed by unskilled labour or skills acquired from peers on the work-site. These are also jobs that pertain to the agricultural sub-sectors which are increasingly

becoming more organised owing either to a connect with food processing industry or the export markets. A skill certificate from the SSC can therefore potentially improve employment potential of the candidate for these jobs.

6. Assessment for Banana plantation worker will be carried out in Maharashtra or Karnataka. Tea plantation workers would be assessed in the Eastern part of India - in Tripura or West Bengal. For the warehouse worker two tentative states have been earmarked - Punjab and Uttar Pradesh due to their large scale rice production and corresponding demand for grading, processing and storage. The QPs, assessment partners and assessment tools for these roles are expected to be approved in January 2014 and so exact assessment sites within the states will be firmed up when the pilot research project commences.
7. Construction Sector - Mason and Bar Bender are the entry level job roles that are chosen for the pilot RPL assessment. These are frequently the first set of off-agriculture jobs that rural to urban migrants get absorbed in. The pilot locations have been decided with an intention to cover geography and different kinds of construction projects - Brahmaputra SDTI (Dibrugarh, Assam), LBSS NOIDA and a Highway project in Maharashtra.
8. Electronics Sector is the third included sector due to a large population of TV and radio mechanics operating in rural and tier 3/4 cities who have self-acquired the trouble shooting and repair skills while on-the-job or observing the 'ustaad'. Pilot RPL assessment will assess the possibility to certify them as service and repair mechanics for modern electronics based appliances, computers, printers and mobile phones. So the selected job role is "TV Repair Technician". The assessment for this will be done in 3 locations NCR, one tier-II city and a rural location from Haryana or Uttar Pradesh
9. **Prepare:** These assessments would be done in close collaboration with the sector skill councils who are expected to support in the mobilisation and screening of candidates. Each pilot assessment will be performed for 50 workers who have no formal training and have been part of the industry for a minimum of fifteen years. The candidate must also have some basic level of literacy and numeracy (equivalent to 5<sup>th</sup> grade) which is the bare minimum essential for him to read labels, signage and count or measure while performing job duties.
10. Additionally SSCs via its partners shall support the project team in selection of the actual assessment site, identification of assessors having both domain knowledge and prior assessment experience. 10 assessors will be identified for each sector. All 30 will go through a two day training to orient them for RPL assessment process. Assessment content and tools available with the assessment partner would be validated for alignment to the Qualification Pack and customised (where necessary) to suit the RPL assessment.
11. There are important considerations that make validation of the assessment content a critical step in the process. Firstly, this project endorses NOS and QP based assessments in line with the NSQF. Since these are nascent in most industries, it is quite possible that the identified assessor had been using tools aligned to NCVT or any other assessment standards. Therefore the assessment tools and content will have to be mapped to the SSC adopted NOS and QP before they are approved for administration for the RPL pilot. Secondly, an RPL candidate may have a lower level of language or written comprehension ability as compared to a formally trained individual. It is therefore recommended that the assessment tools are

simplified; not in technical consideration but for ease of administration. There should be a greater focus on practical demonstrations rather than theoretical evidence of competence.

12. Identification and Mobilisation of candidates for pilot RPL assessment would be done by the assessment agency in close consultation with the training provider and other stakeholders such as potential employers or the SSC. However since each sector dynamics operate differently and the research study should be open to observe and compare various mobilisation approaches, a different mobilisation plan can be finalised for each sector. The research team along with the SSC will firm up this plan during phase-2 of the project.
13. **Execute:** The RPL pilot participants would be taken through a day's orientation program to brief them about the need and benefit of acquiring an NVEQF level certificate, the steps in the assessment process and to make them aware of some standard in use terminologies and safety procedures related to their daily job. The assessors would also do a brief one-to-one interaction with the candidate to establish his eligibility for RPL with respect to age, work experience, physical condition etc. Use of evidences such as photographs of artefacts previously made by the candidate, declaration of experience and competency from an employer or a self-declaration is prevalent in evolved RPL practising countries. Some of these, if the SSC and other stakeholders agree, could be incorporated for pilot RPL assessment. For such cases, the orientation day would also be used for evidence collection and verification.
14. This would be followed by one day assessment which will include a questionnaire as well as a practical test of his skills. The questionnaire will mostly be based on visuals or would require minimal written responses in the regional language. The assessor will provide score for each response he observes. In addition he will be required to record deficiency areas for each candidate. The score sheet data shall be tabulated and calculated for all candidates. The result is then prepared and all candidates that meet the success criteria will be awarded certificates by the SSC.
15. **Analyse:** The Research team shall be present on the site and observe the complete assessment process. The team would also interview the assessors to identify the process deficiencies as well as clear knowledge /skill gaps on the part of workers being assessed. The findings from all locations would be collated to understand whether RPL is at all feasible for the selected roles / sectors and if Yes, then what are the specific inclusions / exclusions to be introduced to the standard RPL implementation framework to make the process easy to adopt, effective and relevant for the chosen sector.
16. An employer survey would also be conducted by the research team in order to assess the industry readiness to accept and assign a differentiated value to a certified worker. The real acceptance and uptake of RPL will trigger only when employers begin to recognise candidate pool with RPL certificates as a preferred source for productive human capital and offer the assessee improved wages/employment terms. The survey participants would be selected from the SMEs operating in the pilot location, members of sector skill councils and various industry associations. 50 employers would be surveyed for each of the 5 chosen job roles thus 250 respondents in all.
17. Many of the traditional occupations where RPL can be applicable as service and repair mechanics, handicraft artisans, are more amenable to self-employment or entrepreneurship. It

is surmised that an SSC certificate can still benefit this population because it will equip them with a formal document that validates their skills (earning potential) which should raise their credibility to the banks and financing institutions. A survey of relevant financial institutions would also be conducted by the research team in order to assess their readiness to accept and approve credit to a certified worker. The questionnaire would be administered to 100 respondents.

## 5. Project Management

1. It is proposed that a project management office be setup in order to ensure effective execution of the project and to ensure quality of the research tools, methods and the project deliverables. The PMO shall be responsible for the following:
  - Preparation of project initiation document comprising the project objectives, core team, steering team, project plan, RASCI matrix etc.
  - Maintaining coordination with various stakeholders of the project to ensure their complete involvement at the right time.
  - Ensuring the project activities are completed as per the agreed project plan.
  - Tracking and Managing the Project cost.
  - Preparation and dissemination of monthly project progress reports.
  - Quality assurance at each step and review of all project deliverables.



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## 7. Annexure

### 7.1. Annexure 1: List of Interviews/meetings conducted for the study

Sno.	Organisation Name	Description	Name of the official met	Designation	Meeting Date
1.	National Skill development Agency (NSDA)	Autonomous body subsumes the office of Adviser to PMO	J.P.Rai	Director General	9 <sup>th</sup> Oct 2013
2.	National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC)	Not-for-profit company, in PPP, under Ministry of Finance, GoI	Dilip Chenoy Basab Banerjee	MD & CEO Head - Standards and QA	6 <sup>th</sup> Nov 2013
3.	Directorate General Employment and Training (DGE&T)	Department in Ministry of Labour, Government of India	Dinesh Nijhawan	Director - Skills Development Initiative, DGE&T, MoL&E	23 <sup>rd</sup> Nov 2013

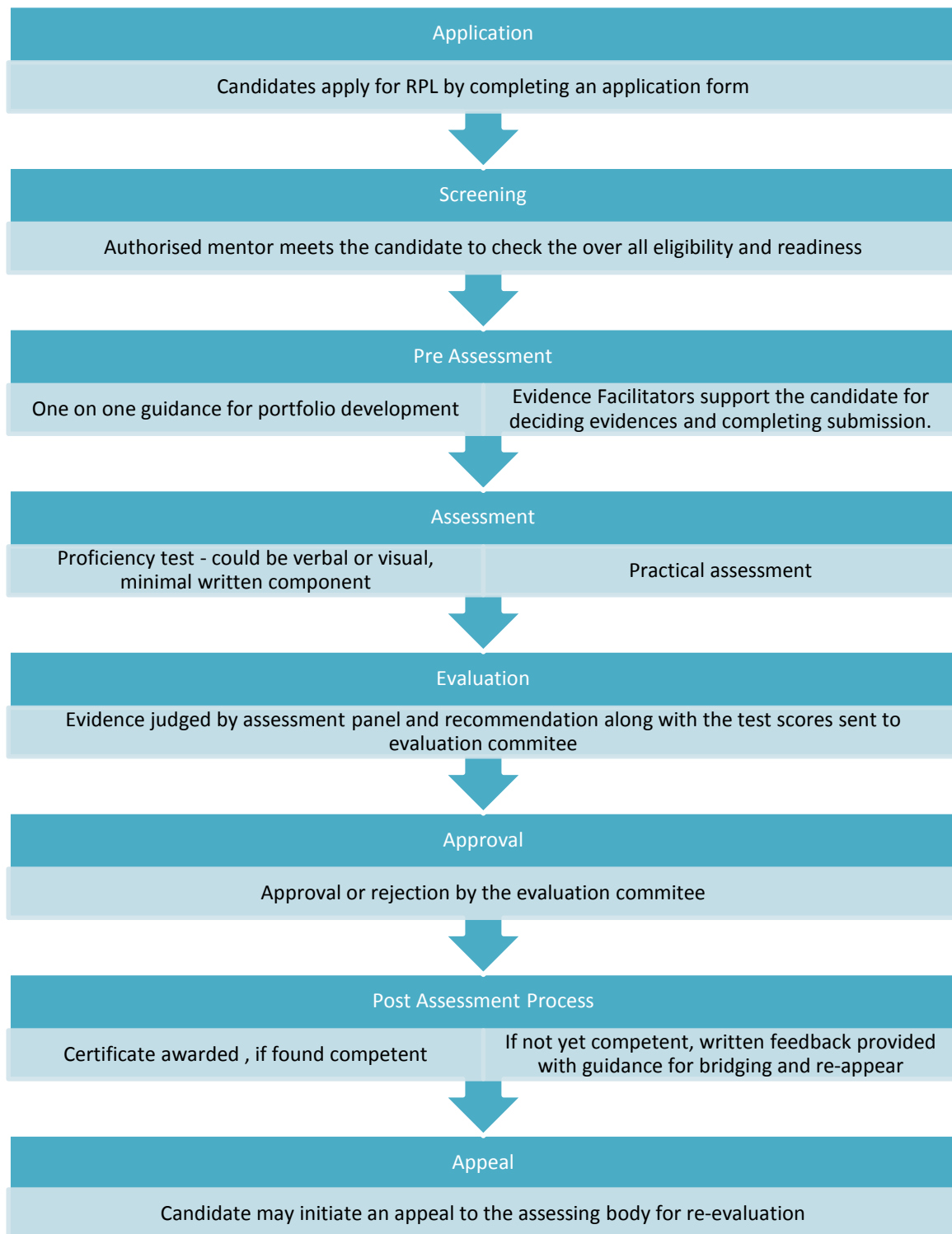
#### Meetings with government bodies already involved in assessments and RPL

Sno.	Organisation Name	Description	Name of the official met	Designation	Meeting Date
1.	National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS)	Autonomous institute under MHRD. Devised RPL framework for India.	S.S.Jena	Chairman	6 <sup>th</sup> Nov 2013
2.	Confederation of Indian Industry (CII)	Industry Association authorised as an assessing body under the MES	Sougata Chaudhary Neeta Pradhan Das	Director- Skills Deputy director- Skills	6 <sup>th</sup> Nov 2013
3.	All India Council of Technical Education (AICTE)	Accreditation body and initiated the SKP scheme	S.S.Mantha	Chairman	Appointment awaited

#### Meetings with Sector Skill Councils of the identified Sectors

Sno.	Organisation Name	Description	Name of the official met	Designation	Meeting Date
1.	Construction Skill Development Council of India (CSDCI)	Sector Skill Council	Col. N.B Saxena	Deputy Team Leader of CSDCI	23 <sup>rd</sup> Oct 2013
2.	Electronics Sector Skills Council of India (ESSCI)	Sector Skill Council	Pradeep Doshi	Sr. Vice President	19 <sup>th</sup> Nov 2013
3.	Agriculture Sector Skill Council (ASSCI)	Sector Skill Council	Sanjeev Asthana Satender Arya	Chairman C.E.O	15 <sup>th</sup> Nov 2013 29 <sup>th</sup> Nov 2013

## 7.2. Annexure 2 – NIOS guided RPL Assessment Process



### 7.3. Annexure 3 – LabourNet RPL Assessment Model

Figure 1: Overview of LabourNet's RPL model

