



An exclusive interview with Dr. Anandi Subramanian, Senior Economic Advisor, MoEF&CC

Vivek Tejaswi

She speaks on the reasoning behind Green Skill Development Programme (GSDP) in Indian context, and how, in the coming years, this will help bridge the green skilled workforce deficit in the environment sector and contribute towards nature conservation and restoration in India.

Dr. Anandi Subramanian, Senior Economic Advisor, has developed the concept of GSDP. It is a unique skill development training initiative that comes under the ENVIS Scheme of the MoEF&CC, to cater to skilled workforce demand in the environment and forest sector. The larger goal of the initiative is to enable India's youth to get gainful and/or self-employment in the environment sector. The programme endeavours to develop green skilled workforce having technical knowledge and commitment towards sustainable development. The programme will help towards attainment of the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), National Biodiversity Targets (NBTs) as well as frameworks under the latest Waste Management Rules.

According to Hon'ble Environment Minister Dr. Harsh Vardhan, GSDP targets to impart green skills to 80,000 youth by 2018 and cumulatively to about 5 lakh youth by 2021. More than 30 umbrella programmes have been identified, which will be conducted in 84 institutions across the country. He also stressed that such an initiative will complement the vision of the Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, of skilling India's youth and strengthening the resolve to conserve and protect the environment.

Ques 1. If not wrong, the term "Green Skill" is being heard first time in Indian academia. How did the idea of introducing completely new skill development course germinate?

Well, yes GSDP is unique. While doing an impact evaluation of all ongoing schemes of the MoEF&CC, I had discussions with several officers/officials across states and understood the current scenario of workforce in the environment field. There is a huge deficit or gap between demand and supply of skilled workforce in environment & forest sectors. Further, about 31 percent of children drop out of school at the Secondary stage itself. Thus an idea germinated to skill the school pass/dropout youth and a concept note on GSDP was generated. It was also decided to tie-up with the National Skill Development Agency (NSDA), Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE).

Ques 2. Past experiential studies shows, the success rate of skill development programmes in India is very poor. In India, bigger skilling initiatives like National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojna (PMKVY) etc. have not created much impact on employability of unskilled youths.

How GSDP initiative is differentiating the odds of previous skill development programmes and what has been added or subtracted to make GSDP more impactful and sustainable?



Figure 3 Field training under GSDP programme.
(Photo source: <http://gsdp-envis.gov.in/>)

I will elucidate about the GSDP. Its design and functioning is not based on PPP or franchise training model. Instead, MoEF&CC is making use of the existing network of Environmental Information System (ENVIS) comprising ENVIS Hubs in State departments and Resource Partners (RPs) in recognised Institutes/Organisations located across States. It is close network loop under the supervision of MoEF&CC.

A pilot programme was launched by Hon'ble Minister for Environment, Forest & Climate Change on June 4th 2017. Based on the positive feedback of the trainees of the pilot programme, and after rigorous homework on the additional courses and centres that could undertake them, the GSDP has been expanded to include more than 40 diverse courses with duration ranging from 80 hours to 550 hours based on the skill requirement or demand of the environment sector. Training will be provided in 84 ENVIS Hubs/RPs/Autonomous Bodies & Subordinate Offices under MoEF&CC/GSDP Partners across India. At first, it is proposed to skill Master Trainers/Specialists who are mostly graduates, who would then help in further skilling the dropout youth, in both urban and rural areas.

The course design is based upon the niche demand of the skilled workforce in a particular domain. For instance, training on Para-Taxonomy including Peoples Biodiversity Register will cater the skill demands of Biodiversity Management Committees as well as institutions like Botanical Survey of India (BSI), Zoological Survey of India (ZSI).

The course modules for all courses have been drawn up by experts in these institutions. The skilling partners will undertake any modification or alteration in the prescribed course, if required, after due consultation with other partner institutes. They can conduct training based on their understanding and suitability of trainees, within the contours of the course module.

We are particular about the programme's sustainability. The successful completion of GSDP pilot training with Botanical Survey of India (BSI) and Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) in 2017 has shown the potential of the programme. As already stated, training will now be focused on creating an effective pool of Master Trainers who have the qualification and attitude to train the school pass/dropouts. Further, there will be a placement cell/officer in every skilling partner institute who will try to facilitate placement of trainees by networking with user groups. But the final employment will depend on user groups (stakeholders) and the trained individual's skillsets. However, not all trainees seek employment. It is noteworthy that there are students who undertake the course and then pursue higher studies/research in that field.



Figure 4 Community Outreach for conservation of biodiversity in Dunda District, Uttarkashi under GSDP programme. (Photo source: <http://gsdp-envis.gov.in/>)

Apart from this, a district wise National Environment Survey under the Grid-based Decision Support System (GRIDSS) programme of the ENVIS Scheme is also on the anvil. It involves environment resource mapping & data collection exercises on natural resources in districts across India under taken through the ENVIS Hubs and RPs. To conduct such intensive survey, there will be a huge requirement of skilled workforce at the grass-root level. Individuals trained under GSDP would also be a good resource pool for these future activities.

Ques 3. In press conferences, Hon'ble Environment Minister Dr. Harsh Vardhan has said that the GSDP aim to get 80 thousand green skilled individuals by the end of this year which will be increased to cover 2.25 lakh by 2019 and 5 lakh (cumulative) by 2021. How and where do you see all those individuals will get employment?

As I have already mentioned, there is a latent demand for 'green skilled workforce' in conservation and protection of environment sector. Areas of employment includes Institutions under MoEF&CC/ Biodiversity Management Committees; Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB)/ State Pollution Control Board (SPCB)/ Local bodies/industries/ firms/effluent treatment plants/ wildlife & bird sanctuaries/ zoos/national parks/ wetland sites/ Eco Tourism/ Wildlife Tourism/ etc.

In addition, to carry out the GRIDSS programme, the skilled workforce is not adequate. These will be created under GSDP. There will thus be a direct requirement of trained individuals at district level, who can help in filling the data gap, which will further help district and state government policy makers to analyse the impacts of a particular environmental damage or intervention.

Ques 4. After listening to you, the programme looks well designed and futuristic. As you mentioned that ENVIS Hubs and RPs will be playing an important role in training and facilitating placement drive for the trained individuals will there be any certification or letter of recommendation from MoEF&CC after completion of the training?

Yes, on successful completion of GSDP training, trainees will be awarded certificates from MoEF&CC, with skill levels based on the National Skill Qualification Framework of NSDA. The certification will give a national recognition, and will also help in an individual's development and in finding new career opportunities in environment conservation and protection.

Ques 5. Is there any collaboration with related government institutions or bodies who could directly or indirectly help in creation of demand for such green skilled individuals?

The entire programme is extremely flexible and lends itself to refinements as and when required to cater to future demands. We have already listed out 84 ENVIS Hubs/RPs/Autonomous Bodies & Subordinate Offices under MoEF&CC/GSDP Partners across India who are on board for training. They are either research based think-tanks or government institutions, each specialized in their domain. We have sent communications to the Chief Secretaries as well as Principal Chief Conservator of Forests of each State/UTs, requesting their intervention in recognising the skilled workforce created under GSDP and providing employment opportunities to them. The ENVIS Hubs and RPs have also been asked to hold stakeholder meetings at the State and District level for this very purpose. With greater awareness of the potential of GSDP skilled manpower, I am very sure that in the coming years there will be greater demand for the 'green skilled workforce'.



Dr. Anandi Subramanian joined the Indian Economic Service (IES) in 1982, and has since worked in various capacities in both the Central as well as State Governments.

She obtained a Master's degree in Economics from Stella Maris College, Chennai; a MSc degree in 'Social Policy and Planning in Developing Countries' from the London School of Economics, London and doctorate in the field of Demographic Economics from the SNDT Women's University, Mumbai.

Her tenures, inter alia, were in Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprises; Planning Commission; State Planning Commission of Tamil Nadu; Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution; Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices, Ministry of Agriculture; Ministry of Finance.

Since November 2015, she is posted as Senior Economic Adviser (Additional Secretary equivalent), in the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change. Dr. Subramanian has been instrumental in conceptualizing and developing the GSDP with a great vision of not only tackling unemployment, but also combating issues related to environment, forest and climate change by creating a 'Green Skilled Workforce'.