

Occupational Aspirations of the Participants of Agricultural Skill Training in Kerala

M.J. Chandre Gowda*

ABSTRACT

'Skilled India' is the ambitious mission of Government of India. Krishi Vigyan Kendras, with the support of qualification packs and model curriculum developed by Agricultural Skill Council of India, are organizing skill trainings besides providing the post-training technical handholding. Training, similar to formal education, mould the aspirations of trainees to pursue occupational choices. The paper presents the occupational aspirations of 277 participants of 16 training programmes on 11 job roles related to agriculture in nine districts of Kerala. Most prominent aspiration was to 'start a new enterprise', which is in line with the objective of creating entrepreneurs in rural areas. Post-training aspirations indicated enhanced aspiration to get a job in government/recognized institutions, an indicator of increased self-confidence and employability of trained manpower. Occupational aspirations varied with job roles and thus provide crucial feedback to policy makers and development agencies for working on future road-map.

Keywords: Occupational Aspiration; Kerala; Skill Training; Vocational Education; Aspirational Strength

INTRODUCTION

Skills and knowledge drive the economic growth and social development of a country. India presently faces a major challenge of paucity of highly trained workforce. Non-employability of conventionally educated youth is also another challenge. Estimates reveal that less than five percent of the total workforce in India has formal skill training (Gol, 2015). It is for this reason that much of attention is being given to skill development

by Government of India. India is currently enjoying the advantage of demographic dividend which is likely to last till the year 2040. If the nation has to get the benefit of the demographic dividend, its working age group (15-59 years) must be skilled (Mehrotra et al., 2013) on profitable and employable skill areas. Educating youth on farming practices is a global challenge. More so in a state like Kerala, whose literacy rate is very high. Higher level of literacy coupled with higher level of unemployment has resulted in educated

* ICAR - Agricultural Technology Application Research Institute, Bengaluru - 560 024 India

unemployment. Educated unemployment is on the upswing in Kerala with 25.07 % of the graduates and 57.73 % of the youth in the age group of 20-24 remained unemployed during the last quarter of 2020 (CMIE, 2020). Besides the national level skill development initiatives, the Government of Kerala has also initiated the Additional Skill Acquisition Programme under the State Skill Development Project to augment the skilling process alongwith the genral education. This programme has improved the employability of educated youth in the state (Davis, 2018). *Krishi Vigyan Kendras* (KVKs) funcitoning in all the districts of Kerala with the financial assistance of Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) have been involved in the skilling of rural farm and non-farm work force on areas related to agriculture. Training programmes offered by KVKs have been found to be effective in achieving the purposes for which those were organized (Selvi and Balasubramaniam, 2019; Safia and Girija, 2020).

Skill training, vocational education and education in general contribute to the process of aspiration formation. Aspirations are forward-looking goals (Locke and Latham, 2002). Aspirations evolve over time in response to life experience and circumstances (Bernard et al., 2014). Occupational aspirations reflect on the desired career goals/options for an individual within the prevailing situations or socio-economic context. The studies on occupational aspirations in the past have been normally restricted to students undergoing or who are about to complete formal education. Lee (2010) measured career aspirations by asking the participants to indicate the job

they expected to have at age 30 from a listing of occupational categories. All these were focusing on 'distant' opportunity space for assessing the aspirations of students who are still pursuing their education, and who have enough time to attain them. Aspirations of Cocoa farmers in Ghana were studied by Nana et al. (2012) with three aspirations viz., farming on own farm as primary occupation; farming as a means of capital accumulation towards non-farm primary occupation; and formal work as primary occupation with no direct engagement with farming. Very limited work has been done on the occupational aspirations of participants of vocational education, particularly the agriculture and related vocational education. Information is also not available on the differences, if any, in the aspirations of the trainees seeking skills in different job areas within agriculture. The possible effect of skill training on changes in aspirations comparted to their pre-training expectation is also not well known. Considering the attention and support being given to skill training, including long duration skill training in the areas related to agriculture and allied activities, this study was undertaken with the following objectives:

1. To assess the occupational aspirations of the participants of skill development programme at the start and at the end
2. To assess the job-role wise differences in the occupational aspirations
3. To study the personal and social profile of the participants and its influence on the occupational aspirations

METHODOLOGY

Data related to the study were collected from the participants of skill development programmes organized during 2018-19 in nine districts of Kerala by the KVKs. All the 16 programmes organized by the KVKs were considered for the study and hence sampling was not involved. Similarly, all the participants of these skill development programmes were administered the questionnaire and all complete responses were considered for analysis. Thus, data elicited from 277 participants of skill development on 11 job roles were used for analysis and interpretation. The details are provided in Table 1.

Each job role has been designed for definite sets of skills through well developed course curriculum, qualification pack, stipulated training hours and conducted by

a master trainer certified by Agricultural Skill Council of India. Participants are subjected to assessment by a third party at the completion of the training and get a certificate upon passing. Since the study aimed at assessing the aspirations of those who were undergoing vocational education, the occupational choices needed to be specific to the job role on which skill training was conducted. Considering the occupation status of the participants at the time of their participation in the skill training, the given choices were – Start a new enterprise, Expand the present profession/enterprise, Earn more salary in the present job, Find a new job in the local area, and Get job in government / recognized institutions. Data were collected on three-point continuum ‘strongly desired’, ‘desired’ and ‘not desired’, with a score of 2, 1 and 0 respectively. Since the respondents had an

Table 1.
Location and Job-role wise Distribution of Respondents

Sl. No.	Job Role	Training Programmes (No.)	Districts	Respondents (No.)
1	Aquaculture worker	1	Ernakulum	19
2	Assistant gardener	1	Wyanad	14
3	Bee Keeper	1	Idukki	17
4	Coconut grower	1	Kasaragod	17
5	Friends of Coconut Tree	2	Kasaragod, Kozhikode	37
6	Micro Irrigation Technician	2	Malappuram, Trivandrum	38
7	Mushroom Grower	2	Idukki, Wyanad	25
8	Nursery Worker	2	Ernakulum, Kollam	35
9	Quality Seed Grower	1	Kozhikode	17
10	Small Poultry Farmer	1	Pathanamthitta	18
11	Vermicompost Producer	2	Kollam, Pathanamthitta	40

opportunity to express multiple choices, the scores were converted into strength of the aspirations, by using the following formula:

$$As_j = \frac{\sum A_j}{A_p \times N_j} \times 100$$

Where,

As_j = Strength of Aspiration of Job Role j

$\sum A_j$ = Sum total of aspiration score for all the respondents for the job role j

A_p = Possible aspiration score (2)

N_j = No. of Respondents for respective Job Role

Information on the personal and socio economic profile of the participants was collected by the respective training institutions using the questionnaire developed for the purpose and provided to them. It included questions on personal and socio-economic variables such as age, education, gender, occupation of self and spouse, marital status, family type and size, family income, land holding and vehicle possession. The Age was measured in terms of completed years. Majority of the participants were male (44.77 percent female) and were married (62.09 %). Education was measured in terms of number of completed years of schooling/education. It included the standard passed for those who attended up to the school level. Post-school education, expressed in terms of examination passed/qualification acquired, was quantified with completed years of education as 12 for higher secondary/PUC/Polytechnic, 15 for

graduates, 16 for professional degree, 17 for PG in general degree, and 18 for PG in professional courses. Occupation status of the participants was categorised into unemployed, daily wage workers, farming/homemakers, skill workers, business, and employed, with a score of 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 respectively. Family size was measured in terms of number of family members living together at the time of data elicitation. Family type was measured based on the number of married couple living together. Nuclear family consisting of one couple living with or without unmarried children was given a score of 1. More than one married couple living together with or without parents and children is categorized as joint family, and was given a score of 2. Family income is measured in terms of annual income from all sources put together. Land holding was measured in terms of acres, with or without irrigation. The data were analysed using frequency, ranking, paired t test, correlation and regression using SPSS version 20.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The number of aspirants and the strength of aspirations for each of the occupational choices are presented in Table 2. In terms of number of aspirants, most prominent aspirations of the skill trainees was to 'start a new enterprise' as indicated by 88.81 % of the trainees. Aspiration to get a 'job in government/recognised institutions' was the second most desired occupational choice as per responses from 78.70 percent of trainees. However the strength of aspirations was highest for getting 'job in government/

Table 2.
Occupational Aspirations of the Participants

Sl.No.	Occupational Aspirations	Ranking based on Number of Aspirants			Ranking based on Strength of Aspiration	
		Number	%	Rank	Strength of Aspiration	Rank
1.	Start a new enterprise	246	88.81	I	94.00	III
2.	Get job in government / recognized institutions	218	78.70	II	96.50	I
3.	Find a job in the local area	214	77.26	III	96.00	II
4.	Expand the present profession / enterprise	200	72.20	IV	93.00	IV
5.	More salary in present job	198	71.48	V	91.50	V

recognised institutions' (96.50) followed by an aspiration to get a 'job in local area' (96.00). The choice to start a new enterprise was in third position with an aspirational strength of 94.00.

The National Skill Development Mission desires that every individual has to be equipped in such a manner that they can earn their livelihood and thereby contribute towards the economy. The results depicted above appears to be in line with the ambitious target of the Mission, which is reflected in the aspiration to start an enterprise and become self-employed to earn a livelihood. As India moves progressively towards becoming a global knowledge economy, the skill development programmes try to meet the rising aspirations (GOI, 2015). However, the aspirational strength indicated that the desire to 'get employed' is stronger than becoming self-employed, which is in line with the results of previous studies (Paul, 2013; Hari et al.,

2013; Sarkar and Sarkar, 2018; Das et al., 2019).

The job role - wise differences in the post-training occupational aspirations are presented in Table 3. For most of the job roles (8 out of 11), the aspiration to 'start an enterprise' was the first occupational choice. It was the highest for Micro Irrigation Technician (94.74%), followed by coconut growers and quality seed grower trainees (94.12% each), assistant gardener trainees (92.86%) and friends of coconut tree trainees (91.89%). Nursery workers (88.57%) and vermicompost producer (87.50%) trainees preferred a job in government or recognised institutions. Among the least preferred occupational choices, more salary in the present job was predominant. It was the least preferred aspiration for the trainees of coconut grower, quality seed grower, assistant gardener, small poultry farmer and bee keeper trainees. Expanding

Table 3.
Job-Role wise Post-Training Occupational Aspirations

Sl. No.	Job Role	Occupational Aspirants (%) within each Job Role				
		Start a New Enterprise	Get job in government / recognized institutions	Find a job in the local area	Expand present enterprise	More salary in present job
1.	Micro Irrigation Technician (n=38)	94.74	78.95	65.79	78.95	73.68
2.	Coconut grower (n=17)	94.12	76.47	76.47	76.47	64.71
3.	Quality seed grower (n=17)	94.12	82.35	88.24	64.71	52.94
4.	Assistant gardener (n=14)	92.86	64.29	64.29	57.14	50.00
5.	Friends of Coconut Tree (n=37)	91.89	72.97	75.68	78.38	83.78
6.	Aquaculture worker (n=19)	89.47	63.16	73.68	73.68	73.68
7.	Small Poultry Farmer (n=18)	88.89	77.78	77.78	61.11	61.11
8.	Nursery Worker (n=35)	85.71	88.57	82.86	71.43	77.14
9.	Vermicompost Producer (n=40)	85.00	87.50	87.50	80.00	85.00
10.	Mushroom grower (n=25)	84.00	84.00	84.00	60.00	68.00
11.	Bee Keeper (n=17)	76.47	70.59	64.71	70.59	52.94

present enterprise was the least preferred choice for nursery worker, vermicompost producer and mushroom grower trainees. For micro irrigation technician trainees, the least preferred choice was to find a job in the local area.

The results provide crucial feedback for the development departments and government agencies to plan for post-training support to skilled rural youth. The skill policy links skill development to improved employability and productivity for inclusive growth in the country. The results point progress towards achievement of the expected

strategy to promote entrepreneurship and to create ample opportunities for the skilled workforce.

Changes in occupational aspirations due to training are presented in Table 4. The skill training enhanced the occupational aspirations of the participants as evident from the number of respondents expressing a particular aspiration at the start and at the end of the training. The aspiration 'to start an enterprise' remained the most important occupational choice, with 17 more trainees (from 229 to 246) expressing desire to pursue the aspiration, after the training. In terms of the difference between pre and post training,

Table 4.
Change in Occupational Aspirations of Participants

Sl. No.	Occupational Aspirations	Respondents (No.)				Difference between pre and post	t value
		Pre	Rank	Post	Rank		
1.	Starting new enterprise	229	I	246	I	17	1.237
2.	Find a job in the local area	205	II	214	III	9	0.977
3.	Expanding present profession/ enterprise	186	III	200	IV	14	0.285
4.	More salary in present job	185	IV	198	V	13	1.627
5.	Get job in government / recognized institutions	180	V	218	II	38	2.300*

*significant at 0.05 level

the shift was maximum for the aspiration to 'get job in government or recognized institute', with an increase from 180 trainees at the start of the training to 218 trainees on the last day. The magnitude of change was statistically significant at 0.05 level. The change was also reflected in terms of rank, which shifted from last rank at the pre-training stage to second rank at the post-training stage. Training effectiveness related studies of Radha and Renjini (2019), and Safia and Girija (2020) support the findings.

Statistical analysis of the relationship and influence of the personal and socio-economic profile of the trainees on their occupational aspirations is provided in Table 5. Family type of the skill trainees, the trainees who hailed from joint families, displayed very strong (0.01 level) and positive relationship with the occupational aspirations. Among the trainees, majority lived in joint families (60.28%). In a rural set up, the joint family structure serves as the social capital that

can encourage the family members to aspire for higher goals. On the contrary, more number of children curtailed the aspirations as evident from highly significant (0.01 level) but negative relationship. The number of male children as well as the number of female children in the family also had negatively significant relationship (at 0.05 level) with the occupational aspirations. Married status of the trainees, which is also a related profile characteristic, exhibited negatively significant relationship with occupational aspirations. Majority of the skill aspirants (62.09%) were married, and the added family commitments limited the occupational aspirations as evident from the negatively significant relationship. Married status might have defused the urge to find better job opportunities, may be out of compulsions to find some job options in the nearby vicinity. Another related profile was the age of the participants which also exhibited negatively significant relationship with the occupational aspirations. The occupation of spouse also had negatively significant

Table 5.
Relationship and Influence of Personal and Socio-Economic Profile of the Trainees on Their Occupational Aspirations

n=277

Sl. No.	Personal and Socio-Economic Profile	Pearson Correlation		Regression		
		r value	Sig.	Beta	t value	Sig.
1.	Age	-0.127*	0.028	0.022	0.216	0.829
2.	Education	0.020	0.384	0.013	0.182	0.855
3.	Gender	-0.029	0.334	-0.038	-0.484	0.629
4.	Current occupation	-0.088	0.094	-0.094	-1.236	0.218
5.	Married status	-0.144*	0.015	0.12	0.883	0.378
6.	No. of Children	-0.178**	0.004	0	0	0
7.	No. of Male children	-0.141*	0.017	-0.056	-0.557	0.578
8.	No. of Female children	-0.125*	0.03	-0.083	-0.958	0.339
9.	Spouse Occupation	-0.146*	0.014	-0.102	-1.088	0.278
10.	Family type	0.168**	0.006	0.171	1.700	0.091
11.	Family size	-0.094	0.079	-0.121	-1.625	0.106
12.	Family Income	-0.043	0.260	-0.037	-0.539	0.590
13.	Land holding	-0.051	0.221	-0.044	-0.635	0.526
14.	Vehicle possession	-0.083	0.107	-0.06	-0.845	0.399

*significant at 0.05 level, ** significant at 0.01 level

relationship with the occupational aspirations. Occupation of the spouses of the respondents indicated that half of them (49.81%) were unemployed. Better occupational position of one of the spouses might put lesser pressure on the other spouse which has been expressed in terms of limited aspirations. Similar and contradictory results have been reported by Das et al. (2019) in their study in Odisha & Antony and Thomas (2020) in Kerala. However the linear regression analysis of the 14 personal and socio-economic profile characteristics on the occupational aspirations did not reveal any significant influence.

This may be an indicator of the fact that the occupational aspirations might be actually influenced by other situational factors, policy support, institutional support, marketing support etc.

CONCLUSION

Most prominent aspiration of the skill trainees was to 'start a new enterprise', which is in line with the ambitious target of the National Skill Development Mission of India. The results must encourage the policy makers to intensify the skill development efforts. The skill training enhanced the

occupational aspirations of the participants which is an indicator of the effectiveness of skill development programmes. The highest level of aspirational strength for getting 'job in government/recognised institutions' is a pointer to the increased employability of the skill-trained rural youth. At the same time, it also indicates enhanced expectations from such long-duration vocational skill training programmes. It puts onus on the governments, administration and development departments to create job opportunities and also to bring in the potential employers to rural areas. The job-role wise preferences in occupational choices serve as valuable feedback to the development agencies for nurturing such dreams with appropriate employment or self-employment opportunities along with specific back-end and front-end support for each of the job roles. Participants from Joint families positively correlated with higher aspirational values, whereas age, marital status, spouse occupation and number of children were found to be negatively associated. These factors may be useful for the skill development institutions while identifying and selecting serious candidates as participants.

REFERENCES

- Antony, R.R. & Thomas, A. (2020). Entrepreneurial behaviour of agripreneurs in agro food parks. *Journal of Extension Education*, 32(1), 6448-6454.
- Bajema, D. H, Miller, W, W. & Williams, D. L. (2002). Aspirations of rural youth. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 43(3), 61-71.
- Bernard, T, Dercon, S, Orkin, K. & Taffesse A. S. (2014). *The future in mind: Aspirations and forward-looking behaviour in rural Ethiopia*. <https://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/Feature%20Story/Africa/afr-tanguy-bernard.pdf>
- CMIE (2020). *Unemployment in India: A statistical profile*. September-December 2020. Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy Pvt Ltd.
- Das, P.K, Panigrahi, J.K, Naik, I.C. & Das, B. (2019). Examination of socio-economic and socio-cultural factors influencing aspiration levels of youth with respect to their education levels: an experimental examination. *International Journal of Recent Technology and Engineering*, 8, 488-495.
- Davis, B. (2018). Balancing skill education and general education : A study on Additional Skill Acquisition Programme of Kerala. *Journal of Social Work Education and Practice*, 3(4), 11-17.
- GOI. (2015). *National policy for skill development 2015*. Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, New Delhi.
- Hari R, Chander, M, & Sharma, N.K. (2013). Comparison of educational and occupational aspirations of rural youth from farming families of Kerala and Rajasthan. *Indian Journal of Extension Education*, 49(1&2), 57-59.
- Lee, I. H. (2010). *Development of career aspirations in adolescents*. Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, The University of Georgia, Athens.
- Locke, E. & Latham, G. (2002). Building a practically useful theory of goal setting

- and task motivation: A 35-Year Odyssey. *American Psychologist*, 57 (9), 705–717.
- Mehrotra, S, Gandhi, A. & Sahoo, B.K. (2013). *Establishing the skill gap on a realistic basis for 2022*. IAMR Occasional Paper No.1/2013. Institute of Applied Manpower Research, Government of India.
- Nana, A. A, Jennifer, L. & Kwadwo, A. (2012). Perceptions and aspirations: A case study of young people in Ghana's cocoa sector. *IDS Bulletin*, 43(6).
- Paul, D. (2013). Occupational aspiration of youth in colleges: A sociological analysis of present and future position of youth in Siliguri city. *International Journal of Social Science & Interdisciplinary Research*, 2(1), 36-43.
- Radha, T. & Renjini, M.U. (2019). A Study on the Involvement of Farmers in Agripreneurship in Kerala. *Journal of Extension Education*, 31(1), 6240-6244.
- Safia, N.E. & Girija, V. (2020). Effectiveness of home science vocational training programmes imparted by KVKs (Krishi Vigyan Kendras). *Journal of Extension Education*, 32(1), 6455-6462.
- Sarkar, R. & Sarkar, S. (2018). A study on the variations in aspirations of unemployed rural youth of Dakshin Khagrabari and Harinmara villages of northern West Bengal, India. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention*, 7(6), 26-30.
- Selvi, P.T. & Balasubramaniam, P. (2019). Effectiveness of trainings imparted by Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) in Tamil Nadu. *Journal of Extension Education*, 31(1), 6223-6229.