

AISECT's Endeavors to Empower Semi-urban and Rural India through Placement Linked Skill Development Initiatives

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This case study aims to showcase the exemplary work that has been done over the last three decades by Bhopal-headquartered AISECT to bridge the skills gap that exists between urban and rural India. In a country where 80% of the population resides in semi-urban and rural areas, it is impossible to have a Skilled India unless the skilling initiatives are executed at the grassroots. This fact was realized by AISECT's Founder Mr. Santosh Kumar Choubey way back in 1980s and he took the pioneering initiative of empowering the semi-urban and rural masses through quality ICT-based vocational education. The journey of the organization to become the country's largest skills and ICT based education group, the challenges faced along the way, the innovations that were introduced to overcome the challenges and the impact that the initiative has had on the society are encapsulated in this case study.

1. Introduction

Skills and knowledge are considered the driving forces of economic growth and social development for any country. As India moves progressively towards becoming a 'knowledge economy', it becomes increasingly crucial that the country should focus on advancement of skills. The institutes of higher education in India have been largely focusing on formal degrees rather than on the vast mass of people outside the formal system requiring some or the other skills training in order to contribute to the bulk of employment at the entry level of each industry. Be it technicians, sales officers, retail staff, banking operations staff, data entry operators or office assistants, the infrastructure required for training such a huge mass is currently not available. Here is where AISECT came as a blessing in disguise.

A brainchild of Mr. Santosh Kumar Choubey, this entrepreneurial pioneer of skill development was established in 1985. Ever since its inception, AISECT has been untiringly reaching out to the remotest corners of the country to empower people, generate employment for the youth and unfold entrepreneurship based initiatives to create an inclusive society. It is a self-sustainable, demand led model which reflects the demand side of

communities for various skills required in the unorganized sector. While initially only ICT and vocation based courses were offered, AISECT today offers over 150 courses in 13 different sectors. The organization has partnered with the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) to train over 13 lakh people over the next 10 years. As part of this partnership programme, eleven major academies have been formed which offer low cost, high quality teaching through university certified undergraduate, postgraduate, certificate and diploma courses in areas like IT & Management, Hardware & Networking, Teacher Training, Telecom Skills, Retail Management, Agriculture, Insurance, Banking & Finance, Textile Training, Fire Safety & Security, Livelihood & Vocational Training and Auto Skills.

AISECT has also launched 'aisdiction.com' to enable students with anywhere anytime access to education. Another portal that has been launched by the organization is 'rojgarmantra.com', which is rural India's largest job placement initiative. The Group has also taken major steps towards including skills training in the higher education framework through its two universities - Dr. C.V. Raman University in Chhattisgarh and AISECT University in Madhya Pradesh.

Dr. C.V. Raman University (CVRU) was established in 2006 in Kota-Bilaspur as the first private university in Chhattisgarh. The University offers short-term skill development courses to students in addition to their regular courses through its CVRU Academy for Skill Development. The Academy is currently affiliated to the Electronic Sector Skills Council and plans to apply for affiliation to various other Sector Skills Councils including Telecom, Retail and Construction. CVRU is the only university in Chhattisgarh that has been selected as the Center for Knowledge Acquisition and Upgradation of Skilled Human Abilities and Livelihood under the self-financed category for the execution of the Deendayal Upadhyay Kaushal Kendra Yojana. The Academy has designed many short term skill development courses as per National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF) for Deendayal Upadhyay Kaushal Kendra. It has collaborated with various industries for market demand based course development and vocational training. Through the Academy, the University seeks to fulfill its objective of spreading quality vocational training and increasing employability opportunities for its students.

The AISECT University was established in Bhopal in 2010. Skill development courses have been introduced right from entry level at Diploma/UG courses at the University. Every academic year, minimum one skill-based course has been made compulsory. These skills, ranging from four wheeler repair to installation of mobile tower to repair of mobile etc., are on subjects beyond normal curriculum. A Skill Academy has been established which has introduced over 30 type of skill courses which are beyond normal

curriculum. The courses include Renewable Energy, Mobile Communication and Automobile Energy and various engineering as well as non-engineering subjects. Entrepreneurship Development Programme have also been introduced for students who want to set up their own enterprise; this has helped in generating number of entrepreneurs in various fields.

2. Impact

The organization has so far trained over 17 lakh people through its widespread network of over 20,000 Centres which are spread across 388 districts, 1070 blocks and 6000 panchayat in 27 States and 3 Union Territories. Its skill development initiatives are targeted towards all categories of people from the community – school students, graduate program students, office goers and job holders, working women, housewives, Below Poverty Line Youth, Panchayati Raj Institutions, Parent Teacher Associations and Government Departments. Over 10 lakh people, i.e. about 60% of the students trained so far, have secured gainful employment. Moreover, about 45 lakh people in semi-urban and rural India have been impacted through the various skilling, vocational training, financial inclusion, e-governance and other developmental initiatives of the organization.

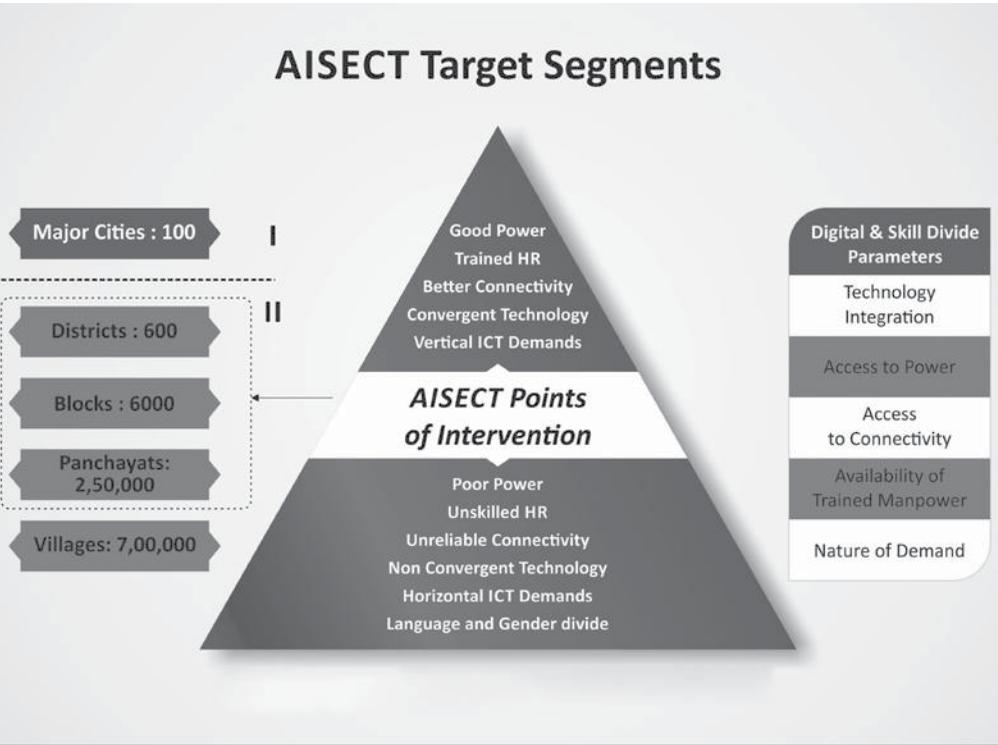


Figure 1: The Indian Pyramid and its Digital and Skill Divide

3. Major Challenges Faced

As the pioneering organization in the country to work towards empowerment of semi-urban and rural masses through ICT and skills based education and services, AISECT had to face a number of challenges along the way. Some of them include:

- **Lack of Power & Connectivity:** Rural areas are typically characterized by the lack of continuous power supply and connectivity. Since AISECT programs were IT based and required working on the computer, this posed a challenge. The organization overcame this hurdle by switching to a flexible schedule of centres' timings. They were opened whenever there was electricity. In some cases solar power was tried. With the availability of laptops and mobiles, the power and connectivity situation has considerably eased.
- **Language Barrier:** The founding team at AISECT realized quite early that in order to demystify Information Technology, it was essential to communicate to people in their language of comfort. Since most available books were in English, Mr. Choubey and his peers set themselves the task of coming up with good Hindi content (a language spoken by most of India). AISECT became a pioneer in it and developed over 100 modules in Hindi on Computer Science for students of all ages. AISECT also developed the course material in various regional languages which helped in the scalability of the model across centres. This gave the organization a huge leap within a short span of time.
- **Mindset of people towards skills:** In India, formal degree is still given a lot more importance as compared to skill enhancement and vocational courses. The organization addressed this issue by increasing the respectability for an AISECT Academy course. This was done by providing courses which were certified by AISECT University and Dr. C.V. Raman University.
- **Fee paying capacity of students:** In rural India, a large section of people are daily wage earners with very little money to spare for education. Such people can't afford to pay the yearly fees for the courses. Hence, low fee structure was adopted and the option was given to the target groups to pay the fee in installments.
- **Lack of funds for marketing:** The AISECT model was a creative yet robust solution for aiding the penetration of IT & skills based education in rural India. The AISECT team had to go down to a district or a block to demonstrate how the centre could be run, how training was to be given to students and how financial stability had to be achieved. Since the organization did not have adequate marketing funds to build the brand

across India, it had to rely on word of mouth, referrals and direct contact to open centres. This considerably slowed down the organization's growth. However, over the years AISECT was able to apportion funds and slowly but surely marketed the brand, geography by geography.

- **Lack of funds for adequate training:** In a mass entrepreneurship model such as AISECT's, maintaining standards and quality poses a major challenge. Training of 50,000 faculty members across 20,000 centres is a herculean task. For a long time AISECT was unable to fund trainers who could go and train all of these faculty members. The organization again overcame this challenge by investing in a studio at its Headquarters. This studio created audio visual content which was put onto CDs and dispatched to the entrepreneurs for them to train faculty through the AV content. Through effective use of technology, AISECT has been able to now improve standards and quality of delivery of the various vocational courses across its centres.

4. Solutions Deployed

The skill development and capacity building requirements of the rural population is vastly different from those living in cities. Over the years, the AISECT Management Team has come to an unparalleled understanding of the needs of the target groups and has deployed a number of innovative solutions to aid the process of skilling the masses. These innovative solutions include:

- **Pioneering a 'Multipurpose IT Centre' Model:** A self-sustainable, demand-led and flexible model was developed to address the multifaceted ICT & skills-based education and services requirements of rural India. While vocational education remains the mainstay of the centres, a host of other products and services, including placement assistance, banking facilities, mobile recharge, internet access and G2C services, were also mounted over the years to the AISECT Centre's offerings.
- **Adopting regional languages:** It was important that the organization communicated with people in their regional languages. Thus, AISECT became the pioneer of IT content creation in Hindi and other regional languages. This required innovative courseware and software research and development. This, coupled with the requisite awareness drives, raised the level of utilization and understanding of technology.
- **Developing an Entrepreneurial Model:** For achieving scale and sustainability, a franchise model has been adopted where the centre owner is responsible for the day to day running of the centre and for creating awareness in his area about the various offerings. Constant handholding

in terms of provision of course material, faculty training etc. is done by the Head Office. State offices have been set up which guide and monitor the centres in their areas. Annual franchise renewal ensures regular quality checks.

- **Designing the first ever IT Yatra in India:** AISECT organized the first ever Information Technology Yatra of rural India with a view to initiate awareness in schools and colleges about IT and various IT based skill development programmes and services offered by AISECT Centres.
- **Forging developmental linkages:** The organization partnered with Government Agencies and Departments for executing ongoing developmental programs in the areas of literacy, education, ICT proliferation, watershed management and health.
- **Launching a portal ‘aisectonline.com’:** This portal empowers students with anywhere, anytime access to education, thereby fostering a collaborative and interactive approach to learning. AISECT Online has been developed keeping in mind the basic issues of accessibility and affordability in distance education, due to which a large number of youth still don’t have access to quality education infrastructure. This portal endeavors to bridge this gap by making quality education accessible to greater number of students.accessible to greater number of students.
- **Introducing India’s biggest rural job portal ‘rojgarmantra.com’:**
Realizing that offering skills training only will not lead to the empowerment of the rural masses, AISECT took the initiative of assisting the trained youth in placement. The organization has launched a rural job portal ‘rojgarmantra.com’ which is focusing on fulfilling the entry level job requirements of private and public sector enterprises at the small town, district and block levels. With over 4 lakh job seekers already registered with the portal, Rojgar Mantra is poised to be the biggest rural job placement initiative of India.
- **Launching the most cost-effective multimedia content solution ‘Eduvantage PRO’:** AISECT recently launched Eduvantage PRO Interactive Multimedia Content with the objective of bringing in a low cost, high quality multimedia classroom solution for K-12 school students at the small town, district and block levels. The product has been assembled in the form of a pen drive thereby making it affordable for both private as well as Government schools.

- Integrating skill development within the higher education framework:** Skill development has been introduced at the two universities of the Group - Dr. C.V. Raman University and AISECT University in Madhya Pradesh - right from entry level with two mandatory skill based courses incorporated in every course curriculum of undergraduate degree.
- Launching India's first ever community radio station by a university:** Dr. C.V. Raman University has launched a community radio station named 'Radio Raman' with an objective to broadcast necessary educational and entertainment based content which focuses on the basic rights of the local community in terms of education, health and law. The classroom lectures that are delivered by the University's faculty are also recorded and broadcasted through the radio station thus benefitting students in rural and far flung areas.
- Introducing online live lectures through Distance Learning Centres:** This initiative provides great opportunity for students of Dr. C.V. Raman University to learn in a live interactive mode and increases the University's reach to various geographical locations across India.

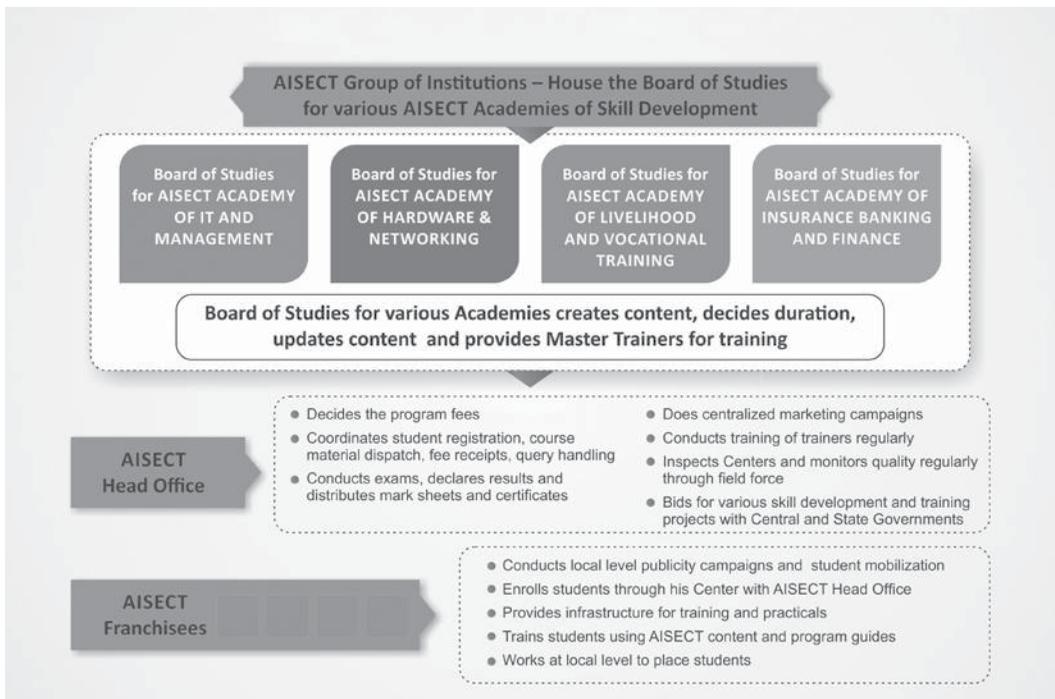


Figure 2: AISECT Model of Skill Development and Training

5. Placement Linked Skill Development

Placement linked skill development has been a key focus area of AISECT. Over the years, the organization has built strong industry links owing to its ability to provide good quality skilled people who meet the entry-level recruitment needs of the national and local companies working in the semi-urban and rural areas of the country. With an extensive experience of providing skilled workforce in semi-urban and rural India and an unmatched understanding of the recruitment needs of the unorganized sector at the grassroots level, AISECT follows a unique online/offline methodology for placement.

In the offline methodology, the organization has been conducting Rojgar Melas (rural job fairs) for a number of years so as to provide placement assistance to the trained youth. Under the AISECT-NSDC partnership, Rojgar Melas have been conducted over the last two years across 10 major states. The AISECT-NSDC Rojgar Mela 2015 was organized across 33 locations in 10 states and saw a footfall of over 16,000 job seekers. Approximately 230 companies participated in the Rojgar Mela across the 33 locations and over 5,000 candidates were shortlisted. The jobs offered by the companies included that of Business Development Executive, Sales Officer, Marketing Executive, Assistant Branch Manager, Web Developer, Customer Care Executive, Tally Operator, Machine Operator, Security Guard, Technician and many more. Depending on the profiles for which they were being recruited, the offered salary varied from 5,000/- to 20,000/-. The organization's objective is not merely to provide placement assistance to the trained people. A placement tracker process is also in place where the AISECT Centres follow the progress of the students in their areas for a year after they have graduated. This follow-up is done through emails, phone calls and SMSs.

In the online methodology, AISECT has launched a rural job portal 'rojgarmantra.com' with the aim of assisting the placement of the skilled candidates. The portal is focusing on fulfilling the entry level job requirements of private and public sector enterprises at the small town, district and block levels. With over 4 lakh job seekers already registered with the portal, Rojgar Mantra is poised to be the biggest rural job placement initiative of India.

Hundreds of national and local level organizations are empaneled with AISECT for their recruitment needs. Some of them include ICICI Prudential Life Insurance, SBI Life Insurance, Nav Kisan Bio Plantech, Jeevansathi, YKS Hotel, Eureka Forbes, Dish TV, India Infoline, HDFC Bank, Dhiraj Son's The Mega Store, Randstad, JBG Group, Welspun, Drupar Chemicals, Vardhman, Future Retail, Shivshakti Bio Fertilizer, Reliance Communication, Idea and many more.

6. Major Skill Development Projects Executed

AISECT has implemented various skill building training programme across the county. Most of these initiatives were for beneficiaries belonging to weaker and underprivileged sections of the society like SC/ST, OBC, Women, minorities, BPL, Scavengers etc. These trainings have been supported by the various Ministries of Government of India and the State Government Departments. AISECT is empaneled with State Skill Development Missions in new project states like Uttar Pradesh Skill Development Mission (UPSDM), Gujarat Livelihood Promotion Company Ltd. (GLPC), Haryana State Rural Livelihoods Mission (HRSRLM), Rajasthan Skill and Livelihoods Development Corporation (RSLDC), Odisha Livelihoods Mission (OLM) along with Madhya Pradesh Rural Livelihoods Mission (MPSRLM). Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY) erstwhile Aajeevika Skills Projects of Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India have been initiated in multiple states like Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Gujarat, and Uttar Pradesh. Over the years, AISECT has been associated with the Central and State Governments for a number of skill development and capacity building projects including.

- **Swarnjayanti Gram SwarozgarYojana (SGSY):** AISECT has conducted this project in Madhya Pradesh wherein it provided skill development training to 13,000 rural BPL youth for employment and self-employment opportunities. The project was successfully implemented where the beneficiaries were trained in various skill based programmes and most of them are now placed through Rojgar Melas to earn their livelihood owing to their newly acquired skills.
- **Implementation of vocational Education in Senior Secondary Schools:** AISECT implemented NSQF in more than 150 Government schools of Haryana, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab & Delhi in IT/ITES & Retail sectors. Activities undertaken during implementation of project include vocational teacher deployment and management, weekly reports, guest lectures, industry visits, practical training, E-learning and hobby classes, salary disbursement, replacements, student counseling for placement and placement tie-ups,
- **Bhopal Gas Tragedy Relief and Rehabilitation:** AISECT is working with the Bhopal Gas Tragedy Relief and Rehabilitation Department of the Madhya Pradesh Government to provide computer education to Gas Tragedy affected victims or their dependents.
- **Employment Based Training for BPL Youth across MP:** AISECT is working under District Poverty Initiative Project (DPIP), Government of Madhya Pradesh, to provide placement linked skill development training.

Skill development of BPL youth at 11 locations was conducted under 4 trades namely Computer Operation and IT enabled Services, Insurance Agent Training and Soft Skills training, Spoken English and Personality Development and Mobile Repairing.

- **District Poverty Alleviation Programme (DPIP):** AISECT is conducting employment and self-employment linked capacity building programme for rural BPL youth in various trades like IT & ITES, insurance agent training, Spoken English, personality development for agri, retail and banking business, mobile repairing etc. Till date, more than 1000 beneficiaries have been trained.
- **Placement Linked Skill Development of OBC Candidates:** Under the Department of Backward Class and Minority Welfare, Government of Madhya Pradesh, placement linked IT and Insurance training for the students of weaker section of the society was conducted. Candidates were provided with relevant course material customized as per the trade requirement. Approximately 1260 candidates have been trained till date and about 792 have been placed in related sector locally.
- **SJSRY project under Urban Development Authority, Government of Madhya Pradesh:** AISECT has been conducting SJSRY Project in the districts of Madhya Pradesh for the respective Zila Panchayats supported by the Department of Panchayat and Rural Development. Under the programme, 3 to 6 months skill based training is imparted to urban BPL youth. The skills in which training is conducted include Computer Applications, Hardware Maintenance, etc. About 500 BPL candidates have been trained and appropriately placed by AISECT under this scheme.
- **Rajasthan Skill Livelihood Development Corporation:** AISECT offers various skill development programme for the student and till now has trained 1041 students and 549 have been successfully placed.
- **Vocational Training Partners of NCVT, Ministry of Labour:** AISECT has established about 50 Vocational Training Providers (VTPs) under the Skill Development Initiative Scheme (SDIS) of the Ministry of Labor and Employment, GoI for providing training under Modular Employable Skills (MES). AISECT is conducting various demand driven short term vocational training courses in the trades of ICT, Retail, Insurance, Electrical and Electronics and Banking etc. Currently these 50 VTPs across MP are functional in the districts of Khandwa, Vidisha, Indore, Satna, Bhopal, Mandla, Jabalpur, Dindori, Narsinghpur and Umaria. About 150 candidates are enrolled at these VTPs for various skill upgradation programs.

- **Partnership with BSF Wives Welfare Association (BWWA):** AISECT partnered with BSF Wives Welfare Association (BWWA) to provide employable skill training to the families of BSF personnel at 6 locations. The project was fully funded by BWWA. Under this partnership, three short-term employment based courses, namely Desk Top Publishing, Office Automation & Internet as well as Book Keeping and Accounting using TALLY, were offered at 6 BSF locations.
- **Odisha Rural Development and Marketing Society (ORMAS):** From 2012 onwards, AISECT has conducted various projects in Odisha. NRLM ORMAS project is one such project being conducted in Orissa in collaboration with Panchayati Raj Department, wherein 2,334 students have registered till date for availing training in the trades of IT & Retail.
- **Swashakti Project:** In 2000-01, AISECT started the Swashakti Project for setting up self-help groups in Tikamgarh. In the following years, two more districts – Raipur and Bilaspur in Chhattisgarh were included in this SHG project. Tikamgarh got nearly 100 SHGs functioning in 15 villages with a total of about 1000 members. These groups have undertaken both community-based (creating and maintaining community halls, sewage systems, wells, bath places and nurseries) and individual/group based (setting up cycle repair shops, bangle shops, grocery stores, cultivation farms, wood and metal processing centres and grain banks) self-help initiatives. SHGs of Raipur and Bilaspur have about 50 groups. They are functional at Raipur in 15 villages with about 500 members and in 24 villages of Bilaspur with about 600 members. These groups are engaged in training, group formation, organization of awareness camps and theme camps, mobilization campaigns through art forms, awareness about food and nutrition, cultural programmes and similar activities.
- **Tejaswini Project:** AISECT was selected by Madhya Pradesh Vitta Vikas Nigam (MPVVN) as a facilitator NGO for Tejaswini Project, an extension of the Swashakti Project in Dindori district of Madhya Pradesh. The project envisages enhancing the skill of SHG members by linking them with market for sustainable livelihood activities and helping them in forming women federations. AISECT is implementing Tejaswini Project of women SHGs in Dindori and Shahpur and has, till date, formed about 500 women SHGs, trained all SHG members on livelihood based activities and is now linking them with various income generation activities (IGA).
- **Digital Literacy of Women:** Training and Empowerment of Women and Adolescent Girls on Basic Computer Concepts under the e-Vidya programme where basic computer course was provided to 8000 SABLE women in Punjab and Chhattisgarh. Under the Women Digital Literacy Programme for Training and Empowerment of Women on Basic Computer

Course through CSCs, around 2500 women were trained in Madhya Pradesh.

- **Backward Rural Grant Fund (BRGF) scheme:** AISECT is the training partner of Water and Land Management Institute (WALMI), Department of Panchayat and Rural Development, Government of Madhya Pradesh (GoMP). It conducts the induction training for elected members of Panchayati Raj Institutions under the Backward Rural Grant Fund (BRGF) scheme of GoMP. The organization provides adequate training resources and local manpower at block level all over the state in 50 districts and 313 development blocks for WALMI.
- **Agriculture Technology:** Management Agency (ATMA) Scheme: AISECT has trained about 1200 farmers from Satna, Sheopur, and Dindori districts of Madhya Pradesh by conducting various Capacity Building Training Programmes under Agriculture Technology Management Agency Scheme..
- **SRMS Project:** During the year 2008-10, AISECT undertook the SRMS Project in 12 districts of Madhya Pradesh. 1327 persons were trained under this project in various trades including computer hardware maintenance, tailoring, fashion designing, mobile repairing, computer data entry and tally, etc. In the meantime in 2008-09, AISECT trained 2693 beneficiaries under the same scheme. AISECT has also provided training to 100 SC candidates at the district level in 2009-10. Additionally, it has provided training to other weaker sections like ST training in Tribal Hostels with MP Council of Employment & Training (MAPCET) in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. In 2007-08, 700 SC & ST students were trained across 7 districts of MP whereas 7309 students in 198 tribal hostels of Chhattisgarh were trained in 2009-10.
- **Capacity Building of Government Employees with Centre for Research and Industrial Staff Performance (CRISP):** AISECT is the channel training partner of CRISP for conducting various training programmes of employees and officers belonging to various Government Departments. Under this association, AISECT conducts massive employee training programmes at district and block level all over the state. The prominent clients are Department of Agriculture, Department of Industries and Department of Information Technology, etc. AISECT provides training infrastructure, training contents and resource persons at district and block level for all such trainings. About 5000 employees and officers have been trained under this programme till date.
- **Computer Literacy and Awareness Programme (CLAP):** Along with State Council Educational Research and Training (SCERT) (GoMP),

AISECT has been the architect of Computer Literacy and Awareness Programme (CLAP), Madhya Pradesh which was conducted by AISECT for over ten years before it was taken over by the Department of Public Instructions (GoMP). AISECT itself converted CLAP into an All India Programme with the support of MCIT. About 100-150 schools, involving about 10,000-20,000 students, are covered under this programme.

- **National Animal Disease Reporting System (NADRS Scheme):** AISECT has worked with the National Informatics Centre (NIC), Government of India for the NADRS Scheme. Under this project, AISECT provided specialized software training to 700 veterinary doctors
- **Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan:** AISECT is actively partnering in various schemes under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan including the awareness generation and trainings conducted under PTAs, preparation of ICT-based educational primers and development of motivational song CDs on literacy, women empowerment, science and environment
With Directorate of SC & ST, Government of Chhattisgarh, Computer
- **Skill Development of Candidates in SC/ST Hostels of Chhattisgarh:** With Directorate of SC & ST, Government of Chhattisgarh, Computer Training in SC/ST Hostels was provided in Jashpur, Ambikapur, Kanker, Mahasamurd and Jangir districts of Chhattisgarh. The programme helped in empowering 7309 SC/ST students through Computer based skill enhancement programmes. Course material in Hindi and infrastructure support were provided in the hostels to make the learning easier and more effective.
- **IT Skill Development of College Students in Chhattisgarh:** In partnership with Directorate of Higher Education, Government of Chhattisgarh, AISECT trained students of 100 colleges in 18 districts of Chhattisgarh about Diploma in Computer Applications (DCA) and Post Graduate Diploma in Computer Applications (PGDCA). Computer Training centres were established in the allocated colleges and around 10,000 students were trained to increase their employment opportunities. The course material was provided in Hindi/English to facilitate the teaching learning process.
- **Indira Suchana Shakti Yojana (ISSY):** This is one of the most prestigious programmes of AISECT under which over one lakh girls were trained in ICT skills in about 1297 schools of Chhattisgarh. Conducted in collaboration with the Government of Chhattisgarh and Chhattisgarh Information Technology Promotion Society (CHIPS), the programme also invited attention of various State Governments as well as National and International agencies.

7. Sustainability and Scalability of the Initiative

- To ensure sustainability, a model was established which is not dependent on Government grants or donor support. An entrepreneurial model was established wherein Industrial Training Institute (ITI), polytechnic graduates and other technically qualified youth were invited to attend an IT based Entrepreneurship Orientation Program followed by quick disbursement of loans. All the 20,000 AISECT Centres are run by people from the local community.
- The centres were set-up with basic infrastructure so that students would not get intimidated and could relate to the set-up.
- AISECT has developed course material in various local languages which helps in the sustainability of the model across centres.
- Industry-based programmes were introduced to increase the demand for AISECT students in the jobs market.
- The course fee was kept very low in order to make them affordable for the target audience.
- Periodical training of Rural Entrepreneurs ensures sustainability of AISECT's model. At AISECT, training is a constant and continuous process. Rural Entrepreneurs are continuously exposed to several workshops and training modules at various levels - central level workshops at the head office, state level workshops and if he is at a district town, the organization conducts meetings and demos there as well. Faculty training is more subject-oriented and various groups are formed who are trained by master trainers.
- The organization is closely working with the leading Ministries of Government of India like the Ministry of Rural Development, Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, Department of Science and Technology, Ministry of Human Resource Development and others. Apart from this, AISECT is also closely working with the multilateral agencies like United Nations Development Programme, UNICEF, World Bank etc. This has helped AISECT in gaining acceptance and trust of the rural masses across the country.
- The scalability factor of the AISECT model is evident from the fact that what started as a single centre in 1990 is today a widespread network of over 20,000 centres covering 388 districts, 1070 blocks and 6000 panchayatats across 27 States & 3 Union Territories of India.

8. Awards and Recognition

- AISECT has won numerous awards and recognitions at various national and international platforms for its innovations and endeavors which are as follows:
- Listed in World Bank-IIM (A) Joint Report as “the most sustainable and scalable form of IT penetration and popularization in India”
- Recognition by UNDP for AISECT’s innovative ICT based vocational training to youth in rural and semi-urban India (<http://www.iicpsd.undp.org/content/istanbul/en/home/presscenter/articles/2015/04/17/aisect-provides-innovative-ict-based-vocational-training-to-youth-in-rural-and-semi-urban-india>)
- Ashoka Senior Fellowship awarded to Mr. Santosh Choubey
- Schwab Foundation’s Social Entrepreneur of the Year Award instituted by the World Economic Forum (Finalist)
- Indian Innovation Award
- Skoch Corporate Leadership Award
- NASSCOM I.T. Innovation Award
- ASSOCHAM Excellence in Education Award
- NASSCOM EMERGE 50 Leader Award
- TiE Lumis Partners Entrepreneurial Excellence Award
- World Education Summit Award
- Inc India 500 Award
- Asian Forum i4d Award
- Best Practice Recognition Award by the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC)

9. Conclusion

AISECT can be called a true path-breaker in terms of its vision, reach and passion for spreading education, technical expertise, generating employment as well as revenue opportunities for thousands from its unique business model. Through its unique offline-online skill development and placement methodology, the organization is making rapid strides in fulfilling its objective of bridging the skills and ICT gap between semi-urban and rural areas.