CHAPTER 6

Learning from Beyond Borders

6.0   Introduction & Background

The sixth chapter seeks to answer the third research question of this study. As such, consequent to gaining understanding of policies related to RPL (in Chapter 4), and of the processes and systems in place for its implementation (in Chapter 5), the current Indian RPL system under PMKVY is sought to be informed by deliberating upon the lessons that can be drawn from the policies and practices existing in various other international contexts. Accordingly, issues related to implementation of RPL, be it - the policy framework in place or the four case studies on RPL Project Types conducted in this research and the interactions held regarding the RPL process under the PMKVY with relevant stakeholders, would be analysed against the developments made in this field elsewhere in the world. For doing so, a textual analysis of the related secondary literature on the subject has been done to help understand the policies and practice as well as the academic discourse on RPL implementation from beyond our national borders.

At this stage, it is imperative to reiterate that, as mentioned in Chapter 2, the theoretical framework of this research is the globalised knowledge economy, learning society and the importance of lifelong learning together with Michael Sadler's approach on Comparative Education. It may be recalled here that the

core idea of Sadler's theoretical approach is that one cannot simply pick up educational systems from across contexts and apply them as living systems elsewhere in different contexts, just like no flower can be plucked from one garden and sown in another since the conditions of soil, climate, environment, etc vary. Accordingly, this study, too, keeps the above theoretic-optics in mind while analysing secondary literature for informing RPL implementation in the Indian context by studying the procedures in place across the world.

6.0.1 Lifelong Learning and Recognition of Prior Learning

LLL is a key to building human capital. Most learning is known to take place through non-formal and informal means, whether at work, home, or elsewhere at leisure. In many developing countries like India, with high school dropout rates, majority of youth and informal apprentices, acquire workplace skills by informal means. In the absence of recognized qualifications, they face severe disadvantages, including finding decent jobs, migrating, and in accessing further education, even though they might have the necessary knowledge and skills. Unfortunately, most formal education systems are not geared to recognize non-formal and informal learning. This hinders the development of human capital and results in its under-utilization. As a result, the recognition of knowledge, skills and competencies acquired through non-formal and informal means is becoming a highly aspirational, political and social issue, attracting the attention of policy makers (Aggarwal, 2015:1). Thus, LLL is, in fact, an approach to re-attach the link between learning and real life (Evans, 2006 quoted by Dykes, 2009: 318)

and processes related to RPL help in recognising, validating and accrediting the previous learning acquired through any learning pathway.

RPL has been understood as the comparison of previous learning and experience of a learner, howsoever obtained, against the learning outcomes required for a specified qualification, and the acceptance for purposes of qualification of that which meets the requirements (SAQA, 2004:9). This means that regardless of where and how a person achieved the learning, if such learning meets the requirements of a qualification (or part thereof), it could be recognised for credits. The RPL process, as per the International Labour Organisation (ILO) is understood to help people acquire formal qualifications that matches their knowledge and skills, and contributes to improving employability, mobility, lifelong learning, social inclusion and self-esteem (Aggarwal, 2015: iii).

Increasingly over the last decade, importance of RPL has come to be accepted the world over and key international standards of the ILO and the UNESCO have recommended that all countries should establish a RPL system (Aggarwal, 2015:2). While UNESCO states that RPL is important for poverty reduction, job-creation and employment (UNESCO, 2012), European guidelines on the validation of non-formal and informal learning lists key drivers for RPL as overcoming a qualifications deficit; addressing sectoral skills shortages; and achieving coherence between countries (CEDEFOP, 2009). World Bank, too, emphasises the importance of the recognition of non-formal and informal learning (RNFIL), particularly in developing countries, having limited provision of formal education and training (The World Bank, 2003).

While this study uses the terminology of 'RPL', several other terms are used for similar processes in different world contexts, like - APEL - Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning; APL- Assessment of Prior Learning; PLAR - Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition; RAC - Recognition of Acquired Competences; RAS - Recognition of Acquired Skills; RCC - Recognition of Current Competences; RNFIL - Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning; RVCC - Recognition, Validation, and Certification of Competences; and VNFIL - Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning. **India, too, has adopted the LLL approach and the policy of RPL under PMKVY**.

6.1   Legal Framework for RPL

The Indian context, first and foremost, needs to provide a proper legal framework for RPL such that, especially the adult learners who have missed the opportunity of being provided formal education and vocational training (VT), can get their prior learning and experience recognised, validated and accredited against formal qualification standards. While India has made efforts in this direction, however, Indian policy makers could also learn from the Danish experience where by an Act in 2007, the possibilities of RPL had been extended in their adult education within general adult education, adult VET, and short-cycle and medium-cycle post-secondary adult education. RPL activity, however, remained limited with various barriers and only a few adults (above 25 years) who started a vocational education (VE) programme benefitted from a shortened programme on the basis of RPL (Andersen, 2016). Thus, Denmark

brought out a new Act in 2015 that changed the legal framework for VE by introducing two tracks – one for adults and another for young people. According to it, adults must begin their VE with RPL, on the basis of which their programme can be shortened if they have the relevant prior learning (Andersen, 2016). **By targeting the Indian adult unskilled workforce in the unorganised sector through such a framework, India could also gain by bridging the skill gap faster through the RPL mode.**

6.2   Key drivers and benefits of RPL

The process of RPL is likely to get acceptance from all the stakeholders involved, including the employers and the workforce, if and when, its benefits come to be acknowledged by all and its outcomes get manifested in tangible and intangible ways.

Increasingly, more and more countries are in the process of establishing RPL systems, as per Aggarwal (2015: 4) for which the key drivers include: (i) Promoting social inclusion and equity for disadvantaged groups – early school leavers, retrenched workers, ethnic minorities – by valuing experiential learning and providing them with opportunities to obtain qualifications; (ii) Encouraging LLL, address skills shortages and gaps and allow holistic development; (iii) Providing access to higher education; (iv) Meeting regulatory requirements of some sectors in terms of employing qualified persons; (v) Improving efficiency and flexibility in education systems by allowing alternative learning pathways – workplace, non-formal, and informal learning – and fast tracking the acquisition of

qualifications; (vi) Fostering employability and better jobs (with possibly higher wages); and (vii) Contributing to transition from the informal to the formal economy. In fact, the OECD report on RNFIL states that while countries facing skills shortages often have unemployed workers with the required skills, such workers are invisible as they lack formal qualifications. Here, RPL contributes to reducing skills shortages by certifying and making visible such knowledge and skills (Werquin, 2010); something that India requires for addressing the skill deficit in the informal sector. It is important to also mention in this context, benefits of RPL referred to in an ILO study by Dyson and Keating (2005) on RPL that states that its outcomes were generally positive for workers as they improved their employability and led to further education and training. India needs to take a cue from this.

The RPL process is also **known to enhance the self-esteem** of RPL certified workforce, especially of those workers who do not have any formal learning since, in many cases, this is the first certificate that they receive in their life as seen from the example of an electrician from Bangladesh who received his first certificate as a formal qualification (quoted in the ILO study by Aggarwal, 2015:6). In the present study, too, this fact was confirmed during interactions at three of the RPL Project Type venues – the RPL Camp (government set-up) at GSGD with auto-drivers; at the RPL Camp (private set-up) for domestic workers; as well as at the RPL at Employer's Premises (government) at the RB At all these venues, the candidates undergoing and having undergone the RPL training and certification felt enthused that they would receive their first (and for many,

maybe their only) certificate which recognised their experience and qualification. Here it is pertinent to point out that initially at GSGD, receiving a certificate based upon prior experiential learning at the end of the programme, surprisingly did not figure among the reasons cited by the 40 auto-drivers for opting for undergoing the RPL process. However, once the auto-drivers were explained how this training would, as an outcome, give them a certificate reflecting their level of competency (upon passing an assessment procedure), the information was well received. Interestingly, except for the certification of their prior skills, that group of auto-drivers was aware about and satisfied with all other advantages of the "package" of the RPL process offered at GSGD. This included a total of 12 hours of training inputs on soft skills, on core/domain knowledge and digital literacy inputs, help for their family and children in terms of getting admissions in IGNOU courses, training for their children, assistance organised through the "*Praamarsh Kendra*" set up at GSGD, the monetary stipend of Rs. 500 and other benefits being thought about for the candidates undertaking the RPL process under PMKVY. That they would get a certificate along with this training that formally recognised their skills had not been focussed upon. As a matter of fact, while undergoing RPL, this aspect should have been the main take-away of the programme. At the other RPL Camp for domestic workers, too, this certificate was not found to be the top-most concern of the candidates.

Clearly then, effort needs to be made to ensure that the certificate recognising the qualifications and skills, must be the primary goal of the RPL process and its main take away. Only then, and with its acceptance by

the industry and other stakeholders being acknowledged, would this certification through RPL process gain respect and acceptability and lead to getting better jobs and/or incomes. The value of the RPL certification should lead to the candidates themselves being desirous to come forth for only getting their prior learning certified as the ultimate goal and for getting their skills updated by wanting to move up the NSQF ladder by joining different levels of skill training sessions over a period of time. The benefit of RPL would flow in the true meaning of the term only then, unlike the present system in place where the certificate is one amongst the many products in the RPL basket, including a monetary stipend.

6.3   The RPL Process

It is clear from various studies and country experiences that RPL has potential to benefit all stakeholders: workers, employers, community, government and education and training providers. However, the RPL process must be carried out in a credible and transparent manner if the labour market and educational institutions are to value the knowledge, skills and competences of certificate holders (Aggarwal, 2015:6).

The main processes involved in RPL have been culled out from various studies done across the world for analysing its implementation. These include studies by ILO (Aggarwal, 2015) which have analysed RPL implementation across and experiences from around the world reflecting that no one size fits all and that there has to be eventually policy learning and not policy borrowing. This

2015 report of ILO has studied RPL implementation across the globe ranging from not just the RPL experiences in the EU countries like France, Italy, Germany, The United Kingdom, Belgium, Ireland, The Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Romania, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Austria, Portugal but also other European countries like Norway, Switzerland and Iceland, Australia, New Zealand, as also South Africa, Mauritius, Seychelles, Namibia, Botswana, Hong Kong, Canada and Bangladesh as well as India, Tanzania and Zimbabwe, Latin America and the Caribbean, Brazil and Chile. Thus, this study proved immensely useful for the current research.

Another study that helped inform this research was that by CEDEFOP (2015), the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, which has brought out a revised report (to its earlier Report of 2009) of the European *Guidelines for Validating Non-Formal and Informal Learning*[29]. It is important to mention here that the 2012 Council recommendation on VNFIL sought to promote a more systematic approach to 'validation' and its key objective is for EU Member States to work together towards national arrangements for validation by 2018 which should make it possible for all citizens to have their non-formal or informal learning identified and documented, and if they so wish, assessed and certified (Cedefop, 2015:4). This study has looked into the issues related to all the Member States of the European Commission. It must be mentioned that the work of Colardyn and Bjornavold (2004) on *VNFIL: Policy and Practices in EU Member States*, although somewhat dated now, also proved crucial in clarifying

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[29] Retrieved on February 24, 2018, from http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/3073

the concepts related to the RPL process and its implementation through stages of its development across European contexts.

Overall, **the RPL process emphasizes three key aspects**. The first refers to processes related to identifying non-formal and informal learning (including self-evaluation); collection and presentation of evidence of learning; assessment and validation of evidence; and issuing a recognized qualification if claims are valid. Cedefop (2015:14) has identified four distinct phases as basic features of validation, namely, **identification, documentation, assessment and certification**. The second concerns the independence of the learning method. The third specifies that only the learning that conforms to standards of a qualification (full or part) is to be certified by an authorized body. **ILO in its study has mentioned that although RPL is primarily an assessment process, it does need to be integrated with vocational guidance and counselling, mediation and skills gap training to ensure a successful outcome (Aggarwal, 2015:3). Indian policy framework in place has taken into account the latter aspects; albeit in its own variations which this study finds has somehow led to the dilution of the centrality of RPL certification being the prime outcome, along with updated core domain skills.**

Although RPL processes and nomenclature vary among countries, the core of RPL involves two key processes: counselling and facilitation, as well as assessment and certification. These are supported by mechanisms such as awareness and publicity, quality assurance, appeals and skills gap training (Aggarwal, 2015:6).

6.3.1 Awareness and publicity: This process builds awareness and interest about RPL in potential candidates, employers, and other stakeholders. The RPL agency (the national institution responsible for RPL) and providers play a key role, publicizing what is RPL, its benefits, whom to contact, process involved, estimated costs, timeframe, eligibility requirements and assistance available. The publicity and awareness-building is through websites, social networking, information sessions at workplaces and education institutions, fairs, and media. **In the Indian case studies, it was noted that the awareness was also spreading through the word of mouth as well as through "mobilisers" or agents recruited for mobilising tasked with getting people enrolled for RPL under the PMKVY.** As such, those enrolling for RPL might not initially know the exact nature of RPL they are joining.

6.3.2 Counselling and facilitation: During this process, candidates interested in the RPL obtain detailed information and orientation from facilitators appointed by an RPL provider (the SSC through its PIA in India). The facilitators are to assess candidates' suitability for a specific qualification (full or part), provide necessary information about learning outcomes and competency standards required for the qualification and the nature of evidence required. The candidate also obtains an application form and documents detailing RPL process and its requirements. **The RPL facilitator should help the candidate in deciding whether to apply for RPL, and for which qualification and at what level. Here again, in the Indian context, the role in the main is currently being played by the mobiliser who then becomes a very crucial link in the entire RPL process. Interaction with**

the stakeholders, including with the mobilisers of the case studies undertaken themselves, reflected that the mobiliser unfortunately was not aware of the entire RPL process as also its relevance and intended outcomes, thereby leading to either the full understanding of the RPL process not being conveyed to the RPL candidates (as seen in three of the four case studies related to the issue of the relevance of the RPL Certificate linking with the NSQF) or by enrolling the wrong candidates for RPL (as in the case of the RPL Camp for domestic workers where only 17 of the 50 candidates enrolled were interested in taking up work at all)!

6.3.3   Assessment and certification: This is a key RPL process and involves a number of steps: application screening, guidance to the candidate by an assessor in building evidences and portfolio, assessment, and award of certificate. First, the candidate's application is sent to an assessor, who screens the application and the evidence. Thereafter, the assessor interviews the candidate and, if required, guides him or her on how to improve the evidence. Once the assessor is satisfied, the candidate is advised about the nature of final assessment (test). If the assessor is not satisfied, the candidate will be told of the shortcomings and advised how to overcome those (for example, collecting additional evidence or upgrading the knowledge and skills). As Paulet (2013) says, 'The objective of assessment is not only to award a qualification but also to steer candidates' personal and professional progress, and to provide them with the tools to do that' (Aggarwal, 2015:8). The Indian scenario, as seen from the case studies undertaken in the present study,

reflected that the process is not being carried out in this manner. **The focus in the Indian context instead seems to be more on giving training inputs (on soft skills, digital literacy and some generic issues of domain knowledge in a 12 hour package under the RPL), rather than on screening the applicant's prior knowledge, identifying the skills gaps and grading the skills for certification (all candidates in the RPL Project Type were seen to be given the same NSQF level of grading in the certification)**.

This basic difference in approach itself has led to the RPL process in India taking a different route than the research and academic discourse as well as the theoretical and practical understanding of the RPL process in other international contexts. In fact, while interactions, especially in the Ministry revealed that this approach was adopted in these initial phases of the RPL roll out in India in order to get the people to come forward for joining the RPL process. However, **it is felt that given the fact that India's demographic dividend will not last endlessly and has a two decade timeline more only, Indian policy makers ought to apply RPL immediately for identifying the skill gaps and help candidates recognise their previous learning, such that with short top-up trainings they can move up the NSQF scale. This alone can ensure that the strategy of RPL can fulfil the skill requirements of the workforce in the unorganised sector as well as help the candidates feel empowered to improve their respective livelihoods which are among the intended objectives of the Indian RPL as per the laid down policy prescriptions.**

It is also seen that vital difference exists between countries in the stage of final assessment: in some countries, such as Tanzania and South Africa (for artisans), final trade test is compulsory, but this is not the case in France, Australia and Mauritius. Where compulsory, the test/examination is the final step of the assessment. If not, the assessor(s) can declare a candidate successful based the evaluation and interview. The RPL agency then awards the certificate to the successful candidate. Some agencies carry out moderation of assessment results in line with their country practice before declaring results and awarding certificates (Aggarwal, 2015:8). **The Indian case revealed that the certification is based on three main components – a written objective test (assessed generally through tablets for online tests), a viva voce followed by a skill training practical test. However, the crucial difference here is that all the candidates are assessed on what training they are given during the course of the RPL process laid down by that SSC or PIA, and not on the prior learning of each candidate. Besides, all the candidates enrolled are given the same level of NSQF certification (say NSQF 3 or NSQF 4) whatever their level of prior expertise or skill may have been. Another factor to be noted is that unlike in the case of Sweden, where for instance, the focus of a RPL project was the transition of care workers into licensed practical nurses (LPN) (Anderssen and Fejes, 2012), in India, the RPL policy does not talk in terms of moving up the NSQF details. In fact, most stakeholders were unaware about this.** It was only while interacting with the officials (Head Training and CEO) of the SSC of domestic workers that it was

brought out that they were working on a proposed **OM or Occupational Map** which had levels 2 to 8 laid out for the domestic workers. This, once finalised and approved, would show a learning pathway to the candidates of this sector to rise up the economic, social and skill qualification ladder.

6.4   Key Actors

The key actors in RPL approach are the candidate, the counsellor (advisor/ benchmark expert/evidence facilitator), and the assessor/ certifier. Naturally, while the candidate is central to the RPL process, an educational identity is accorded to the counsellor, in some contexts the role is becoming para-professionalised and undertaken by non-educationists, with a greater and more formalised reliance on manuals and guidelines. The assessor is the subject specialist. Behind the scenes are a range of other range of other roles, functions and identities (Harris, 2000:26). The standards, for instance, are the product of stakeholders negotiations; RPL texts and guidelines are produced usually by educators (or policy makers, as in the case of India).

6.4.1 Learner or the RPL Candidate

It is the candidate's responsibility to identify his/her prior learning and show that it matches the learning outcomes leading to a desired qualification as also to prove that he/she has learned what she claims to have learned. Having said that, however, taking a cue from the South African system, the **RPL candidate must be protected by rights** like the right to fair and transparent processes; access to standards and criteria being used in the

accreditation processes; to know the learning outcomes to be met; access to competent, trained educators and assessors who assist them; right to be assessed by methods that are flexible, appropriate to the subject and tailored to their needs; right to have prior learning assessed for academic credit towards credentials within reasonable time; and right to transfer the credits (SAQA, 2004: 43). **India would gain from incorporating similar aspects in its policy such that those undergoing RPL are made the centre of activity and focus is given on linking their existing skills with the NSQF to formalise learning acquired through any pathway.**

Among the administrative processes counted as important to those pursuing RPL as mentioned by Dykes (2009: 321) are making the application and registration process efficient and transparent as well as having competent and informed staff to assist with information and advice. Besides, the trainers should be respectful and motivating and teach in manner that is comprehensible to the learners. They must also be conscious to teach and prepare the study material in a language and a format that is easy to follow for the group. For instance, at GSGD, it was noticed that the power point presentation being shown to the auto-rickshaw drivers on stress management in English which most candidates could not read, even so the lecture was lucidly given in Hindi which could be easily understood by the RPL candidates. Similarly, the booklet handed out to domestic workers at another RPL Camp also could have been prepared with more pictorial representations to explain concepts rather than giving written directions (as was

the case) which that group consisting of mostly illiterate women found find less use off. Such sensitisation of involved stakeholders would help make the RPL process better for the candidates.

Another issue is making the candidates feel that they would get value for their effort and time. In fact, Dykes mentions that while undergoing learning, RPL students do require emotional support, too, which should be provided together with ounselling services and welfare so that they can cope simultaneously with doing work and learning as well as supporting their families (2009: 322). Here it is worth mentioning that the RPL training of auto-rickshaw drivers was initially spread over five days. However, later it was consolidated into one day only so that the auto-drivers do not have to stop earning their source of livelihood for undergoing the RPL Camp. This was a crucial tweaking of the training module (done with approval of NSDC) since almost 99% of auto-drivers, despite working 10-12 hours a day, remained in debt and meeting their families' needs was a priority for which they have to earn daily. The South African experience has also shown that support services (to RPL candidates) should consciously address the invisible barriers to successful assessment including re-alignment of existing academic development programmes to suit the needs of adult learners as well as dealing with the very significant anxieties, traumas and non-technical barriers that arise when adult learners enter the RPL arena (SAQA, 2004:58).

Overall, learner-centredness is a key principle underpinning the NQF. Translated into candidate support, it means that advisory/ support services

needs to be developed to complement the processes where appropriate evidence is identified and benchmarked and to support candidates in the preparation and planning for assessment (SAQA, 2004:59). Thus, RPL assessment is not only about the act of assessment, i.e. writing a test, demonstrating a skill, but also about capacitating people to be assessed so that they can provide evidence of their applied knowledge (SAQA, 2004:69).

6.4.2 Evidence Facilitator: The evidence facilitator is another key actor in the RPL process; albeit termed differently in different contexts. **SAQA RPL policy is explicit about the need for appropriate training of staff that deals with the RPL process** (SAQA, 2004:39). The first point of contact is with an 'evidence facilitator' (or mobiliser in the Indian context). Evidence facilitation is part of the pre-assessment stage which consists of two separate steps: screening and pre-assessment. During the screening phase, the evidence facilitator meets with candidates to ascertain viability of the application for RPL. If the application is not viable, the candidate is informed about alternative learning pathways. If it is viable, the evidence facilitator and candidate embark on the pre-assessment phase. During the pre-assessment phase, the evidence facilitator introduces the candidate(s) to the process of assessment and the support services, including possible short learning programmes that will assist candidates in preparing their evidence like portfolio-development or academic writing skills etc. (SAQA, 2004:41). The role of mobilisers in the Indian context has been discussed above. **The mobilisers were not found to be adequately aware of the full import of the RPL programme and in fact, they possessed only part knowledge.**

6.4.3 Moderators: The role of the moderator, too, is critical. The South African model reflects that the moderation function of a provider/institution is a key aspect of the overall approach to quality assurance (SAQA, 2004:48). Internal moderation system is established to perform important roles like: verify that assessments are fair, valid, reliable and practicable; identify the need for the re-design of assessment; provide an appeals procedure for dissatisfied learners; evaluate performance of assessors; provide procedures for de-registration of unsatisfactory assessors; and provide feedback on unit standards and qualifications. They assist in establishment of appropriate assessment methodologies and tools, help define the assessor and evidence guides, and moderate a sample of the assessments and the assessor practice in line with the requirements (SAQA, 2001: 61 quoted in SAQA, 2004: 49).

6.4.4 Assessor: The assessor has a central role to play. Taking the example of South Africa, we find that an assessor has to make a judgement about an achievement that will result in credits towards unit standards or qualifications (SAQA, 2001: 47 quoted in SAQA, 2004: 42). Clearly thus, **the assessor must possess full contextual knowledge and understanding of the learning to be assessed. And an assessor must be registered only when deemed competent in the generic assessor standard and an expert in the field of learning in which assessments are undertaken** (SAQA, 2004:42). **The integrity of the assessment and also of the RPL system hinges on the extent to which assessors can evaluate evidence and make assessment judgements in a credible and accountable way which places a huge**

responsibility on assessors and requires a critical reflection on their own practices. **As such, support structures for assessors are as important as those for candidates. Mentoring and coaching of assessors by internal moderators and external verifiers are critical to develop the skills and abilities of assessors** (SAQA, 2004:44).**The link of assessors was acknowledged as being weak in the Indian context.**

6.5   Assessment

Some factors that need to be kept in mind while assessing RPL candidates have been delineated below which are based on experiences of RPL practice in different nations. **India, which is currently not doing RPL assessment of the prior learning of candidates *per se*, can inform its practice on these lines by making appropriate policy changes.**

Firstly, unless proper policies, structures and resources are allocated to a credible assessment process, it can easily become an area of contestation and conflict. This emerges from a number of international approaches. Besides, **the implementers of RPL should be very clear on the intended purpose and outcomes of the initiative (SAQA, 2004:26). This is crucial for all key actors involved. Furthermore, bias against experiential and non-formal forms of learning may inhibit the assessor from finding alternative forms of evidence for applied knowledge and skills, particularly if such evidence is not presented in a 'traditional' format**. Anti-bias and sensitivity training, specifically as it relates to the fears and doubts of adult learners, should be an

integral part of assessor training. Assessor guides as a standardised 'toolkit' should be developed in conjunction with the internal and external moderator to ensure consistency of assessment. This is a critical part of the planning for RPL implementation (SAQA, 2004:47). Breier and Ralphs (2009:483) make an interesting point about RPL assessment when they refer to inherent contradiction in its concept itself since RPL is intended to assist those who had missed out on formal education yet it required candidates to compare their learning with formal outcomes usually acquired through formal education. Thus, they mention that RPL has proved most effective when knowledge to be recognised is of practical nature and can be demonstrated physically. Where knowledge is less tangible, it is difficult to match formal learning outcomes. So, most commonly, RPL candidates are required to develop a portfolio of evidence of prior experience and learning, which is then assessed for potential (Breier and Ralphs, 2009). It has to be appreciated that understanding of the Aristotelian concept of *phronesis* or practical wisdom makes an important contribution to the conceptualisation and implementation of RPL in adult learning contexts since RPL candidates are likely to have less formal education, hence their practical wisdom is more likely to be associated with the particular and the oral (Breier and Ralphs, 2009:491).

6.6   Forms of Assessment

There are **several forms of RPL assessment**. The validation and recognition of prior learning can be done through reliable, precise, unambiguous and non-judgemental procedures. Cedefop (2015:46-51) lists out: (i) **Tools for extracting**

evidence including – tests and examinations; dialogue or conversational methods; declarative methods; observations; simulations; and evidence extracted from work or other practices. (ii) **Tools for presenting evidence** including – CVs and individual statement of competences; third party reports; and portfolios. In its earlier report, the European Guidelines for non-formal and informal learning had listed eight categories of assessment methods (Cedefop, 2009). These are:

1. Debate: It offers the candidates an opportunity to demonstrate their depth of knowledge as well as their communicative skills. As per Andersen (2016) looking at the Danish context, dialogue (with or without documents) gives the participants an opportunity to tell about their own experiences and competences, and the assessor has an opportunity to ask about documents and experiences. Its advantage is that it provides an insight into the participant's background and perception about their own competencies. Its limitations are that the participant is required to be able to articulate the skills acquired and to reflect on how competences have been developed. Besides, dialogue as a tool of assessment works well when the assessor has a thorough knowledge of the competencies required for the jobs at which the programs are aimed.

2. Declarative methods: This is an admittance of an individual's personal identification and recording of their competencies and are normally signed by a third party in order to verify the self-assessment.

3. Interviews: These can be used to clarify issues raised in documentary evidence presented and/or to review scope and depth of learning.

4. Observation: This enables the extraction of an individual's evidence of competence while they are performing everyday tasks at work.

5. Portfolio method: This uses a mix of methods and instruments employed in consecutive stages to produce a coherent set of documents or work samples showing an individual's skills and competencies. Portfolio is a collection of evidence prepared by a candidate in support of their claim of meeting requisite skills/competencies of a formal qualification. Portfolio development is a crucial component of RPL where individuals can become aware of their respective levels of skills/competences which they can get assessed to link with NSQF.

6. Presentation: This can be formal or informal; can check individual's ability to present information in a way that is appropriate to the subject and the audience.

7. Simulation and evidence extracted from work: Individuals are placed in a situation fulfilling all the criteria of real-life scenario to assess their competences.

8. Tests and examinations: This helps to identify and validate informal and non-formal learning through, or with the help of, examinations in the formal system.

The nature of evidence recommended by various countries and development agencies includes certificates and awards; letters of recommendation; samples of work; videos and/or photographs of work activities; skills logbooks; details of formal training, records of seminars, conferences and

workshops attended; resume and performance appraisals; testimonials from current or previous employers; and job descriptions (Aggarwal, 2015: 9). Evidence of skills, knowledge and values may be in the form of: certificates from previous education and training courses, including short learning programmes and skills programmes; licences to practice; professional registration; products of any nature relevant to the courses offered at the institution: art portfolios; publications, etc.; samples of completed work; employment related documents such as resumes, performance appraisals, etc.; statutory declaration outlining previous types of work and experience; references from current and past employers, supervisors and colleagues; testimonials from persons holding relevant qualifications in the area being assessed; photographs of completed work certified by a referee or accompanied by a statutory declaration; and if self-employed in the past, evidence of running a business using the skills and knowledge being claimed. (Mays, 2002 in SAQA, 2004:56).

Not all countries, however, use same assessment methods; they all seem to use more than one method. France, for example, typically uses the declarative method (Paulet, 2013), where the portfolio method is also widely used. Other commonly used methods in a number of international contexts include the USA using standardised national examinations, institutionally developed challenge examinations, etc. together with individual assessment through a portfolio of evidence or oral interview. In UK, portfolios of evidence, assigned subject-related essays, challenge examinations, interviews/oral examinations, and testimonials from supervisors are all used. Australia uses

work-experience 'translated' into educational outcomes, validation of industry-based and in-house training programmes through an evaluation of such programmes, challenge tests and portfolios. In Canada, main methods are portfolio assessments, demonstrations, challenge examinations and workplace training programme evaluation. In Denmark, Andersen (2016) lists among the tools of assessment – dialogue with or without documents, checklists, statements from previous or current employers, practical tests and exercises, written tests and logbooks and schedules for documentation and /or self-assessment.

Thus, as Harris (2000: 25) mentions, assessment involves candidates submitting their portfolios containing 'direct' evidence such as products and samples of work and 'indirect' evidence such as testimonials, certificates and references. Candidates are assessed, besides the portfolio of evidence, through a variety of other methods; most common being the work-based performance assessment either in the natural setting or where it is difficult logistically, then assessment by simulation. The other methods include the interview which also fulfils the function of assessing knowledge or the competence to perform. **The least popular and the last resort are the traditional assessment practices such as tests or written exams.** An important point that came out from the Danish context is that more time spent for RPL necessarily means less time (effort and resources) spent on teaching (and training) as per Andersen (2016). Also overall, RPL practitioners have a range of valid forms of assessment to choose from when making decisions about their preferred assessment methodologies. However, it is important to remember that assessments should

be fit for purpose and a particular assessment tool should not be used where there are more efficient and practical ways to assess (SAQA, 2004:58). Here it is important to mention that the assessment tool of practical tests and exercises was found to be valuable since this gave a reliable picture of what the participant was capable of doing in a realistic setting. Besides, it is also serves to assess those participants who are less skilled at speaking, but are better in a practical context. While conducting individual practical tests leads to excessive costs, alternative methods are being looked at for conducting practical tests in groups.

Overall, these assessment tools and methods mentioned above should be – (i) Valid (assess the desired competences); (ii) Reliable and consistent (various assessors use the same assessment tools and methods and obtain the same results); (iii) Transparent (candidates, assessors and moderators are aware of the assessment tools and methods and standards); (iv) Equitable and flexible (candidates' needs are taken into account – time, place and method); (v) Manageable and achievable (the assessment should be possible within the time and resources available); and (vi) Fair (allowing for appeal) (Aggarwal, 2015:9).

6.7   Credit Awarded

The only credit awarded is the 'formal', 'specific' credit (Harris, 2000: 25). This is the credit for competence which directly matches the skills and knowledge in national standards. If a candidate's evidence is assessed as being directly equivalent to standards, then RPL is 'granted'. In case of a doubt, however, further evidence or assessment is recommended, and emphasis may

even shift to more traditional methods of assessment like written documentation or written exams. In case of the credit is eventually denied, then the candidate is supported and encouraged to seek new learning.

6.8   Ways for New Learning and Skill Gap Training

Some countries make provision for skills upgrading programmes so that candidates can fill skills gaps and meet desired standards. Harris (2000: 25) mentions that NVQ of South Africa recommends that the ways for seeking new learning include self-instruction, an open learning package and, if all else fails, classroom instruction. In India, there is need to first assess the skill gaps properly and then give top-up training inputs, after which the candidates can be assessed for RPL and certifying their level of qualification as per NSQF standards.

6.9   Quality Assurance and Quality Management of RPL

To ensure the credibility and consistency of RPL certification, countries specify quality assurance mechanisms. Those most frequently used are: establishing common standards; ensuring the availability of competent RPL practitioners; collaborating with employers' and workers' organizations and other relevant stakeholders; developing assessment tools and methodologies; accrediting RPL centres; moderating assessments; monitoring and evaluation frameworks; independent auditing of the entire RPL process; and disseminating results. These ensure the successful implementation of a credible and accountable RPL system (SAQA, 2004:71). The RPL system should be based on fairness, validity,

reliability and practicability. Fairness entails that an assessment should not in any way hinder or advantage a learner. Validity in assessment refers to measuring what it says it is measuring, be it knowledge, understanding, subject content, skill, information, behaviours, etc. Reliability in assessment is about consistency. Practicability refers to ensuring that assessments take into account the available financial resources, facilities, equipment and time. Assessment that requires elaborate arrangements for equipment and facilities, as well as being costly, will make the assessment system fail.

6.10 Key barriers & Strategies for a successful RPL System

6.10.1   Perspectives on RPL: Challenges

Hamer (2012: 116 as quoted in Andersen, 2016) has summarized **three different critical perspectives on RPL** – (i) a **critical instrumental perspective** that focuses on "inadequate tools, processes and promotional practices in place to engage learners or make RPL a sufficiently streamlined process". (ii) a **critical pedagogical perspective** that focuses on "an absence of various learning and assessment methodologies tailored to specific needs of marginalised groups". And (iii) a **critical epistemological perspective** that questions whether "alternative knowledge can be embraced or negotiated through RPL". These three perspectives look at the different types of challenges for successful implementation of RPL that need to be addressed to ensure widespread use of RPL of high quality and with respect for the participants' prior learning (Andersen, 2016).

6.10.2   Key Barriers to RPL

Despite high expectation from RPL, many countries are experiencing a slow implementation, and difficulty in upscaling from project-based implementation to establishing a sustainable national RPL system that is accessible to all. According to an ILO study (Aggarwal, 2015:11-28), the key barriers and strategies/ building blocks in successfully implementing RPL on a large scale are:

1.   **Awareness, Vocational Guidance and Counselling:** RPL is an evolving concept, not only many different terminologies and definitions are used, but processes also vary in various countries. Thus, like any new concept, it takes time for stakeholders to fully accept it. Moreover, majority are unaware of RPL, its processes and methodologies and its acceptability by employers for employment is less. In fact, low awareness of RPL in Norway, particularly among those with low formal education, for example, is the biggest challenge to increasing its uptake and requires a targeted information strategy. In fact, in many countries, the RPL methodology for assessing the knowledge and skills of persons is fairly complex, and the candidates applying for RPL require significant support and counselling during the various processes. In a successful RPL system, the nature of the relationship between the assessor and the candidate is quite different than seen in a traditional, formal education system. The assessors, while maintaining quality and accuracy in the assessment, must provide correct information about the process as a whole and guide candidates in collecting evidence. For example, while a candidate may have all the necessary credentials, he/she may not know how to present them. In Tanzania, counselling

is provided by both facilitators and assessors. The aim is to provide effective counselling right from the start, so that suitable candidates are identified and the rejections at the final assessment stage are minimized. To this end, some countries now emphasize the use of ICT, for instance in Queensland, Australia individuals first visit a Skilling Solutions Centre (often in a local shopping centre) and use a web-based self-evaluation tool to match their skills, knowledge and experience to a relevant qualification (full or part). This takes about 15 minutes. They are then provided with a list of preferred RPL providers where they can undergo the RPL process. The Australian government's website is very user-friendly and provides complete information. A well-directed strategy can help in creating awareness about RPL and its potential benefits, and in building positive attitudes. **This could be possible in India at the RPL Project Type the RPL Centres which, as seen in this study, have not taken off as envisaged by policy makers where RPL candidates could approach these Centres for assessing their skills and get advice on where to undergo their RPL process of training, assessment and certification.**

2.   *Integrating RPL with policy, legal and regulatory frameworks for education and training systems:* **An RPL system should be an integral part of a country's education and training system**. It should promote alternate pathways to acquiring qualifications, ensuring parity between RPL and formal education; facilitate LLL; and ensure the allocation of sufficient resources so that stakeholders take it seriously and prioritize its development and implementation. In Denmark, every 18 to 25 year-old has the right to RPL, as do those

undertaking adult VT (Andersen and Aagaard, 2013). Dutch VET law ensures parity of skills acquired from formal learning with those gained from non-formal/informal learning; the skills are assessed through a system independent of learning pathways (Duvekot, 2013). In Finland, adults with more than five years of documented work experience are eligible for applying for a journeyman's or craft certificate through RPL. If their documents meet the requirements, they undertake the same final examination (theory and practical) as apprentices. If successful, they can then apply for admission to higher education (Christensen, 2013). In Australia, RPL is part of the Australian Quality Training Framework charter and the standards for Registered Training Organisations and it is mandatory for RPL to be offered to all applicants on enrolment. Similarly, India too make provisions in policy and practice (with required infrastructure and apparatus in place) to make it possible for all workers in the informal sector to come forth to get their skills assessed and certified.

3.   **Stakeholder ownership and commitment:** The effective participation of stakeholders, especially employers' and workers' organizations, in education and training systems is essential to ensuring that training matches the needs of the labour market. This presents a challenge for many countries, and all the more so, in those with a large informal economy, as establishing collaboration with informal sector enterprises is in itself an obstacle. It is very important to ensure active participation of all stakeholders and social partners, especially employers and workers, in the planning, implementation and evaluation of RPL, so that they not only ensure quality but also recognize the benefits of RPL.

4.   Institutional frameworks and the capacity for RPL: Like any new system, RPL requires a clearly defined institutional framework for planning and management. Some countries entrusted responsibility for RPL to existing institutions without analysing their existing capacity constraints or awarding additional resources. RPL was viewed as a similar form of assessment as for formal education and training systems, and allocated the responsibility for RPL to them. As a result, both public and private education and training institutions also became RPL providers, mistakenly believing that existing formal assessment systems would cover RPL. In addition, many of these institutions lacked additional resources and incentives to promote RPL as well as the capacity to implement it. Thus, implementation of RPL was ineffective. Even countries with a good recognition system expressed their inability to rapidly scale up RPL due to lack of competent staff and/or facilities (Werquin, 2008). In planning an RPL system, thus, a country should comprehensively analyze the capacity of the existing institutional framework(s) for education and training for RPL to be implemented effectively. Though setting up new institutions for RPL may not be essential, the capacity of existing institutions needs to be strengthened. This can be achieved by setting up exclusive RPL units within these institutes, employing additional professionals. The effective involvement of social partners in the institutions is also essential. Tanzania, for example, is empowering existing institutions to take up RPL, while in Costa Rica, the National Training Institute has established a specialized unit for RPL (Vargas, 2004). South Africa is planning to use a mixed approach, setting up a new, overarching national RPL

institute in addition to using existing institutions. In Germany, universities are responsible for higher education, and Chambers of Crafts, Industry, Commerce and Farming manage VET (Aggarwal, 2015:16). Resource institutions for developing tools and building capacity of RPL providers and professionals are also required. For example, Denmark has established a RPL National Knowledge Centre for the management and dissemination of knowledge about RPL; it plays an important role for the development of quality standards and methods for assessing prior learning (Kippersluis, 2014 as quoted in Aggarwal, 2015:16).

5.   **The capacity of RPL professionals:** In most countries, having an inadequate number of competent RPL professionals acts as a barrier to implementing and scaling up RPL. The system needs professionals to perform key functions including the development of assessment tools; counselling and facilitation; assessment and certification; quality assurance, audit and appeals; and RPL system and processes management. Most shortages are in areas of tools development and the assessment. As a solution, the RPL system should develop and implement training programmes to build professionals' capacity and develop tools, case studies and guides to assist them with carrying out their tasks effectively. Countries should also have a mechanism for accrediting and/or registering assessors.

6.   **Matching occupational and qualification standards:** Assessment under RPL is carried out against standards prescribed for a qualification. Since RPL candidates acquire a significant portion of their learning at the workplace, there needs be a close matching of occupational standards with qualification

standards. This presents difficulties in terms of mismatching since occupational standards, which are decided by labour market, define the standards of performance (competences) individuals must achieve when carrying out functions of an occupation (plumber, driver etc.), while qualification standards, designed by educational institutions, focus on how and what people need to learn as well as how it will be assessed (CEDEFOP, 2009). Qualifications should, thus, be modular and competency based, with clearly defined standards or learning outcomes. The standards for full or modular-type (part) qualifications (against which candidates are assessed) should closely match the occupational standards used in the labour market. If the full qualification covers a broad range of skills, the modules may be designed in such a manner to serve three distinct purposes: (i) A module (or a combination thereof) must match the standards of the associated occupation; (ii) There must be horizontal and vertical linkages between modules; and (iii) Overall, the modules should come together to cover the standards of the full qualification. However, designing such qualification system allows workers to see their skills assessed and certified, at least against a module or part qualification and ensures parity with formal education and training. If desired, workers can take additional modules, furthering their knowledge and skills, spending less time and money, and thus fulfilling the objective of lifelong learning. This methodology has the potential to strengthen countries' NQFs. India had designed a new competency based training system called Modular Employable Skills, which has the aforementioned features. Tanzania is also restructuring its qualifications along these lines (Aggarwal,

2015: 18). Assessing and certifying skills of individuals against part qualifications is gaining momentum, and countries including Mauritius, Australia and Tanzania now offer RPL for part qualifications as well.

7.   Assessment methodologies: A tried and tested assessment methodology is a critical factor in the successful implementation of any RPL system. Credibility and confidence in an RPL system, to a great extent, depends on the use of quality assured means of assessment. Ideally, to ensure parity of qualifications, the same assessment tools and methodologies should be used for formal as well as non-formal and informal learning, but the differences in learning contexts and learners' characteristics makes this difficult. While quality assurance in a formal system is carried out at all stages (input, the learning process and outcome), the RPL system cannot do this for the first two stages as the system has no control over them. To resolve this, a much more rigorous assessment methodology is used to ensure that only competent candidates are awarded certificates. However, this results in a complex, time-consuming methodology that acts as a barrier for accessing RPL. The most widely used approach for RPL, namely the portfolio method, could be very demanding in relation to collecting evidence and completing documentation, particularly for individuals in the informal sector or those having a limited formal education. Some candidates may lack the necessary writing skills for written examinations. In essence, the portfolio method presents the most challenges to RPL, especially in developing countries with large informal economy, as producing creditable evidence and testimonials is difficult. Recognizing this, countries are adopting various means to ensure a fair

assessment of knowledge and competency of persons without making the process too complex. These revised methods include:

- **Combining the portfolio method with a trade test.** Portfolio and other criteria are used to screen potential candidates undergoing a trade test or examination, thus reducing reliance exclusively on portfolio method. For example, VETA in Tanzania and NAMB in South Africa use this method for RPL for artisans. In Mauritius, a portfolio and a panel interview method is used, but stakeholders while reviewing the implementation of RPL recommended supplementing the existing methods with a practical trade test (Aggarwal, 2015: 20).

- **The trade test method**. India, where 90% of the workforce is in the informal economy, uses the trade test method for RPL (DGET, 2014). The assessment is, however, done by independent bodies, preferably with the involvement of the industry concerned.

- **Developing and disseminating case studies and tools used in successful RPL programmes for the benefit of other assessors.** Australia has developed resources that help to streamline and simplify RPL processes as well as minimize the cost to applicants. These resources have been tested and can be used by RPL providers, enterprises and the candidates for the followings sectors: automotive; communications, IT, print and graphic arts; community services and health; construction; manufacturing, engineering and related services; utilities and electro-technology (Aggarwal, 2015: 21). In Colombia, the National Training Service

(SENA) has developed test banks (a set of questions) for RPL assessors to use during assessment (Vargas, 2004). In South Africa, three sub-frameworks of NQF – the General and Further Education and Training sub-framework, the Higher Education sub-framework and the Occupational Qualifications sub-framework guide RPL implementation.

- **Some countries are concentrating on making the portfolio method more user-friendly**, using ICT for e-RPL or e-portfolio and providing extensive support to candidates. The approach to assessment is also being transformed, with assessors facilitating and guiding applicants during the process, and using a combination of methods. For example: Deloitte Consulting used an innovative methodology 'e-portfolio' (e-RPL) as an alternative to a hard copy portfolio to certify skills of workers with low levels of education in South Africa's grain silo industry. European guidelines on RPL recommend organizing group sessions for candidates for preparing portfolios, often a major challenge for individual candidates. These group sessions can be complimented with individual tutorials (CEDEFOP, 2009).

- While it is important to ensure that candidates are at the centre of the process (UNESCO, 2012), this should not be at the expense of quality. So, there is still an ongoing need to continue development of innovative assessment methods for RPL that: (i) Are less time-consuming, more cost-effective and simple but credible; (ii) Take into account the context in which each candidate's learning has been acquired and their individual characteristics.

8.   Costs and funding: Obtaining qualifications through RPL is economical compared to the costs of formal education and training. Even so, it is much more expensive than the assessment and certification of formal training, which has not only the economies of scale but the marginal cost also reduces significantly as more students enrol. This is not the case with RPL, where intensive, personalized counselling and assessment is required. In some countries, for example Mauritius and Tanzania, a panel of assessors examines a candidate and may also conducts a site visit to observe the candidate at work as in the Seychelles. Such requirements increase the cost of assessment. Initial investment may also be needed in setting up the system, developing tools and building capacity. Thus, the cost of RPL depends on the methodology a country adopts, the level and type of qualification and the extent of the support needed by candidates. It also depends on the availability of pre-existing competency standards and assessment tools in the country, and what, if any, institutions are responsible for RPL. The costs will be lower if existing institutions share the responsibility of RPL. Most countries do follow this approach, but some have underestimated the cost implications and the complexity, and thus faced constraints in implementing and expanding RPL. Countries should have clear guidelines on cost-sharing of RPL between government, employers and candidates to ensure its sustainability and the upscaling (Aggarwal, 2015: 23). The cost of RPL for a candidate may include registration fees, assessment fees, transport and preparing the portfolio. Opinion also exists that if candidates are asked to bear a higher proportion of the cost, it may act as disincentive,

especially as the implementation of RPL in many countries is in still in preliminary stages and its benefits have yet to be well known. In addition, candidates already have to bear opportunity costs as many of them might be employed and thus may put off RPL if they have to bear most of the cost. Employers may feel similarly reluctant, unless RPL is linked to the company's human resource management strategy. Initially, then, costs need to be subsidized by government, as is the case for education and formal training systems. Such subsidies may vary from target group to target group, i.e. whether RPL is being delivered to those working in the formal or the informal economy, the employed or unemployed, the nature of qualification (elementary or higher education, TVET and/or the country policy). However, employers could bear the opportunity cost, for example, by giving paid leave, and also cost of skill gaps training and of collecting evidence. It is important to mention that during the Focus Group Discussions as well in the questionnaires, there were candidates who mentioned that they would have done this RPL training under the PMKVY even if they were not paid any stipend. Besides, there were others too who went ahead to say that they would even pay for undergoing this process. As such, the importance of the RPL process truly lies in what the benefits do the candidates see in it for themselves. So, were this RPL certification to translate into tangible benefits in terms of better job or salary or even intangible benefits of gaining from the training or in self-esteem, the candidates, at least certainly need not be paid for doing this training. Those funds could instead be used for improving the RPL process and making it more robust.

Many countries have education or skills development levies, a part of which could be assigned to RPL. In many African countries, government/public training institutions bear the cost of RPL (Aggarwal, 2015;24). This is true for Botswana, Mauritius, Namibia, and Tanzania. In South Africa, while skills development levy for meeting RPL costs exists, in some cases employers also share the cost. India has started an RPL programme for construction workers, who largely work in the informal economy, with State Construction Welfare Boards paying the assessment fees (US$165 per person) and skills gap training fees, and providing a wage allowance (US$0.60 per hour, per person) to offset wages lost during training (DGET, 2014). In all these examples, no direct cost was charged to the candidates.

To promote the use of RPL, governments may grant tax incentives to employers and individuals. The Netherlands, for example, provides tax benefits to RPL customers (individuals and employers) for performing RPL (Kippersluis, 2014). Since funding is a critical issue for sustainability of RPL, the governments should ensure a policy environment that ensures sustainable and equitable funding for RPL. Fees for the delivery and administration of assessment and RPL services, should not create barriers for candidates. The development of services and programmes is an investment in the LLL approach across all levels and sectors of education and training in South Africa (SAQA, 2004:16). As a corollary, cost recovery should not be the basis for the fees candidates are required to pay. Harris (2000: 132) suggests that the calculation of cost for RPL services should always be offset by the "social cost of not valuing prior learning".

RPL funding and cost-sharing examples from countries around the world reflected through an OECD study on RPL practices of 22 countries noted use of different cost-sharing methods for RPL. Candidates usually cover a small portion of the cost through registration/entrance fees, although this is not a prerequisite for all countries. Examples of costs and who covers them are given below:

- **Ireland** – The institution covers the fees.

- **Slovenia** – The public employment service bears registration fees of the unemployed.

- **Czech Republic** – The registration fees varies from EUR 30 to EUR 70.

- **Norway** – EUR 120-300 in the academic field, EUR 300 for vocational sector and EUR 1,800 for a vocational examination. For tertiary education, all costs are covered by the university budget.

- **Canada** – Assessment fees are borne by institutions; other costs (for counselling and information) are divided between institutions and learners.

- **Belgium** – Registration fees are EUR 25 for the unemployed and EUR 100 for employed. Funding also comes from the European Social Fund (ESF).

- **The Netherlands** – Costs are shared between employers and the funds for education and development or the local authorities.

- **Switzerland** – Canton of Geneva spends an average of EUR 2,200-3,400 per candidate.

- **Austria, Australia, Chile and Denmark** are among those countries that offer tax relief in this area, with the result that funding is indirectly based on the state budget. (Aggarwal, 2015: 24).

- **Denmark** has the **taximeter system** for funding RPL where the RNFIL is financially supported by the Ministry of Education. The funding links one-off funding to institutions according to the number of RVA candidates completing competence assessments, personal study plans, training plans within specific institutions and courses of adult education and training. Allowance schemes for 'lost' earnings during participation in education and training are based on a co-financed system through public and private sources. Private sources include funding by companies through a national fund set up by the social partners and through collective agreements (Source: Andersen and Aagaard, 2013 as quoted in Aggarwal, 2015:23).

9.   **Upgrading skills:** In view of the skills gap between learning acquired on the job and qualification standards, most individuals require some form of additional knowledge and skills to pass RPL assessment and acquire qualifications. For candidates, this means upgrading their existing skills or acquiring new types of skills, or both, to meet prescribed standards. This presents a key challenge to RPL candidates, as education and training systems lack sufficient flexibility to deliver customized programmes to meet their training needs. In addition, the capacity of education institutions in developing countries is already stretched and generally unable to admit and provide education to all students seeking admission to formal, full-time education. Accordingly, they are not very keen to develop and deliver such customized short-term programmes. So, the RPL system should promote skills upgrading opportunities for candidates that can be delivered with flexibility. Bottlenecks in training infrastructure can be overcome if

training institutes offer RPL programmes at weekends and in the evenings, thereby optimizing the use of the existing infrastructure, which would reduce the cost of training. This type of arrangement would (and does) help the employed RPL candidates as well as the training institutes. India launching a massive programme – the Skills Development Initiative (SDI) – comprising short-term training programmes based on this training delivery principle. Between 2007 and 2012, it has trained more than one million individuals using this specific strategy approach (Aggarwal, 2015:25-26).

The skills gap training across different practices followed in countries shows that in Latin American countries, RPL goes beyond testing an individual's current competency. RPL helps with developing their existing skills in order for them to obtain the qualification sought. In Brazil, SENAI's national training services facilitates the preparation of training plans, while in Colombia, SENA provides complimentary courses to those who were unable to pass the tests due to a skills gap (Vargas, 2004). The Vocational Educational and Training Authority (VETA) in Tanzania is mandated to organize/facilitate short-term programmes for unsuccessful candidates to undergo skills upgrading, whether in-institution or workplace-based, as well as bridging courses for successful candidates aspiring to acquire further qualifications (VETA, 2014).

10.   Quality assurance: Having a traditional mind set, some education providers and assessment bodies have little faith in an assessment-only approach for awarding qualifications. European guidelines for the RNFIL likewise observe that there is a high level of trust in formal learning and hostility towards non-traditional

qualifications (CEDEFOP, 2009). Such bias can be overcome, to a great extent, by emphasizing the stringent adherence to quality in the RPL process; creating awareness among stakeholders about its high quality processes; ensuring stakeholders' participation in the RPL process; and collecting and disseminating evidence about its impact, especially success stories of persons who have benefited from RPL. Quality assurance mechanisms should be comprehensive, covering issues such as using competency standards for assessment; ensuring the availability of competent RPL practitioners; collaborating with employers' and workers' organizations, and other relevant stakeholders; developing assessment tools and methodology as references for practitioners; accrediting RPL centres; moderating assessments; developing monitoring and evaluation frameworks; conducting independent auditing of the RPL process as a whole; and disseminating results of evaluation and audit to all stakeholders. In Portugal, for example, providers have to follow a Quality Charter, the Netherlands has developed a quality code for providers, and Tanzania has prescribed a comprehensive framework for quality assurance (Aggarwal, 2015:27).

11. Monitoring and Evaluation: This is important for tracking the implementation, outcomes and impacts of RPL programmes, and being able to take corrective measures for improving performance thereafter. Information about RPL outcomes and impacts can also contribute to enhancing the image of RPL, ensuring the effective participation of all stakeholders and thus the potential allocation of more resources by governments and employers. This system should produce information like whether the worker was employed in the informal or

formal sector, about the number of candidates who enrolled, dropped-out, appeared in the assessment and passed the RPL; about candidates' views about RPL processes such as facilitation and counselling, the assessment methodology, and the provision and effectiveness of skills gap training; views of successful candidates about career progression, improvements in performance, self-esteem, and remunerations and ease of access to further education; employers' views as to improvements in performance at work; those stakeholders who are interested or disinterested in RPL and why. Portugal has designed an administrative management and information system for monitoring RPL – RVCC, which stands for recognition, validation and certification of competences – is used by all providers. India has developed an online portal to track the progress of a candidate from enrolment to certification and is further improving the system by adding a module on the status of candidates after certification; each provider will have to track and enter employment status of candidates on the portal (Aggarwal, 2015: 28).

12. Knowledge management and sharing: Since RPL is, in most countries, in the development phase or the early stage of implementation, each need to learn from the others' experiences and share effective tools and practices. The focus of collaboration should be on developing tools, building capacity, benchmarking and sharing those practices that did or didn't work. Examples of regional bodies and international organizations that have carried out studies on country practices on RPL include OECD, CEDEFOP, ILO, and UNESCO (Aggarwal, 2015: 28).

Apart from the above 12 key barriers, in Denmark, research showed that the main barriers to spread of RPL were lack of public awareness of RPL and financial barriers relating to conducting RPL, besides inside and outside the institutions barriers together with assessors having the know-how about non formal learning areas and innovations taking place in companies since a lot of adult skills and competences are acquired directly in practice (Andersen and Laugesen, 2012 and Moss, 2011 as quoted in Andersen, 2016).

11.0 Conclusion

Thus, it is seen that most countries have initiated steps in establishing an RPL system, but often face challenges when it comes to its implementation and scaling up. The key challenges for RPL include complex, time-consuming methodology, particularly for people working in the informal sector or with a low level of education; institutions and staff having inadequate capacity to plan and implement; the mismatch between occupational and qualification standards; limited awareness of the benefits of RPL; low participation of social partners and thus, its acceptability by employers and higher education institutions; insufficient provision for upgrading knowledge and skills of RPL candidates to meet accepted standards; and inadequate funding.

Promoting good, thorough and fair RPL is not just a matter of good intentions and access to new knowledge, but indeed also a question of whether the legal framework and conditions and incentives support good RPL practice (Andersen, 2016). The prerequisites for establishing an RPL system include the

development of competency standards, qualifications and assessment tools; the accreditation of RPL providers and assessors; the development of monitoring and evaluation systems, including management information system; and the capacity building of institutions and staff. It is critical that RPL is seen to be a process which not only values different forms of learning and gives formal recognition regardless of how the learning was achieved, but also passes the test of intellectual scrutiny in terms of the integrity and the validity of the process and becomes integral to education and training practice, particularly in the ways we assess (Heyns, 2004:2 as quoted in SAQA, 2004:78).

While one can take ideas from the implementation practices in existence in different countries, but as the SAQA Report states, and on the lines of the chosen theoretical framework of Michael Sadler for this study, the idea that 'one size fits all' does not apply. Situations and contexts vary from country to country and within a country in different sectors and qualifications. In fact, a guiding principle of RPL in Australia is that - 'There is no one RPL model that is suitable for all qualifications and all situations; in particular, different sectors give rise to different models'. **For RPL to be locally effective, there must be policy learning and not policy borrowing. Indian policy makers ought to keep this factor in focus while strengthening the implementation of the current RPL process.**