

**Ambuja  
FOUNDATION**

**SEDI**

SKILL &  
ENTREPRENEURSHIP  
DEVELOPMENT  
INSTITUTE



# SEDI's Growth Story

**Empowering Youth for Livelihood through  
Skill & Entrepreneurship Development Institutes (SEDI)**

## Introduction

### The Skilling Ecosystem in India

In the mid-2000s, India's demographic story was often described as an opportunity waiting to be realized. With a population that has crossed 1.4 billion, nearly two-thirds of whom are within the working-age group, the country holds the promise of a demographic dividend that few other nations in the world possess. Yet this promise also carries a risk of becoming a liability if its youth remain unskilled and underemployed. Each year, more than fifteen million young people enter the workforce, most of them from rural areas where livelihoods continue to depend heavily on small-scale, rain-fed agriculture and informal wage labour. For a significant proportion of these youth, higher education has not translated into employability, and the absence of local opportunities has led to large-scale migration in search of work, often to precarious, low-wage jobs in urban centres. The result is a paradox of simultaneous labour surplus and skill scarcity, an economy hungry for trained workers and a young population unable to access or afford the training that could connect them to dignified, stable livelihoods. Recognising both the opportunity and the challenge inherent in this situation, India began building comprehensive national skilling architecture over the last two decades. The establishment of the **National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC)** in 2009 and the launch of the **Skill India Mission** in 2015 signalled a commitment to mainstream vocational education and training. The creation of the **Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE)** brought further coherence to a previously fragmented ecosystem by bringing multiple government and private training initiatives under a common vision. Complementing these state-led efforts, the **Companies Act (2013)** mandated that eligible corporates invest at least two percent of their net profits in corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, providing an unprecedented impetus for private participation in national development priorities. Skill development emerged as one of the most widely supported CSR themes, supporting the country's industrial aspirations with the developmental need to make its youth employable. This convergence between government policy, corporate investment, and social purpose forms the backbone of India's current skill development ecosystem.

Yet, despite this policy momentum and institutional focus, multiple structural challenges continue to limit the effectiveness of skill-building efforts across the country. Training opportunities remain disproportionately concentrated in urban and peri-urban areas, leaving vast rural regions underserved. Course content and delivery often lag behind evolving market demands, especially in emerging sectors such as green energy, digital services, logistics, and healthcare. Quality assurance mechanisms are uneven, and the shortage of qualified trainers in rural areas constrains both scale and depth. Many programs prioritise enrolment numbers over placement outcomes, and few provide sustained post-placement support to help trainees adapt to the realities of the workplace. Equally significant are the social barriers that prevent large segments of the rural population, particularly women and first-generation learners, from accessing skilling programs. Cultural norms around safety, mobility, and gender roles often restrict participation, while financial constraints deter families from sending their children, especially daughters, to distant towns for training. The combined effect of these factors is a continued mismatch between education, training, and employment that leaves millions of young Indians underutilised and disheartened.

CSR-led collaborations has been crucial as a crucial bridge in this backdrop. Beyond financial support, CSR-led collaborations have introduced innovation, quality benchmarks, and accountability mechanisms that complement government schemes. They have also enabled the creation of training ecosystems in areas that were previously considered too remote or unviable. The involvement of private partners has helped integrate industry expectations directly into course design, ensuring that trainees graduate with skills relevant to the market. However, the effectiveness of CSR-driven initiatives ultimately depends on credible implementation partners, organisations with the field experience, institutional capacity, and community trust to translate resources into tangible outcomes. The need today is not merely for more training centres, but for models that combine technical rigour with inclusiveness, that balance efficiency with empathy, and that are able to convert training into employment and employment into empowerment.

### ***Skill and Entrepreneurship Development Institutes (SEDI)***

Even before national initiatives on skill development gained momentum, Ambuja Foundation based on the felt need of the community had designed and operationalized a comprehensive model to address rural employability. Recognizing that sustainable rural development required concurrent investments in employability and enterprise, the Foundation identified livelihood security for rural youth as a critical gap. Thus, in 2006, long before CSR contributions to skill-building became mainstream, the foundation launched the first **Skill and Entrepreneurship Development Institutes (SEDI)** in Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh - an initiative that combined technical skill training with counselling, soft skills, and placement linkages to bridge the gap between aspiration and opportunity.

Over the years, as India's skill-development landscape expanded through the combined efforts of government and industry, SEDI evolved as one of the earliest examples of how a foundation could serve as both an innovator and an implementation partner for CSR in the national skilling mission. With sustained community engagement, emphasis on soft skilling the youth, rigorous monitoring, and adaptable training models, skill development could deliver not only employability but also dignity and confidence to first-generation workers. As India looks ahead to the next decade - defined by rapid technological change, the rise of green and digital economies, and the continued need for inclusive growth - the lessons from SEDI's experience remain instructive. When public intent, private investment, and community participation align, skilling becomes the foundation for employment as well as social transformation.

### **The Evolution of SEDI**

The genesis of the Skill and Entrepreneurship Development Institute (SEDI) lies in the Ambuja Foundation's long-standing engagement with rural India, where they observed that agriculture, which had once been the mainstay of household incomes, was no longer able to absorb growing labour; landholdings were fragmenting, and rain-fed cultivation left families vulnerable to climate fluctuations. In such settings, young men and women, often the first in their families to complete schooling, found themselves caught between aspiration and constraint, lacking both the skills and the opportunities to move towards gainful employment.

The first two SEDI centres were established in partnership with lead banks. Prior to launch, Ambuja Foundation conducted a detailed survey to assess local youth aspirations and align training programs with the skill requirements of nearby industries. These initial pilots were modest in scale, training just a few hundred youth in locally relevant trades such as two-wheeler repair, tailoring, and computer operations. However, they laid the foundation for a model that would later prove both replicable and sustainable. The early years were dedicated less to numerical expansion and more to refining the model: ensuring that training was closely aligned with market demand, that course content integrated both technical and soft skills, and that each trainee's journey, from mobilisation to placement, was tracked and supported through structured follow-up. This focus on quality over scale allowed SEDI to develop a tested operational framework that could be expanded without compromising standards.

By the time the **Companies Act of 2013** came into effect, mandating corporate investments in social responsibility including skill development, Ambuja Foundation already had a tested and credible model ready for collaboration. When the **Skill India Mission** was launched soon after, calling for large-scale vocational training across the country, SEDI's approach was already aligned with national priorities. This fortuitous convergence of policy direction and field experience enabled SEDI to scale up swiftly and confidently. What had started as two centres under Ambuja's direct management evolved into a network of centres established and operated through diverse CSR partnerships. Currently, there are over 53 centres across India, collectively training more than 22,000 youth annually. A single centre, such as Jaitaran, has the capacity to train over 1,200 young people each year. Across the network, tens of thousands have secured employment or launched small enterprises, with placement rates ranging between 70 and 80 percent in many centres. Supported by over twenty-eight funding partners, Ambuja Foundation serves as the knowledge and implementation backbone.

The evolution of SEDI has also been marked by the development of a wide spectrum of **partnership models** – financial, infrastructure, knowledge, and certification partnerships – each designed to leverage the strengths of collaborators while maintaining consistency in quality and outcomes. This diversification of partnerships has enabled SEDI to retain its essential character while expanding its reach.

Guided by a customised **Standard Operating Procedure** for establishing and managing centres SEDI teams follow a defined sequence - from needs assessment, community mobilization, and team recruitment to course initiation and placement linkage. Over the years, a three-tier monitoring structure was developed to ensure that expansion did not compromise quality standards:

- The Mobilization Strengthening Team focuses on reaching out to communities, building awareness, and ensuring that youth enrolment reflects local diversity.
- The Training Quality Enhancement & Monitoring team continually updates curriculum and teaching methods based on employer feedback and emerging industry trends.
- Finally, the Placement Preparedness Team works closely with both trainees and employers to align expectations, provide soft-skills training, and track post-placement outcomes. This ensures that any new centre becomes operational within a predictable timeframe.



Additionally, internal and external impact assessments are conducted twice a year to evaluate trainee performance and trainer effectiveness. Alumni tracking for up to two years post-placement ensure early identification of dropouts and facilitate replacement or re-skilling where necessary. These mechanisms guarantee that any new SEDI, regardless of its geography or partner configuration, can become operational within a predictable timeframe and deliver measurable outcomes.

The period following 2013 saw not only quantitative growth but also qualitative consolidation where SEDI's role expanded from that of a direct implementer to a strategic enabler and mentor, helping CSR partners design, operate, and sustain their own skilling efforts. The diversity of partnerships also brought innovation; new trades were introduced in line with local market dynamics, such as fire safety in industrial belts, and retail management and healthcare-related courses in semi-urban clusters. Through its close integration with industry, SEDI ensured that curricula remained demand-led rather than supply-driven, constantly updated in response to employer feedback and emerging economic trends.

Over time, SEDI's journey came to reflect the evolution of India's own skilling narrative, from small, localised initiatives to a coordinated national effort grounded in collaboration and scale. Ambuja Foundation's early commitment to building a robust ecosystem before pursuing expansion allowed SEDI to enter this new phase with credibility and preparedness. When the Skill India campaign called upon corporates to engage in skilling as a shared national responsibility, SEDI was already demonstrating how such partnerships could function effectively, anchored in community trust, guided by industry relevance, and reinforced by rigorous monitoring.

Today, the SEDI network stands as a living example of how foresight and field experience can align with national policy to produce sustainable models of rural transformation. Its trajectory, from experimental beginnings in 2006 to a nationwide movement supported by diverse partners, emphasizes SEDI's belief that skilling is not a peripheral activity but central to the idea of inclusive growth. The Ambuja-led SEDI model has shown that when quality systems, institutional discipline, and social purpose come together, they can generate pathways that

connect India's most underprivileged youth to the country's evolving economy, turning a potential demographic challenge into a collective national advantage.

## Unique Features of the SEDI Model

Over two decades of practice, the Skill and Entrepreneurship Development Institute (SEDI) has evolved into a distinctive and replicable model for rural skill development, one that combines technical rigour, social inclusion, and institutional discipline within a framework of community trust. What differentiates SEDI from the multitude of skilling initiatives across India is not merely its reach or its placement record, but the way it has embedded quality, empathy, and adaptability at every level of design and execution. Built on the twin foundations of *industry relevance* and *human development*, the SEDI model ensures that young people from the most remote and marginalised geographies are able to access training, employment, and entrepreneurship opportunities that would otherwise remain far beyond their reach.

Two guiding principles consistently shape how SEDI is run. One is keeping the model inclusive. SEDI actively recruits women, differently-abled youth, and those from marginalized communities. The other principle aspect of the SEDI model is its affordability and accessibility. Fees are deliberately kept low - typically between Rs 1,000 and Rs 2,000 for an entire course, including uniforms, toolkits, and certification. Comparable private institutes often charge 20 to 30 times more, putting training out of reach for most rural families. This pricing model reflects Ambuja Foundation's belief that skill development should be a public good, not a privilege. For many families, the affordability of SEDI has been the deciding factor in allowing children, especially daughters, to participate.

From the outset, SEDI's expansion strategy has deliberately prioritised presence in **rural and remote locations**, particularly those where access to formal vocational education remains minimal or disadvantaged/marginalised groups face systemic exclusion. Many centres are



Hospitality class at SEDI Nagaur, Rajasthan

located in blocks or small towns that had no prior training infrastructure, often becoming the single institutional gateway for youth seeking employable skills. Through skill training, they gain not only employability but also a sense of belonging and recognition. Establishing institutes close to communities also builds trust among parents and guardians, who are often hesitant to allow their children, especially daughters, to travel to distant towns. Many families had never considered skill training, viewing it as inferior to formal education. Mobilization teams go door-to-door, holding meetings with families to explain the benefits of skill training and address their concerns around migration, safety, and cultural adaptation. Parents were invited to visit the centres, meet trainers, and see the facilities for themselves. By demonstrating a safe and supportive environment, SEDI slowly began to change these norms, often serving as the first formal learning environment encountered by many first-generation learners across rural and marginalised backgrounds.

This was particularly important for enrolling young women since in many villages they were not allowed to travel alone, let alone work outside the home. The institute has developed innovative mechanisms to promote **gender inclusion**, such as engaging local champions and alumni families to demystify stereotypes around women entering non-traditional trades. Group placements that facilitate collective entry and mutual support to navigate new environment at workplace, low fees that include uniforms and protective gear, and a predictable timetable help reduce the frictions that often push women out of training. Gender stereotypes are challenged through training women in traditionally male-dominated fields like automotive repair and electrical work, and their financial success has had a visible demonstration effect, encouraging more families to support their daughters' aspirations.



*Woman Trainee explores the CNC machine at SEDI Chandrapur, Maharashtra*

Equally central to the SEDI model is its emphasis on **modern, well-equipped training infrastructure** that mirrors industry standards. Each centre houses trade-specific laboratories, tools, and teaching aids developed in collaboration with industry partners. Whether it is the electrical labs designed with Schneider Electric, the retail and computer training facilities established with support from Godrej and Tally, or healthcare and hospitality set-ups designed to simulate real workplace conditions, the objective remains consistent i.e. to ensure that trainees are certified and job-ready in every practical sense. Continuous feedback from employers is used to refine course content, introduce new modules, and retire outdated ones. Plus, continuous capacity-building workshops ensure that trainers remain updated on industry trends and pedagogical, creating a dynamic loop between classroom learning and workplace expectations. This strong interface between training and industry distinguishes SEDI from many government and private institutes that struggle to keep pace with market realities.

What sets SEDI apart from most skilling centres in India is its consistent focus on “workplace readiness,” by integrating **soft skills and personality development** into all technical courses. Every course pairs hands-on training with embedded modules on communication, grooming, teamwork, time management, and financial literacy. Morning assemblies requiring reading newspapers aloud and speaking in front of peers, conducting role-plays, group discussions, mock interviews and presentations - are all used as experiential platforms for confidence building. Alumni consistently note that even within two to three months of training, they who once avoided eye contact or hesitated to speak in groups started feeling self-assured with clarity in expression. These behavioural transformations, though less tangible than technical proficiency, are among the most valued outcomes cited by placement partners across industries, who note that while they can train recruits on technical systems, they prefer candidates who are already groomed, disciplined, and communicative. They describe SEDI as a “preferred partner” precisely because trainees arrive with communication skills, discipline, and professional etiquette that other institutes rarely instil.

SEDI’s growing emphasis on **entrepreneurship promotion** reflects its evolving understanding that employment alone is not enough to secure sustainable livelihoods. Many graduates, particularly those from trades such as tailoring, electrical repair, mobile servicing, and beauty therapy, aspire to start their own ventures within their communities. To support this, SEDI integrates entrepreneurship modules into its training, covering business planning, financial literacy, and access to credit. In some centres, dedicated entrepreneurship cells identify and mentor potential business owners, link them to funding institutions, and help them navigate bank and paperwork requirements. Family participation is deliberately integrated into this process: parents are informed of expected earnings and business cycles, which promotes trust and reduces familial friction during the uncertain initial months. By doing so, SEDI has created a predictable, supportive ecosystem that enables trained youth to translate their skills into viable, self-sustaining enterprises, reducing distress migration.

**Post-placement retention**, a major challenge in most skilling programs, is another area where SEDI’s model demonstrates foresight and commitment. Recognising that the transition from training to employment is often the most vulnerable stage for rural youth, particularly those placed away from home, SEDI and its partners have developed structured support mechanisms to enhance continuity and stability. These include the creation of temporary accommodation facilities or “transit hostels” in placement clusters, group placements that allow trainees from

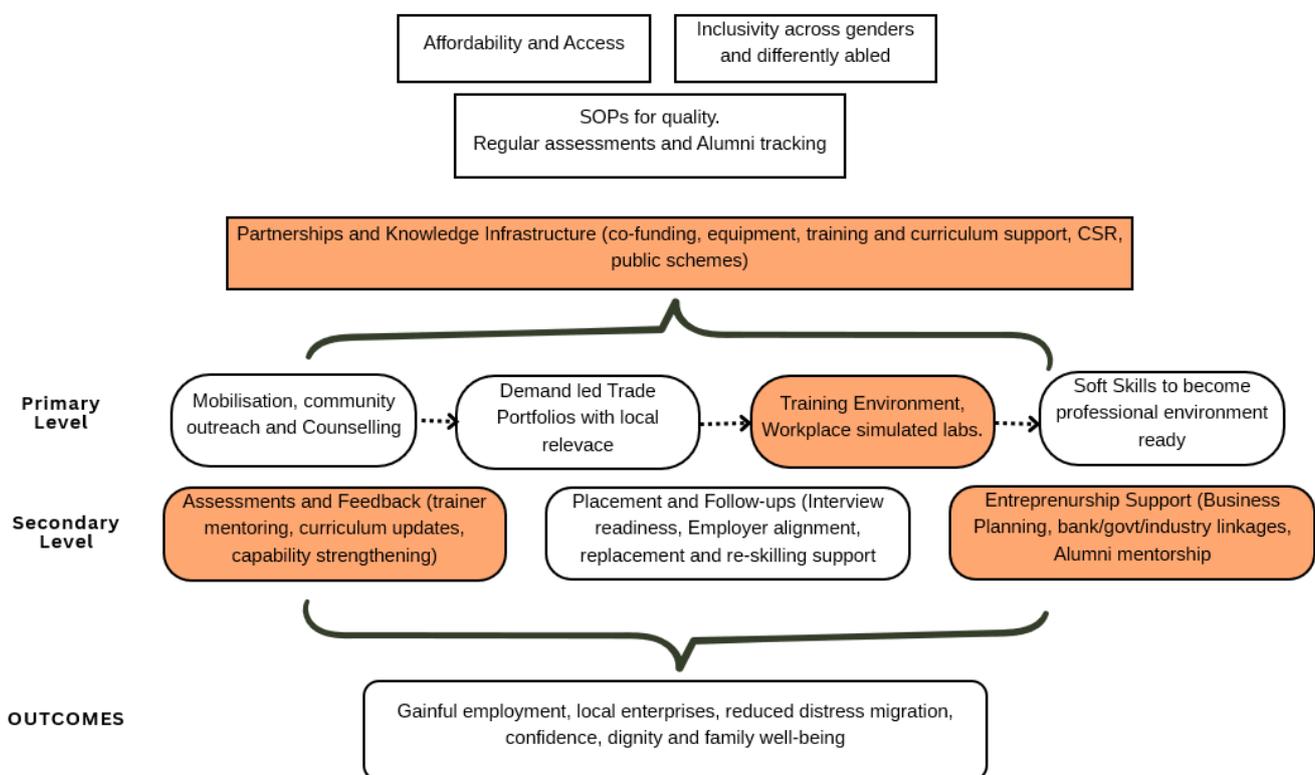
the same centre to support each other in new environments, and a follow-up system that tracks alumni for up to two years after placement, facilitating replacement placements if needed. Dedicated team maintains contact with employers to monitor performance, troubleshoot emerging challenges and help them find better opportunities as they grow. Alumni chapters and peer networks further strengthen this post-placement ecosystem, for eg: Trainers invite recent entrepreneurs back to share what worked and what didn't and trainees say that hearing a peer explain how they navigated a lease, negotiated with a supplier, or survived a slow quarter is more useful than general advice.



Physically Challenged Trainee starts his business in Electricals in Hardiwar, Uttarakhand

The model also stands out for its **specialised manpower structure**, which assigns clear roles and responsibilities within each SEDI centre. Dedicated *mobilisers* engage with communities to identify and counsel prospective trainees; *counsellors* support them through personal and emotional challenges; *trade-specific trainers* deliver technical instruction; and *soft-skill trainers* focus on grooming and workplace readiness. This distribution of functions ensures that every aspect of a trainee's journey, from enrolment to post-placement support is systematically managed. Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) govern all workflows, covering mobilisation campaigns, training schedules, assessment protocols, and placement processes. Continuous capacity-building of the team is also institutionalised, with senior principals and domain experts mentoring new trainers and administrators through structured orientation programs. This internal ecosystem of mentorship and standardisation has created a consistent culture of quality.

Finally, underlying all of these processes is a **comprehensive monitoring and quality assurance system** that combines decentralised decision-making with central oversight. Each SEDI is empowered to adapt courses based on local demand, while maintaining adherence to standard frameworks for reporting, assessments, and audits. Periodic internal reviews and partner evaluations ensure accountability for both performance and impact, and a centre’s reliability is legible to communities because development and funding partners make it possible to maintain quality at scale.



In essence, the SEDI model represents a **comprehensive and human-centred approach** to skill development, one that acknowledges the complexity of rural youth aspirations and addresses them through a blend of technical excellence, personal growth, and institutional care, all made possible by partners who also believe in the mission. By integrating proximity to communities, quality infrastructure, continuous industry engagement, social inclusion, and rigorous follow-up, SEDI has become an enduring ecosystem that nurtures capable, confident, and resilient citizens ready to participate in India’s growth story.

## The Way Forward

The national conversation on skilling has expanded far beyond employability - it now encompasses the future of work itself. Rapid technological change, the growth of the green economy, and the reconfiguration of industries through automation, digitalisation, and artificial intelligence are transforming the nature of jobs across sectors. For institutions such as SEDI, these shifts bring both challenge and opportunity. The task ahead is not only to equip youth with contemporary skills, but to cultivate the adaptability and confidence to thrive in a labour market that is in constant flux.

Guided by this vision, Ambuja Foundation has articulated a **five-year strategy** that defines SEDI's future direction. The plan sets out a clear vision statement, identifies new target groups, specifies emerging courses to be introduced, and outlines the scaling of SEDI centres through collaborations with like-minded partners. The focus will remain on expanding access to rural and semi-urban youth while deepening quality, ensuring that every new SEDI upholds the same standards of training, placement, and monitoring that have made the model credible over the years.

A key strategic priority for the coming years is to **align training with emerging technologies and sectors**. SEDI plans to establish advanced labs with updated equipment, with a redesigned curriculum. This requires significant capital investment, which cannot be sustained by operational budgets alone. Funders have a critical role to play in this area by supporting infrastructure development that will enable SEDI to deliver cutting-edge training that keeps pace with industry demands. Without such investment, rural youth risk being left behind in the digital and green economies.

Women's empowerment will remain a cornerstone of SEDI's future strategy. While female enrolment has increased dramatically, there are still deep-rooted barriers to overcome. In many conservative regions, families remain hesitant to allow daughters to travel or work outside the home. Dedicated efforts are needed to expand women's participation and retention, including safe transportation, women-only batches, and targeted outreach to parents.

Another area of attention is the **declining interest among youth in blue-collar trades**, a trend noted by SEDI management across centres. While white-collar service roles are perceived as more aspirational, skilled blue-collar jobs continue to offer significant long-term earning potential and opportunities for entrepreneurship. SEDI's efforts therefore include renewed advocacy to dignify blue-collar work and highlight viable career progression within these trades. Robust career counselling, awareness campaigns, exposure visits, targeted outreach, and role models who can showcase the dignity and possibilities of skilled work will be used to reshape perceptions around skilled blue-collar jobs.

Simultaneously, SEDI will continue to **promote entrepreneurship and self-employment** as integral outcomes of its skilling mission. Each year, SEDI mentors dozens of young entrepreneurs, but leadership recognizes that this area needs more structured support. Many graduates have the skills and drive to start businesses but lack access to capital, mentorship, and markets. Experience has shown that many trainees, particularly in trades such as tailoring, electrical repair, mobile servicing, and beauty therapy, prefer to start small enterprises within

their communities and rather than seek wage employment in places far from home. The Foundation is therefore strengthening its entrepreneurship development component through structured business counselling, assistance in accessing micro-finance and government schemes, ongoing mentorship, and create stronger peer networks for mutual learning. These hubs will help transform individual success stories into a broader movement of rural enterprises that generate jobs and reduce migration pressures.

The **availability and retention of quality trainers** will remain central to the institution’s agenda. As technologies evolve, so must those who teach them. SEDI plans to strengthen trainer development systems by linking with industry experts, expanding refresher programmes, and enhancing the role of its Training Quality Enhancement and Monitoring (TQEM) unit. This will help ensure that all instructors - whether in long-standing or newly established centres - possess both technical proficiency and pedagogical skill, supported by continuous mentoring from senior team.

Co-ownership is the operating logic behind these arrangements. Ambuja Foundation supplies the implementation backbone - SOPs for center set-up, training quality teams, a placement preparedness unit, and alumni tracking - while partners add capital, sector knowledge, equipment, recruiters, and geographical presence. Ambuja Foundation develops multi-year roadmaps, budgeting, and advanced modules, while “working jointly” even in fully CSR-funded centres to maintain manpower support and uphold the SEDI brand. The model thus accommodates multiple funding arrangements including fully CSR-funded centres, co-funded centres, independent CSR-supported centres.



*Students learn Air condition machine repair as part of Refrigeration and AC repair course at SEDI Dadri, Uttar Pradesh*

The SEDI model has evolved into an effective and scalable framework that accommodates diverse partnership arrangements. Ambuja Foundation provides the implementation backbone, standard operating procedures, quality assurance systems, placement preparedness, and alumni engagement—while partners bring capital, sectoral expertise, technology, and market linkages. This collaborative structure ensures both consistency in delivery and adaptability to local contexts.

The next phase of SEDI’s journey will be driven by strategic partnerships that deepen engagement with employers, funders, and knowledge institutions. With an existing network of CSR and institutional partners and a strong foundation of trust and transparency, the focus will be on co-developing curricula, aligning training with emerging industry needs, and expanding apprenticeship and entrepreneurship pathways.

Looking ahead, SEDI aims to leverage national and international collaborations to unlock the potential of India’s rural and semi-urban youth. By combining Ambuja Foundation’s proven implementation systems with partners’ resources and innovation, these alliances can catalyse large-scale, inclusive growth transforming local aspirations into engines of economic progress.



Women Trainees attend a mason training class at SEDI Bhatapara, Chhattisgarh



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