TRAINING FOR COMMON GOOD LAND USE

Putting training delivery at the heart of land-based social enterprise

A report by SHARED ASSETS
Shared Assets is a think and do tank that supports people managing land for the common good. At Shared Assets we believe that land is a common resource that should deliver shared benefits for everyone. We provide practical advice, support and training to landowners and communities who want to manage land as a sustainable and productive asset. We also undertake research, policy and advocacy work to help create an environment where common good models of land management can flourish.

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Land-based social enterprises often make great trainers. Furthermore, delivering, hosting and otherwise facilitating training can play a big role in their financial sustainability. This briefing expands on this idea, and explores what needs to happen to help more social enterprises develop their training offers.

Introduction

In recent years we’ve worked with dozens of the most successful land-based social enterprises\(^1\). We’ve learned many of the most successful enterprises share some common traits. One of these is an amazing ability to create diverse streams of income and social value. This is a crucial skill, because it is extremely difficult to run financially sustainable land-based enterprises. The diversified income streams vary widely between groups. However, one of the most common one is delivering, hosting, or otherwise facilitating training and education activities.

We think land-based social enterprises are extremely well placed to deliver these activities. Accordingly we think there is a lot of scope for expanding the training they offer, and the income they can generate from it. Over the past year we’ve been speaking about training with a range of experts and practitioners. We also ran a workshop with some land-based groups delivering training and other experts.

This short briefing draws on this research to:

- Argue the case for land-based social enterprises facilitating more training.
- Summarise the kinds of training being offered to show their value and inspire groups thinking of developing their own programmes.
- Identify barriers to developing the capacity of the sector and possible solutions.
- Outline and justify Shared Assets’ plans for encouraging this development.

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\(^1\) By ‘Land Based Social Enterprises’ we mean businesses that use land to pursue a social or environmental mission, whilst also generating income. In practice this briefing should be relevant for any socially-oriented land-based groups even if they do not describe themselves as social enterprises.
Training delivered by land-based social enterprises

What kinds of services do they deliver?

We have seen land-based social enterprises engaged in a wide range of education-related activities. In many cases these activities are able to both generate income and deliver social outcomes. In others, income generation is more difficult since the social outcomes that the activities deliver are not easily compensated in the market.

- **Training other land-based groups.** This can generate income, spread good practice, and build networks. This might be teaching good land management, or any of the other skills needed to run a successful business. For example Cordwainers Grow run ‘Grow a Gardener’, which helps people learn how to setup and manage a community garden.

- **Volunteer training.** Many land-based social enterprises rely on volunteers for some of their work and see training volunteers as a key part of their work and mission. Sometimes this can also generate income, for example corporate volunteering. Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park welcomes over 3000 volunteers a year, including corporate volunteers paying £25/head.

- **Formal or informal apprenticeships and on-the-job learning.** This can occasionally generate some income (e.g. from apprenticeship schemes), but it is normally about developing staff and providing opportunities to young people and new entrants. For example the woodland social enterprise Chiltern Rangers have provided work placements and formal apprenticeships for young people.

- **Supported/ starter projects.** Some programmes aim to help new entrants access land and develop the skills need to run their own projects in a supported environment. FarmStart, delivered by several enterprises, gives new entrants small pieces of land and supports them to grow food for market.

- **Schools and young people.** Some work directly with schools or other organisations to deliver outdoor education for young people. OrganicLea, for example, both visit schools and offer land-based training for young people who have been excluded from school.

- **Other training.** Some enterprises deliver training aimed at the general public or specific groups. This might be on basic land-based skills, or anything else. OrganicLea run public courses on gardening and one off trainings on things as diverse as wind turbines, bee keeping and yoga.

- **Providing a training venue.** Some groups are able to rent out their spaces for other people to use to run courses. Often these groups or activities will share or
contribute towards the social mission of the enterprises. For example, woodland social enterprise **Hill Holt Wood** is a popular training and conference venue.

**Why are land-based social enterprises so well placed for this?**

Land-based social enterprises are naturally well-suited to delivering these types of training for a number of reasons:

- **Skills, experience and networks:** Land-based social entrepreneurs often make popular and knowledgeable trainers. The entrepreneurs have often learned the hard way and so can help identify key learning and shortcuts for others. They can also provide access to networks and markets for new entrants.

- **Training often fits in well with social and environmental missions:** Volunteering or training with a land-based project can act as a gateway to deeper engagement with the environment, community or things like food systems.

- **Ability to deliver a wide range of services:** They can engage at many different levels, from schools to land-based professionals and everything in between. This is especially important as land-based sectors can struggle to bring in new workers.

- **Providing beautiful and inspiring training venues:** Many sites will already have facilities for volunteers or guests that can easily be adapted for training courses. Visiting successful projects can be inspiring to people starting their own journeys.

- **Land-based work is great:** People find it therapeutic and empowering. It’s a hands-on and outdoor alternative to traditional education, which help people who don’t thrive in traditional educational environments.

**Case studies**

**Example 1: OrganicLea - Waltham Forest**

**OrganicLea** is a food growing social enterprise. It offers a wide range of training opportunities, including working with volunteers and school students, apprenticeships, and delivering City and Guilds certified units in horticulture, garden enterprise, and food growing. It also runs one off sessions on things like building wind turbines, and mushroom cultivation. These activities contribute to the food growing business and some generate income. They also help it achieve its vision of a just food system with more people able to grow food.
Example 2: Hill Holt Wood, Lincolnshire

Hill Holt Wood is a woodland social enterprise. It provides education and training to 14-19 year olds, adult education courses in the woodland, and a rolling 12 month internship for architecture graduates. It also offers sessions on woodcarving, storytelling, and nature trails. The site can be rented for conferences and team building sessions. Many of these activities generate income for the enterprise, whilst also contributing to its vision of creating a better environment and reaching out to those in need.

Example 3: Kindling Trust, North-West England

Kindling Trust is a food growing social enterprise. It offers a commercial organic growers course, supports existing growers, and helps new entrants to farming. ‘FarmStart’ involves giving participants a small piece of land and supporting them to grow food for market. ‘The Land Army’ promotes good growing as a career. Kindling also offer team building away days. These activities form an important part of its financial sustainability, whilst also promoting sustainable land use and food sovereignty.

Example 4: The Harington Scheme, North London

The Harington Scheme is a charity that provides gardening, horticulture and landscaping services. They provide skills and vocational training to young people with learning difficulties. Services include vocational training, supported employment, and providing pathways into work. Some of the courses are linked with City and Guilds, and other, qualifications. Training is a core part of what Harrington does. It is both a key pillar of their business model and a way of helping young people live fuller lives and participate more fully in the community.
Barriers to delivering more training

The organisations above give an indication of what is possible, but the land-based social enterprise sector has a lot more to offer in this area. This section discusses some of the main barriers holding it back from delivering more of these services.

Difficulty generating income from training

Land-based social enterprises can struggle to generate enough income from training to make it worthwhile. Work-based training such as apprenticeships can be relatively expensive to administer. The seasonal nature of much land-based work also means the enterprises struggle to pay trainees for more than a portion of the year.

For paid-for courses it can be hard to cover training costs solely through charging participants. This is not surprising given that land-based work is often relatively poorly paid. People doing courses will be reluctant or unable pay for them, when they know a longer term payoff is unlikely. Many potential participants find it hard to pay for training, even when it is subsidised.

Lack of support and funding for training

There is relatively little public funding to support land-based training, despite huge skills shortages and a lack of new entrants to the sector. Where it is available, it often comes with restrictions. For example a significant portion of the funding is aimed at people aged 16-24, excluding many of those who would like to enter land-based work.

The demands of delivering training

Delivering training is not easy. Not all practitioners will make good trainers, and training is in itself an expertise that needs to be developed. This is hard to do whilst also managing the land. Even for skilled and experienced trainers, training can be difficult, especially if it involves working with young people or vulnerable groups. Thus training delivery may be inappropriate for some enterprises, and limited for others. It is also crucial that training does not detract from the other operations of the enterprises, and in particular from core income-generating activity.

Marketing and generating demand for training

Demand can be an issue for some courses, varying according to sector, location and other factors. It is extremely difficult to gauge how many potential participants there are, and what specific things are holding them back. Publicity can be difficult with multiple networks and sectors in play and no clear sense of the scale of the sector. Designing, marketing and delivering training - or any other form of supporting others - inevitably takes time away from the other parts of the business. Projects may need to be at a certain scale or level of capacity to be able to deliver it well.
It is difficult for one training course to deliver all the things people need. Training for technical land-based skills and enterprise are often offered separately. More ‘niche’ requirements of land-based social enterprise often are not covered at all e.g. ‘ethical’ marketing training. Given this diversity of needs, it is very difficult to pitch ‘general’ trainings.
Some key solutions

We think the following changes could help land-based social enterprises deliver more training, and in turn improving their sustainability and success in helping more people.

Land-based social enterprises could expand their training offers

Land-based social enterprise training could target a wider set of participants, thus generating more income and helping more people. Some potential offers are introduced below. We have observed land-based social enterprises working in most of these areas already, but there is considerable scope for further development:

- **New landworkers for all sectors:** Land-based sectors currently face serious problems with an under-supply of workers, particularly skilled ones. Brexit may exacerbate this problem, since many current landworkers are from the EU. Land-based social enterprises could play a key role in training more people for careers in land-based work. The diverse set of skills that can be learned through training with a land-based social enterprise will help landworkers develop their careers in a sector that increasingly requires the ability to innovate and diversify. Land-based social enterprises can often provide training opportunities and access to land for new entrants who would otherwise struggle to get hands-on experience, especially those in urban environments.

- **Modern land professionals:** Many professions could benefit from the expertise of land-based enterprises. This might include landscape architects, developers, construction managers, or planners, not to mention a wide range of local authority officers engaged with land use. Trainings might focus on things like designing food growing or green spaces in housing developments, or on creating a strong foundation for community management of environmental assets. Many of these professionals would be willing and able to pay for training, be it as part of their original training, or later as part of continuing professional development (CPD). Moreover, this training could help them produce more social and environmental value through their work - helping to create spaces that work for communities.

- **Supported employment:** Increasing employment is often a key strategic goal of local authorities. There is particular focus put on young people not in education or employment (NEETs) and the long term unemployed. Supported employment programmes are designed to increase people's employability, by giving them training, work experience, and improved confidence and people skills. Lambeth Council recently worked with the New Economics Foundation and Numbers for Good to explore the potential for social enterprises to deliver supported employment. Land-based social enterprises are extremely well placed to deliver this service, especially given the therapeutic and empowering nature of the work.
• **Work with schools and colleges:** Several reports on skills deficits discuss the need to begin training with schools. Not only can this set children up for future land-based careers, but it can inspire them to engage with the land around them whatever they end up doing. Land-based projects could also provide an excellent venue for the work placements required by many colleges.

• **Corporate social responsibility:** Companies could benefit from developing relationships with land-based social enterprises, facilitating things like away days and professional development opportunities for their employees. For social enterprises this could represent a lucrative income stream and a chance to engage people with their projects and missions.

• **Training on a wider variety of topics:** Land-based skills training is the most obvious and frequent topic that land-based social enterprises focus on. However, there are many other things that courses could focus on, some of which would attract participants who do not particularly wish to engage in land-based work. Land-based social entrepreneurs have skills in things like setting up and running businesses, marketing, building networks, community development, and any number of other skills that could be shared with participants with a range of ambitions and jobs.

• **Collaborating with other groups:** Enterprises could join together to deliver larger trainings, or join with other groups to deliver broader courses. These collaborations could mean more funding opportunities and the potential for greater positive outcomes. This is especially important for large training contracts, for example from local authorities.

**Conduct more research on running successful training**

We need to collect and share information about the most effective ways to deliver training and how to overcome the barriers trainers and trainees face.

Some key questions include:

• What are the most successful business models for and content of training?

• How can trainers scale up their activities to help more people?

• How can training support full-time learning given the seasonal nature of the work?

• How can trainers best collaborate and learn from each other?

• How can social enterprises make careers in land-based work more attractive?

**More funding should be made available for land-based training**

We need a population with the skills to manage our land properly, whether that’s producing the things we need, or enhancing the environment. The land-based sector is extremely important - providing us with food and fuel, and making local economies resilient to shocks.
We need strategic funding to ensure that the best brains are working on making the most of our key non-renewable resource.

At the moment this funding does not exist, and the land-based sector is ageing and losing skills. This needs to change. This means public funding for training. This money could go to anyone who can share the skills we need. This might mean large landowners like the National Trust. We think it should definitely include land-based social enterprises as they have a huge amount to offer. Land managers should be paid for contributing to the skill base, beyond the paltry amounts available for apprenticeship schemes. We can look to the US for an example of how this might work, with significant USDA support for incubating new farmers and training.

**Government should support land-based enterprises to deliver training**

Government can play a key role in facilitating land-based social enterprise delivered training. This could help achieve many governmental goals, especially around increasing employability and addressing land-based skills deficits. The following strategies would help:

- **Provide financial rewards for land managers who support and train new entrants:** We have a shortage of land-based workers, which Brexit will exacerbate. Subsidies reform represents an opportunity to change this. Government should introduce subsidies, or other measures, that make it worthwhile for land managers to train and provide access to land for new entrants.

- **Use commissioning to support land-based social enterprise training:** Local authorities and other branches of government can contract land-based social enterprises to deliver training. This could be by targeting them to deliver supported employment or other training for the public. It could also be bringing them in to train internal staff. Given recent cuts, and the according loss of expertise, they could especially benefit from training delivered by experts in land-based enterprise.
What will Shared Assets do?

Shared Assets is committed to helping build the capacity of the social enterprise sector to deliver training. We will look for opportunities to do the following:

Promote land-based social enterprise as a training delivery provider

- Encourage local authorities to look to land-based projects for employment support
- Establish training/ employment support as a key part of social value - something that local authorities should look for in the procurement process, and include in social value policies.
- Show social enterprises how to highlight the social value of their training
- Collect case studies of successful training organisations such as the ones detailed earlier in this briefing

Collaborate with land-based social enterprises to develop, deliver and promote new training:

- Provide support for land-based social enterprises developing training courses
- Market and publicise existing courses
- Conduct research on how to deliver quality training that helps enterprises generate income and fulfill their social missions
- Coordinate and bring people together to co-deliver training - especially in relation to building partnerships for bigger bids, and broader trainings.
- Link land-based social enterprises to new potential clients for their services (e.g. land-based professionals, large landowners, schools, businesses)
- Help groups network and exchange skills

Advocate for more support for training:

- Campaign for government to develop financial support for land-based training
- Urge local authorities to consider commissioning to social enterprises for supported employment and internal land-based training