

## SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AND HIGHER EDUCATION: STRATEGIES TO INCREASE EMPLOYMENT FOR YOUTH

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### Abstract

*India's population is fast expanding at a rate of 17%. India will become youngest country, with 64% of its population in the working age group by 2020. Most of the workforce is engaged in agriculture sector, with inadequate skills. However, presently only 2% of the total workforce in India has undergone skills training. Thus, India can become a source for skilled workforce, if properly planned and executed skill development training programmes. The challenge is to reach the diverse population, mostly migrating labour from agriculture sector to service sector. Government of India has formulated National Policy for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (2015) to improve the employability of youth. Higher education institutes have a vital role in this, as a 'skill development agency'.*

*With our current training capacity, India will provide only 3 million workers. At present, vocational education is mainly imparted through Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and Polytechniques, which are limited in number. Skills help individuals to transform their lives. It also promotes social inclusion, in addition to contributing to productivity and production.*

*In today's globalized world, market needs workers with specialized skills. Different sectors have different job specific demands, at different point of time. Here, higher education plays a vital role. By taking into consideration the local situations, especially in rural areas, universities can organize various skill development training programmes. It can also become interwoven part of curriculum. Considering interests of youth and needs of local market, universities can plan add-on courses/choice-based courses. By revising and reviewing current curriculum of various faculties, universities can implement skill development courses. The major challenges for all educational institution are to follow the market trends/demands, as market is volatile. Hence, continuous needs assessment of market is required and accordingly courses should be designed. Extensive macro and micro scale researches need to be conducted. Expansion and bringing equity is another challenge.*

*Emphasis should be given on developing soft skills at the formal education level itself.*

*Hands on training/internship/ apprenticeship should become integral part of the curriculum. This will help students to strengthen their learning along with skills. It should be ensured that the skills, acquired through education system, should address the demands of the job as well as needs of the market.*

*Thus, there is a need to frame competence based model of lifelong learning.*

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**Key words** - skills development, workforce, needs assessment, market, lifelong learning, soft skills, curriculum, infrastructure

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“Education, vocational training and lifelong learning are central pillars of employability, employment of workers and sustainable enterprise development”.

*-International Labour Organization*

### **Introduction**

India’s population is fast expanding at the rate of 17%. Thus by 2020, India will be the youngest country with 64% of her population in the working age group. To reap India’s demographic dividend, Government of India in its XII Five Year Plan has focused on skills development. It is a big challenge for India to give quality education and impart skills to her huge number of youth; so that they can become employable and be productive contributors to country’s development.

‘India Labour Market Update’, Newsletter (July 2016), published by International Labour Organization, New Delhi Office states that India’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate in 2015-2016 has reached to 7.5%. In spite of this rapid growth rate, 41.8% of the rural population continues to live below poverty line. The key challenge, therefore, is of inclusive economic growth. The challenge is to ensure that the economic growth translates into better labour market conditions. The vast majority of workers in India are in informal jobs. A large portion of this workforce finds work through informal means such as word of mouth references, contractors, etc. (agricultural labourers, workers engaged in contractual employment). There has been shift of workers from agriculture mostly to the area of construction. In recent years, most of the new jobs created in formal sector are actually informal in nature. The major cause of worry is that these workers are deprived of an access to social security of any kind!

With the initiative of ‘Make in India’ introduced by the government, manufacturing sector is growing rapidly (9.3% in 2015-16). In this process of development, structural transformation is inevitable. This leads to change in employment status and its pattern as well. The process of

structural transformation has begun in India, though at a low rate. People from agriculture sector are moving to social sector. Agriculture is one of the sectors in India, where high employment opportunities still exist, even though they are seasonal. In 2015-16 service sector accounted for 53.4% of Gross Value Added (GVA). It is prevalent in urban areas as compared to rural ones. It is interesting to note that share of industry (manufacturing and construction) stood at 31.3% of GDP in 2015-16. Increase in employment opportunities in construction sector shows rise in casual wage employment and a decline in the area of self-employment. In spite of the increase in general education levels, majority of today's youth is unemployed. This is a major challenge for government and educational institutions as well. The challenge is to create more jobs in various sectors, which can absorb youth, women and socially deprived people across the country, particularly in rural areas. Development of rural communities should be given priority. The reasons for this include persistence of poverty in rural areas, urbanization, globalization and climate change. The Millennium Development Goal on eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, and the global goal of achieving decent work for all will not be achieved unless rural poverty is reduced, if not eradicated. Education, entrepreneurship and physical and social infrastructure play a vital role in developing rural areas. Skills are central to improving employability and livelihood opportunities, reducing poverty, enhancing productivity and promoting environmentally sustainable development.

Migration from rural to urban areas has placed enormous pressure on cities. Providing employment and decent incomes in rural areas is a solution to reduce migration and poverty. Hence, there is a need to promote livelihoods both in farm and non-farm activities.

Indian children, on an average, receive only 8 to 10 years of education. The quality of education is another area for research. Poor educational performance leads to poor skilling, affecting the quality of workforce. For India to become a hub for skilled labour, quality of education needs to be addressed with a sense of urgency. Educational institutions should encourage youth to take up challenges to become social entrepreneurs. They should be motivated to go to rural and semi-urban areas either to promote cottage and small industries, or for self-employment. Universities should promote social entrepreneurship.

### **Globalization and workforce**

Globalization has entered into all walks of life, including market. It has increased competition. Industries have challenges to meet the global standards. Thus, market requires workers with high levels of skills. Workforce with innovative ideas to improve the quality of products/services is in great demand. Knowledge and skills in production are in demand. Hence,

basic education is not sufficient in this globalized era. The current reality is that youth/graduates entering the market are inadequately equipped with skills that industry demands.

### **Indian market scenario**

India's labour market has traditionally been characterised as highly hierarchal and segmented with 86% of total employment in the informal sector, including self-employment (World Bank, 2012b). In spite of an increase in employment especially in service sector, majority of the new entrants end up working in the formal sector with low wages and without any long-term job security.

### **Government efforts for skill development**

Education and acquisition of skills are important determinants for job prospects. History of education in post independent era shows that government has implemented various schemes for skilling youth. The National Policy on Education (1986) emphasised on vocationalization of secondary education. There are 16 central ministries who offer various technical and vocational education and trainings (TVET). Skills development programmes are offered through various institutions such as Industrial Training Institutions (ITIs), Indian Institute of Management Studies (IIMS), Indian Institute of Technology (IITs), Polytechnics, etc.

### **Vocational Education**

It is offered at higher secondary stage. More than 150 job oriented courses in the areas of agriculture, business and commerce, engineering and technical, home science, health and paramedical, are offered.

### **Polytechnic Education**

This mostly includes three years diploma courses in various disciplines such as Electronics, Computer Science, Medical Lab Technology, Leather Technology, Printing Technology, etc. It trains students who have completed minimum Std. X education. This aims to create skilled manpower that can support shop floor and field operations as a middle level link between technicians and engineers (Goel, 2012).

### **Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and Industrial Training Centres (ITCs)**

Certificate level crafts training for students, who have education between Std. VIII-XII, can join these courses. Vocational training in trades such as carpentry, electrician, plumbing, painters, masons, dairy assistance, etc. is provided through these centres. They offer short term courses.

### Apprenticeship Training Scheme (ATS)

It provides one year on-the-job training to those, who have completed ITI training. Stipend is also provided during this training period.

### Other institutions

Other various institutions funded by government such as National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) (85 courses), Jan Shikshan Sansthan (JSS) (255 types of courses) also offer short term skills development programmes.

Despite all these efforts, India is facing shortage of skilled workers. Skills attained by people through these institutions are poor in quality. Thus, the challenge is to improve the quality of education and skills. The reasons for low performance of these institutions are as follows (Goel, 2012):

- Low priority for Vocational Education
- Shortage of trained teachers and trainers
- Inadequate linkages with industries
- Absence of a National Competency Testing and Accreditation system
- Lack of infrastructure
- Inadequate or non-coverage of trades in service sector
- Lack of equivalence for employment purposes
- lack of vertical mobility
- Inflexible curriculum
- Lack of convergence between various agencies
- Lack of overall social recognition

To make the existing vocational education system relevant to the market needs, a major restructuring of the system and its management is needed. Besides this, change in the attitude and perception of youth and parents towards vocational education is required, as this has been proved as a major hurdle in skilling youth. In Indian society, vocational training is generally looked down upon. It is a misconception that those who cannot perform well in formal education strive for it. Hence, both the parents and children prefer formal education. It is believed that formal education provides white collar government jobs along with social status. Another factor responsible for low demand for vocational education is social structure and the caste system. Society does not appreciate or value crafts and trade skills. Certain skills are viewed from caste angle. These factors de-motivate youth to join vocational training courses.

All the above factors have resulted in a huge gap in skilled workforce in labour market.

### **Role of educational institutions**

India has only marginally improved its performance in education since 1995, whereas countries such as China, Mexico, South Africa and Russia have made much larger gains in strengthening their education pillar-not only in terms of quantity but also in terms of quality (World Bank, 2006). After 2000, the number of educational institutions in India has increased enormously. Indian youth is getting access to education, including higher education. The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) at all levels (primary, secondary and higher education) has increased. However, dropout rates are also high. This is one of the biggest hurdles in skills development. Making the opportunities available for skills development to school dropouts needs special attention and special strategies.

Global economy demands highly skilled and technically qualified human resources. It is the role of educational institutions to develop the requisite technical and scientific capabilities. They need to respond to challenges posed by knowledge economy. The other challenge is to skill the people in informal sector. In this situation, TVET plays a vital role in achieving inclusive and sustainable growth. It will prepare youth for gainful employment. Universities can establish lifelong learning centres in each village and offer vocational training. It can also extend its academic support/inputs and assist in framing curriculum of various courses offered by TVET centres, which are already functioning in rural areas.

Government of India has established National Skills Development Council (NSDC), which has identified 24 sector skills. Each of them has Sector Skills Councils (SSCs). Based on market demands, common skills required for a specific occupation are already identified and common curriculum has been framed by these SSCs. Universities can tie-up with these SSCs and organizes skills development courses at various levels. This will reduce skills gaps to a certain extent.

### **Role of lifelong learning**

Initial education is no longer sufficient in this science and technology driven world of work. Hence, lifelong learning is the option to keep oneself updated, secure employment and attain stable income. Today, higher education is accessible even in rural areas. Thus, students with more diverse range of interests and abilities are enrolled. Universities have to face the challenges of satisfying all their needs. Considering these diversities and needs, universities have to plan and execute vocational courses and prepare them for the globalized market. How to link these courses with the constantly changing market needs is another challenge for the universities.

### Concept of skills development

Skills development does not just include production and/or service skills. It also includes 'life skills'. While framing vocational courses one needs to focus on ethics and values too. Students should be able to distinguish between ethical and unethical behaviour at work place. Students should have understanding of labour laws -labour rights and responsibilities, concepts of corruption, bribery etc. These are important aspects of work life, which should be covered in skills development courses. Life skills include understanding self-esteem and boosting self-confidence, improving communication skills (especially non-verbal), learning problem solving and negotiation skills, acquiring decision making skills and team work.

Thus, skills development should not only concentrate on how to gain employment but also on developing person's potential, which can contribute to the progress of an enterprise. As stated earlier, employers want employees who are adaptable, creative, problem solvers and are ready to update themselves from time to time.

### Role of universities

Universities can no longer sit in ivory tower. They have to link themselves with the constantly changing society and economy. Existing curriculum of many universities with their old teaching methodologies are now redundant. Hence, the students holding degree certificates are deprived of skills and employability. Universities have to bring reforms in the areas of curriculum, teaching methodology and evaluation patterns to address the issue of un-employability. They can offer more number of interdisciplinary courses and create new knowledge. They should introduce more subjects which have inbuilt components of meeting market demands. Internship, field work and projects should become integral part of curriculum. Students should be given hands-on-training, apprenticeship opportunities during their course itself. Apprenticeship is one of the best tools for effective skills development training. It gives students an opportunity of 'learning by doing' and 'learning while earning'. This on-the-job experience helps students to enhance the skills acquired in the classrooms. This makes students 'ready for employment' (employable). In short, universities should focus not only education but also on employability, employment and entrepreneurship.

Universities can rethink about admission policies. There should be vertical mobility between certificate, diploma and degree courses. Students, who have successfully completed vocational trainings, should be allowed to take admission in colleges/universities. This will help them to acquire higher qualifications. Universities should also reform their examination pattern. Students' evaluations should focus on learning outcomes, and not merely on knowledge accumulation.

Possibility of ranking or rating system can be explored.

Universities can conduct market survey and identify skills gaps in the labour market, unmet learning needs of rural people, especially disadvantaged groups and plan skills development courses for them.

### **Challenges in implementation of skills development programmes**

According to the World Bank, (2012b) globally, around 200 million people were unemployed. Out of this, 75 million were under the age of 25 years. By now, at least a few millions must have been added to this. Technology is expanding at a very high speed. This demands workers with cognitive and complex skills. Another phenomenon of ‘new trend of hire and fire’ has been introduced by globalization. Market has become more casual and flexible than ever before. Industry prefers more flexible workers, with high skills. This has also resulted in instability in career prospects. To cope with all these challenges, our current skills development system (universities and other skill development institutions) is poorly equipped. Thus, our youth is also not prepared for these challenges. Skills development is the most difficult sub-sector to organize and manage in the education sector, because it cuts across organizational boundaries, caters to diverse clientele, and involves multiple delivery mechanisms, and its market characteristics keep changing (Okada, 2012, p.171, Asian Development Bank, 2008, p. x).

In XII Five Year Plan, Government of India introduced National Policy for Skills Development and Entrepreneurship. It aims to generate productive and gainful employment on a sufficient scale. As mentioned earlier, agriculture contributes more than 50% of GDP by employing micro-enterprises, casual labourers and unpaid family members’ work. A large number of out of school youth is also employed in agriculture sector. The challenge is to frame separate strategies to skill these diverse population. Are we really equipped for this?

It is estimated that, by 2020, India will have 700 million people in working age group of 24-59 years. The biggest challenge is how to develop the capacity and potential of these people? We cannot focus only on agriculture sector, as other sectors such as construction, retail; manufacturing, transport, hospitality and healthcare are also coming up. They also need skilled workforce. What plans do we have for them? There is only one possibility of strengthening existing TVET institutions. In addition, a large number of new TVET institutions with well equipped infrastructure and qualified faculties should be opened in rural areas. Upgradation of skills and skilling of new entrants, who have acquired skills informally, should be done simultaneously.

One has to focus on skilling the youth in labour intensive industry such as agriculture, food



processing etc. There is also a scope for organizing training on how to maintain livestock, floriculture, horticulture, etc. Government/universities can open community colleges in rural areas to train people in these sectors. This will help to create sustainable livelihood in rural areas. Unless youth, especially in rural areas, is appropriately skilled at the right age and is linked with correct livelihood options, young people will remain unemployed. Industry provides job opportunities but rural youth, if not skilled properly, will remain unemployed. It is a challenge for all of us to fill the widening gap between rural and urban employment.

### Strategies to increase employment

There is a risk that the ‘demographic dividend’ might actually turn into a ‘demographic deficit’ (Okada, 2012, Paul, 2011) if the upcoming young labour force cannot get enough education and earn sufficient income to support the non-working age population in coming years.

There is a lack of public awareness about various types of vocational education courses offered by different institutions and its career prospects (FICCI, 2015). The mindset of people, especially of parents and youth, towards vocational education is another hurdle in skilling youth. Hence, various strategies should be adopted by the government and universities to make millions of young people employable. Following are some of the strategies suggested. This is not exhaustive list. One can add to it as per local situations:

- Community colleges, with well equipped infrastructure, qualified and trained faculties, should be established in all villages. Various need based vocational training/ courses can be offered through these colleges.
- Community radio should be started in all villages. It will provide locally relevant information and employment opportunities. Such information would help rural youth to get jobs and also reduce their migration to urban areas.
- Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) should be well trained/informed about skills development programmes. They can provide information about skills development programmes implemented in their own village and its vicinity. They should also be informed /updated about labour market and its needs.
- PRIs should be provided with broadband connectivity with high speed. Up-to-date information about skills programmes in the village and its vicinity should be available at PRI level. Youth, staying in remote and interior parts of village, can avail this information, whenever needed.
- Rural specific courses should be designed to promote off-farm livelihood. They include-

- Rural tourism
- Sustainable harvest of non-timber forest produce by regenerating degraded lands
- Sustainable harvesting by involving SHGs ( Self Help Groups)
- Enterprises that promote renewable energy
- Establishing value chains and niche markets for non- timber forest produce
- Expanding agro-processing and building competitive value chains from producers to urban centres and export markets
- Training in sustainable livestock management
- Nursery training for preparation of saplings (fuel, fodder, fruits, etc.)
- Promoting integrated farming.
- Employment exchanges need a major revamping. Currently, employment exchanges are doing nothing, but just registering names of job seekers. They should establish linkages with industries prepare data base of job opportunities and disseminate online information to job seekers/unemployed youth.
- Networking between all institutions offering vocational courses is a must. This will help to utilize resources and also avoid duplication, thus reducing the cost of training.
- Vocational training to be offered to rural youth should be affordable. As far as possible, there should be provision of stipend/paid apprenticeship.
- TVET centres should have in-house placement cell. This is possible, if the centre has tie-up with industries. This will help to ensure jobs.
- Courses should be designed in such a way that trainees should be able to use skills immediately. Courses should be customized as per the local needs.
- Public private partnership should be encouraged while implementing skills development courses. This will help to share cost, infrastructure and expertise as well.
- Prior learning should be recognized and given due credits. Especially industry people should give due respect to prior learning.
- Universities should revise their curriculum and incorporate multi-skills and life skills at all levels (UG& PG). They can work in close collaboration with NSDC, utilize their skill gap studies in 21 sectors commissioned by the council and convert these into competency-based curriculum. This will enable students to choose their career path. This will give them opportunities to acquire various skills before they enter job market. Industry people must be involved in curriculum framing.
- Universities should establish career guidance and placement cells on their campuses. These

centres should help the students to have easy entry into workforce. Advocacy and support system should be made available to vulnerable groups to participate in workforce.

- Each university should provide mentor to students to get proper guidance.
- Universities should reframe their admission criteria. Like Australian VET system, students, who have completed vocational education, should get entry to pursue higher education.
- Universities can have MOUs with industries, which will help for students' internship, placements and apprenticeships.
- Universities can establish lifelong learning centres in villages for conducting vocational courses. In these centres they can demonstrate and impart trainings to farmers about how to use advanced technology, soil testing, etc. Enterprise trainings should be organized for farmers, especially the marginalized ones, to take and manage the risks involved in introducing progressive production technologies.
- Universities should take up special researches to identify skills gaps in informal sector, explore educational options for upgrading skills in these areas.
- Communication campaigns on skills development courses should be organized by using all media-print, electronic and social media in multiple languages. It should inform about the prospective future of various courses. These campaigns should create awareness about various new avenues available; to look beyond traditionally preferred jobs.
- Like Rajasthan SLDC, 'skills on wheels' can be started where movable training institutes (mobile vans/buses) can offer locally relevant courses.
- As mentioned earlier, market is constantly changing, so the needs of skills are changing. Hence, curriculum of all courses should be constantly revised.
- Government should establish more number of TVET centres in rural areas who can run short term courses in areas like automobile, security guards, retails, and health care takers for old age, massage, child care, plumbing, beauty and wellness, sports coach, fitness instructors and so on.
- Individuals, who are capable of running business and nurture entrepreneurship, should be encouraged by giving them the infrastructure facilities, loans at low interest, etc.

## Conclusion

Thus, we see that skills development is crucial for the development of our country. We are forced to meet the global challenges. Hence, the youth needs to be skilled on the war-foot level. If the energy of youth is not channelized properly, they may go astray and indulge in anti social

activities, which would be suicidal for them and will be harmful for the society at large. Higher education can play a pivotal role in this area with its renewed curriculum, teaching methodologies, strategies and can equip the coming generations with the required skills for their personal growth and development, which will automatically reflect in India's growth.

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