

Skill Development for the Youth: A Global Quest

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ABSTRACT

Education and Skill Development have the power to transform the economic condition of any nation. They are an absolute bet to get all segments of society involved for the benefit of a country's economic growth and transformation. Education, unlike in ancient times, has become more achievement-oriented than child-oriented. It does not address the needs of all the children who, in spite of various levels of scholastic competence, are capable of learning and need to develop those skills and become empowered to live effectively in this world. In India, young people who will soon be entering the labour market constitute the largest segment of the demographic structure. A majority of them have limited access to education and training, and most find work in the informal sector. In recent years India has rapidly expanded the capacity of educational institutions and enrollments, but dropout rates remain high, and educational attainment remains low. India so far has not sufficiently prepared its youth with the skills that today's industries require. Thus, to accelerate its economic growth, the country has introduced drastic policy reforms in skills development.

I. INTRODUCTION

Every successful goal achievement has proper skill development behind it. Skill-based education and training play a significant role in preparing the young masses for the workplace. More specifically, it bridges the gap between the worlds of learning and work by ensuring that the young people learn skills required by the labour markets.

Skill development is an essential element in improving the employability and potential productivity of the working poor and can be an important tool for reducing poverty and exclusion and enhancing competitiveness and employability. Education and skills can facilitate the working poor and vulnerable groups, such as people belonging to rural communities, persons with disabilities, or disadvantaged youth to escape the vicious circle of inadequate education, poor training, low productivity and poor quality jobs with low wages. Evidence for this can be found in any nation that has prioritized education and skills development. An increasing global competition, rapid technological intensification and highly young population have brought skill development in the center of all debates demanding a competitive India.

The objective of Skill Development is to create a workforce empowered with the necessary and constantly upgraded skills and knowledge to gain access to decent employment and ensure a country's competitiveness in the dynamic global market. It aims at increasing the productivity and employability of workforce both in the organized and the unorganized sectors. This initiative seeks an increased participation of youth, women, disabled and other disadvantaged

sections with the enhanced capability to adapt to changing technologies and labour market demands.

II. THE PRESENT SCENARIO OF SKILL DEVELOPMENT AROUND THE WORLD AND IN INDIA

The current standard model of learning fits neither people's diversity of talents and attitudes nor the demands of employers. Schools and universities in many countries, despite recent reforms, still focus on developing traditional cognitive skills, teaching narrow facts and solving routine problems with rules-based solutions. However, countries at all levels of development including Europe, Africa and China have realized that adequate education and skills can improve the employability of workers, the productivity of enterprises and the inclusiveness of economic growth. This realization has led to an increased interest in the devising of skill development policies to drive the change necessary to meet development challenges. Many policy makers are aware that if their countries are to gain or maintain their status as high-income countries, they must produce the higher value-added, higher quality goods and services that can yield higher wages and profits. To do this they need a skilled workforce and an education and training system that adequately prepares young people to enter the labour market. Across the world, skills development has been addressed with considerable seriousness. The countries that emerged successful in raising their employment rates among young people closely link vocational training with labour market needs. This can be sampled in the following chart according as per the Planning Commission Report of 2008:



India has changed its skills since 2008 and at present more and more employers are on a lookout for 21st century skills in the job seekers. It is not that the country does not have enough degree holders but the business and industry fraternity does not find it sufficient for employment. Surveys and studies are conducted at regular intervals and it has been reiterated so far that 80% workforce in rural and urban India does not possess any identifiable marketable skills.

India is one of the few countries in the world where the working age population will be far in excess of those dependent on them and, as per the World Bank, this will continue for at least three decades till 2040. This has increasingly been recognized as a potential source of significant strength for the national economy, provided that the country is able to equip and continuously upgrade the skills of the population in the working age group.

III. INDIA SPECIFIC SKILL DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES

India's population, which is huge at 1.21 billion, is fast expanding at a rate of 17% and integrating rapidly into the global economy. India is among the youngest countries in the world, with the proportion of the work force in the age group of 15-59 years, increasing steadily. But unfortunately, it is lagging behind the developed countries and even countries like China primarily when it comes to skilling. Only 2% of our workforce has formal vocational skills. It has been estimated that to benefit from the demographic dividend that India boasts about, an additional 500 million people need to be skilled by 2020. But to reach this target, a whole set of challenges are required to be dealt with:

- 1. Focus on formal system of education over vocational education:** Over the years, skill gap has become a growing concern. Our higher education system being degree driven, had put skill enhancement to the back burner, resulting in serious employability gap at almost 80%. This has resulted in neglecting the vast mass of people outside the formal system requiring some or the other skill training and contributing to the bulk of employment at the entry level of each industry. Be it technicians, sales officers, retail staff, banking operations staff, data entry operators or office assistants, the infrastructure required for training such a huge mass is currently not available.
- 2. Growth of technology:** India has a great opportunity to meet the future demands of the world and become the worldwide sourcing hub for skilled workforce. However, the rapid growth of technology during last couple of decades has put our nation in a grip of severe skill deficit. Today, a large section of India's labor force has outdated skills and with current and expected economic growth, this challenge is going to only increase further, since more than 75% of new job opportunities are expected to be skill-based.
- 3. Lack of IT knowledge in rural and semi urban areas:** There is an immediate requirement for introducing modern tools and techniques to people who are trained in traditional skills. Unless modern technological tools like internet are used to impart vocational training, skilling cannot be scaled up in a country where millions of youths are unemployed for want of skills.

4. **Tough competition between firms:** In the globalized era, competition has intensified among firms and industries, requiring them to improve the efficiency and quality of their products and services. This forces them to hire fewer, but more skilled, workers. Thus, the entry requirements for youth seeking work have become higher and tougher.
5. **Quantity of youth to be trained:** Over 65% of India's large population is below 35 years of age; a robust skills training and certification system for these large numbers is a tough task.
6. **Access:** India's large geographical territory and changing socio-economic conditions make the implementation of standardized, skill-based instruction a huge challenge.

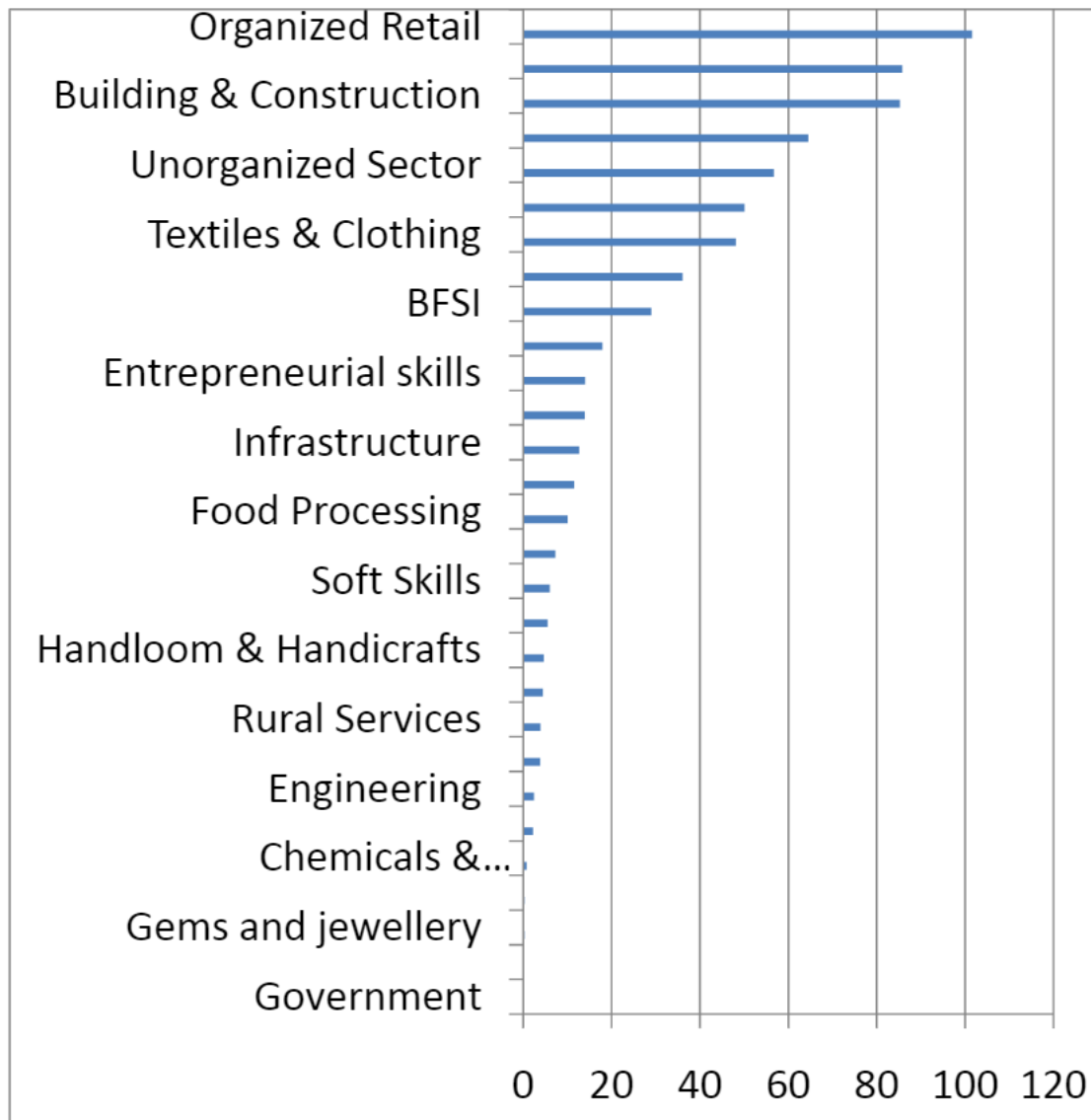
The challenges for India get magnified, as it needs to reach out to the million plus workforce ready population, while facing an ever increasing migration of labour from agriculture to manufacturing and services. On the other hand, the country's workforce skilling is much darker with strength of formally trained worker at a dismal level of merely 5%.

IV. JOINT EFFORTS BY THE GOVERNMENT AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR IN

OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES

In order to achieve a sustained economic growth in double digits, it is important to focus on two important areas of skill development in both workforce and professionals and promotion of entrepreneurship at all levels. Awaking to this dire need, the Government has set a target of creating formally trained skilled workforce of about 500 million people by 2022. In its 12th Five Year Plan, India has set a tough challenge in the field of vocational education and training. According to the plan, the "demographic dividend" in India needs to be exploited not only to expand the production possibility frontier but also to meet the skilled manpower requirements of in India and abroad. Therefore, part of its National Skill Development Mission government has established the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) in the Public Private Partnership mode to facilitate setting up of large, high quality, for-profit vocational institutions. The NSDC has geared itself for preparing comprehensive action plans and activities which would promote PPP models of financing skill development.

In addition, NSDC also aims to set up 1,500 new ITIs and 5,000 skill development centers across the country as well a National Vocational Qualification Framework (NVQF) for affiliations and accreditation in vocational, educational and training systems. Likewise, it has set a sector wise skill target (in millions) presented below:



(Source: National Skill Development Corporation)

A total target of skilling 72.82 lakhs was accepted by various central government Ministries, and the NSDC, for the year 2013-14. The table below shows the allocated targets, and the latest status of target achievements as reported by these organizations to the National Skill Development Agency.

S.No.	Ministry / Organization	2013-14 Target (Persons)	Cumulative Achievement by end- June 2013	
			Number	% of annual target
1	M/o Labour & Employment	14,00,000	1,80,000	12.9%
2	M/o Agriculture ¹	12,00,000	1,71,935	14.3%
3	National Skill Development Corporation	10,00,000	53,473	5.3%
4	M/o Rural Development ²	8,00,000	79,593	9.9%
5	M/o Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises ³	6,50,000		
6	D/o Higher Education (MHRD)	5,44,000	36,044	6.6%
7	D/o Electronics & Information Technology ⁴	5,10,000	2,00,690	39.4%
8	M/o Housing & Urban Poverty Alleviation ⁵	4,00,000	7,812	1.9%
9	M/o Women & Child Development ³	1,50,020		
10	M/o Textiles ⁶	1,50,000	6,408	4.3%
11	M/o Social Justice & Empowerment ³	1,21,400		
12	M/o Tourism	67,300	11,601	17.2%
13	M/o Tribal Affairs ³	60,000		
14	M/o Home Affairs ³	58,000		
15	M/o Road Transport and Highways ³	56,000		
16	M/o Chemicals & Fertilizers	39,000	12,000	30.8%

17	M/o Commerce and Industry ³	35,000		
18	D/o Heavy Industry	30,000	6,752	22.5%
19	M/o Minority Affairs ³	5,000		
20	M/o Development of North Eastern Region ³	4,000		
21	M/o Food Processing Industries ³	3,000		
	TOTAL	72,82,720	7,66,308	10.5%

Skill Development Progress (FY 2013-14)

(Source: National Skill Development Agency, Government of India)

Indian Government's major initiative, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan has already started witnessing success since its implementation. School dropout rates have declined from 80 lakh in 2009 to 30 lakh in 2012. Besides the Indian Government's holistic sustenance through all its initiatives in the form of necessary financial support, infrastructure support and policy support, the private sector has also recognized the importance of skill development and has begun facilitating the same via three key dimensions — non-profit initiatives, for-profit enterprises, and as a consumer. They are taking several initiatives to contribute effectively to the Government's endeavors.

Each year, educational institutes churn out millions of graduates who do not have the specific skills required by the market. If this trend continues, our economic growth would be hurt in the long term. To change this current trend, organizations like AISECT who have been promoting vocational training for almost three decades now, are continuously endeavoring to educate, train, empower and generate skilled workers through vocational training. Such organizations have opened academies to impart skills in different sectors and grant formal certification. Also, AISECT University has introduced skill-based courses in addition to strengthening skill delivery system at UG and PG level. Their skill development programs and AISECT'S presence in district and block level places ensure that the target youth trained by AISECT fulfils the need of the industry by taking up jobs at the entry level in the

industry and even adding to informal employment in the unorganized sector.

With a network of over 12,000 centres, AISECT offers a wide range of vocational education courses with the objective of addressing the skill gaps pertinent to the emerging needs of a rapidly growing economy. Till date, the organization has transformed the lives of over 13 lakh students through a host of skill enhancement programs through its university-certified vocational courses as well as its association with the Central and State Governments for various skill development and capacity building programmes like the Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY), Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and Swashakti Project. AISECT has also tied up with the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) with an aim to skill about 13 lakh youth within 10 years.

V. CONCLUSION

India faces complex and enormous challenges in fostering skill development for youth. Moreover, majority of youth from economically and socially disadvantaged groups get very limited education and little access to vocational training. They work in the unorganized sector and enter the labor market without adequate vocational skills, leading to unstable, informal, and low-wage employment.

In India, the bulk of employment is in rural areas and in the unorganized sector, and almost all manufacturing firms are stationed in the informal sector. Noticing the segmented nature of the labour market, Indian youths must acquire education, training and skills for decent jobs. On one hand where the country narrates about its software engineers and impressive economic growth, its youth have limited access to education and skills training, high rates of school dropout, and large mismatches in the labor market. So even if the Indian Government has embarked on a drastic reform of its training policy by intensifying its efforts to increase the number of skilled workers, it needs to promote industrial development and achieve sustainable growth. The Government should invest more in education and training of youth and it must open training opportunities in the informal sector for youth who have not completed secondary education.

Moreover, it needs to put strong strategic emphasis on youth employability in order to bridge the gap between the industry requirements and the skill set of the youth. Launching job portals like rojgarmantra.com, which are targeted specifically towards the youth of rural and semi urban India is one way of bridging this gap. Such portals need to fulfill the local, entry level job requirements of private and public sector enterprises at the town, district and block levels. Government sees the youth as the future leaders of our country. Hence, it needs to realize that good placements alone will drive more youths to vocational training. Significant steps like including soft skilling of candidates, better information flow about jobs to candidates living in far-flung areas etc, may also contribute towards solving this problem. Once it is done, that day may not be far when India will emerge as the largest contributor to the global workforce, an exceptional strength compared to the rapidly ageing population in the Western countries, thereby witnessing a vibrant economic growth.

[7] Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and Swashakti Project India

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