

TOWARDS AMULTI-SKILLED WORKFORCE

-ML DHAR

The ongoing process of globalization has highlighted the fact that the demand in the job market would be mostly of labour with skills and multi-skills. This underlines the importance of skill development and training particularly in developing countries like India.

India has a workforce of around 400 million but only about 5 per cent of them in the age-group of 20-24 have obtained vocational skills through formal training system, whereas their percentage in industrial countries is much higher. The illiterate and literate upto primary levels of education constitute a very high proportion of the existing workforce. Other weaknesses of the Indian labour force at the macro-level are vocational bias against technical skills, occupational preference for non-production jobs, mismatch between skills acquired and skills required and dearth of adequately/appropriately trained technical personnel.

The lack of professional skills among the educated is considered to be one of the major factors for large unemployment. This is because that our education system is excessively oriented towards general academic education with a little or no vocational orientation. The mid-term appraisal of the Tenth Plan points out, "Our education system is not generating a sufficient supply of trained people, especially those trained in skills that are in demand."

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Unorganized Sector

Majority of the country's labour force i.e. about 92 per cent is engaged in informal economy also known as the unorganized sector. It comprises of small and micro enterprises, self employed persons engaged in production/services, contractual labour etc. Urban informal sector has for a long time been playing a major role in generating employment. About 8 to 9 million are being added to this

workforce annually due to continued migration from rural areas. Currently, employment generation is mostly taking place in informal, services and tertiary sectors.

Major concern in India is that a large number of persons engaged in the informal sector are working with low level of productivity and income. Out of an estimated 397 million employed, about 122 million are working poor, i.e. that they are working but living below poverty line. Both the level of training and access to education is low among them. Various factors including low productivity and income have kept the informal sector largely stagnant in terms of individual growth and dynamism in economic activity.

The viability of unorganised sector as a major provider of employment largely depends on the possible ways to increase the productivity of labour in the unorganised sectors and make it attractive to improve job quality. In this regard the World Employment Report of the ILO has indicated that in the present context of globalization, demand for un-skilled/under-skilled labourers has declined while the demand for skilled and multi-skilled labour has increased.

Increasing pace of globalization and technological change provide both challenges and growing opportunities for economic expansion and job creation. "In a rapidly changing environment, new ways and means of ensuring that people who work possess the necessary knowledge, skills and attitude are criteria for seizing the opportunities inherent in globalisation and technical progress while reducing their unwanted consequences", reports International Labour Organisation.

Globalization in its wake is bringing in advanced high technologies which require complex higher level skills. This requirement can be met through formal institution based arrangements with involvement of all social partners in it. The Second National Commission on Labour proposed introduction of new modular approach to vocational training and imparting skills attuned to the needs of the labour market and in consonance with the latest technology. The Commission among other recommendations in this regard also proposed integration of market driven courses in Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs), review, and if necessary, revision of curriculum every five years to keep it contemporary.

The Expert Group headed by Dr. B.N. Gupta, constituted in

December 2002, also recommended introduction of multi-skilling courses in ITIs and identified new areas covering agriculture sector for starting training in agro-related trades in ITIs. The National Council for Vocational Training (NCVT) approved the Expert Group's recommendations with some modifications. The Labour and Employment Ministry has already implemented some of these recommendations while action on the remaining has been initiated.

Upgrading ITIs

In a major initiative for meeting market needs, the government is working on upgrading 500 ITIs out of the existing 1896 government-run ITIs through Private-Public Partnership (PPP). The upgraded ITIs are to function as the Centres of Excellence for producing multi-skilled workforce of international standard. To begin with 100 ITIs are being upgraded through domestic resources by the Labour Ministry while assistance is being sought from the World Bank for upgrading the remaining 400.

The 100 ITIs to be upgraded are located in 26 States/Union Territories (except Jammu & Kashmir, Sikkim and North-Eastern States) in proportion to the number of Government ITIs in these States. The Labour Ministry has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with most of these States to ensure sustainability and continuation of the scheme. The upgrade of each ITI is to cost Rs. 1.60 crore to be shared between the Centre and the State in the ratio of 75:25.

The new ITIs will have multi-skilling courses during the first year of training followed by specialized advanced modular courses in the second year. New courses are based on sector-wise approach to impart training in all trades of a particular sector. It is a departure from the existing pattern of training based on specific trades. The trainees at the new ITIs will have multi entry and multi exit options.

Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) is being ensured through greater involvement of industry in all aspects of training. Institute Management Committees are to be headed by the representatives of the industry. The new ITIs are being provided sufficient autonomy to build up partnership with the nearby industries and adopting new training technologies with close involvement of industry and other stakeholders.

J&K and North-East

The Government has also approved centrally sponsored schemes for establishing new ITIs in Jammu & Kashmir, Sikkim and North-eastern states with an outlay of around Rs. 130.60 crore. The scheme will help in doubling the training capacity in these states.

Certification of Skills

A large number of workers in the unorganized sector acquire skills in an informal manner, which have not been tested or certified. Lack of certification restricts their employability. Thus, there is a need to develop a system of certification of skills of this category of workers. Labour Ministry took an initiative in this regard. It launched a centrally sponsored scheme in March 2004 entitled “Testing and Certification of Skills for Construction Workers in the Informal Sector” at a cost of Rs.2 crore. About 2500 construction Workers were tested and certified by “Construction Industry Development Council” in first seven months of the launch of the scheme.

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