

Skilling the Rural Youth of the Northeast of India Through Rural Technologies

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Abstract

The proportion of rural youth population in India is about 67–68 per cent of the country's total population. The North Eastern region of India has its share of over 1.07 per cent of the youth population of the country and also a relatively higher proportion of youth unemployment (57.37 per 1,000), indicating that the challenge is paramount. The eight North Eastern states have their unique requirements in skill-based training, depending on the natural resources, industry and native trades. The governments of these states have embarked on skill development missions to meet the aspirations of youth through training, to enhance employability and employment. However, it is observed that the need-based simple skills required by the rural youth of the North Eastern region which will enable them to take up self-employment were not provided by the multiple agencies—both government and non-government. There is a strong need to bring simple rural technologies to the skill development agenda in the North Eastern region of India while creating a way forward plan. There are success stories of young entrepreneurs who have started on a small scale, overcome the difficulties and have grown to make a name for themselves in the region, providing the necessary fillip to the rural economy of the North Eastern region of India.

Keywords

Rural youth, skill training, rural technologies, self-employment, demographic cohort

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Introduction

India has a high proportion of youth in its population, especially that of rural youth. The proportion of rural youth population in India is about 67–68 per cent of the country's total population. Harnessing their potential to contribute to the country's growth would require rural-centric policies that combine the development of appropriate technologies and innovations, skilling of youth and the creation of an ecosystem for the establishment of own enterprises. Many education and training systems do not provide young people with the basic skills needed to escape poverty and unemployment, even when they continue to receive formal education. Non-formal education programmes and training seek to fill this gap by providing learning and skills development opportunities that are relevant to the context in which young people live and seek their livelihoods.

India's big and small economic patterns and trends are all highly impacted by its largest demographic cohort—the youth. The pitiable figures on India's formally trained workforce—which stand at merely 2.3 per cent in comparison with economies like South Korea which are at a mammoth share of 96 per cent—indicate that the former will have to rethink, redefine and repaint the entire talent map of the country to stand a fair chance of participating in global jobs market and hence play a resourceful role in the growing economy. It is vital for India to reimagine its talent landscape by studying the global job market trends and pursue novel approaches to fulfil the skill gaps in the industry and reset the talent demand–supply equilibrium in the country (India Skills Report, 2020).

Youth and Skill Development

The youth population (aged 15–29 years as India's National Youth Policy 2014; Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, 2014) in India, which is about 333 million (around 27.5% of the total population) as per Census 2011, suffers from a low level of education and skill base. Only 3.8 per cent of the youth population had either received or was receiving formal vocational training in 2011–2012. This percentage is very low as compared with developed countries such as the United Kingdom (68%), Germany (75%), Japan (80%) and South Korea (96%) and developing countries such as Mauritius (36%) and Colombia (28%). Similarly, the level of education which is treated as the foundation for acquiring a specific type of skill reflects dismal performance. Around 20 per cent youth were illiterate or below primary education in 2011–2012. Besides this, there exist huge disparities in education and skill attainment across gender, social groups, income groups, rural–urban and formal–informal sector workers, type of work, etc.

In such a scenario, education and skill development of youth is a particular imperative due to two reasons. First, the demand for a skilled workforce has gone up due to changing work organisation. It is estimated that there will be an additional net incremental requirement of around 110 million skilled manpower

by 2022 in 24 key sectors in India. Second, changing demographic profiles of India with bulging youth population suggests that the youth population will increase from about 333 million in 2011 to about 370 million by 2030. These young people are likely to join the labour market. They need to be provided quality education and training to make them employable workforce in the future. This will not only expand the production possibility frontier of India but will also help meet the expected shortfall of the young skilled workforce in the ageing developed world (Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, 2015).

As the educational participation of youth increases, there arises a strong case for strengthening quality education and building the skill component in education became stronger, along with schemes for skill training of youth who are not in education.

The projection of increase in youth labour force at state level made by National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector (2009) reveals that between 2006–2007 and 2016–2017 around 81 per cent of the increase in youth labour force will be in the eastern and central states (Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Odisha, Assam and the North Eastern states) while the southern and western states will contribute negatively. This trend is of serious concern as the formal training capacity in a former group of states is only 28.1 per cent as compared with 57.1 per cent in the latter group of states. As a result, the skill-training programmes must address skilling needs of lagging states to have their significant impact on youth (Rajiv Gandhi National Institute of Youth Development, 2017).

Youth in the North Eastern Region of India

The North Eastern states of India comprise Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura, covering an area of 2,62,179 km² and constituting 7.9 per cent of the country's total geographical area and 46 million people or about 4 per cent of the total population of the country (Census 2011). Most North Eastern states have remained one of the underdeveloped and untapped regions of the country.

It is in this context that the North Eastern Council (NEC) and the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) have prepared Vision 2020 for the North Eastern region. This requires substantial investment and implementation of Action Agenda outlined in the Vision and Strategic Plan, and also imparting of skills at all levels. The North Eastern states, clubbed together, have some common attributes. But they also have significant variations related to culture, language, values, work preferences and ethics and overall environment related to government, infrastructure, terrain, proximity to or availability of markets and services. Hence, the skilling interventions may vary across states and districts despite similarities of activities (National Skill Development Corporation, 2012).

Skilling of Rural Youth of the North Eastern States of India

The North Eastern region of India has its share of over 1.07 per cent of the youth population of the country and also a relatively higher proportion of youth unemployment (57.37 per 1,000), indicating that the challenge is paramount. Therefore, the North Eastern states of India have their unique requirements in skill-based training depending on the natural resources, industry and native trades. The governments of these states have embarked on skill development missions to meet the aspirations of youth through training and enhance employability and employment. Several training partners, academic institutions and vocational training centres are actively involved in a range of programmes that enable livelihoods and increase productivity and income levels of people in the states. Most initiatives are a part of national schemes like Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) (*transl.* Prime Minister's Skill Development Programme) and Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY) (a villagers' skill development programme) apart from regional schemes from the states.

In Arunachal Pradesh, under the 12th Plan, there is a proposal for State Skill Development Mission under the chairmanship of the chief minister, along with a steering committee representing the industry. The nodal department has set a target to train 50,000 people by 2022. The project implementation unit will work with the government's Industrial Training Institutes as vocational training providers along with private agencies in training for different sectors. In Assam, Employment Generation Mission (EGM), an autonomous body under the government, spearheads the skill development initiatives. Their major objective is to stimulate the economy of Assam through skill development through Project Implementation Agencies (PIAs). EGM has registered in its account several success stories, enumerating the various workshops and seminars held in training the youth in diverse skill sectors such as the bell metal unit, printing press and horticulture. The EGM started with 7 lakh and proliferated from 1 unit to 18 units in just one and a half years. Skill-based training is also carried out through Assam State Livelihood Mission and National Urban Livelihoods Mission. The Manipur state has created various committees and sectors to create a stimulus in enabling youth to undergo skill education and training. The main agenda of these committees is to identify and suggest ways and means of skill upgradation and to discover why the youth are not very much enthusiastic about enrolling in these programmes.

Also, another important agenda that they have is to review the existing approach, strategies, priorities and ongoing policies and the loopholes in their implementation. The Government of Manipur has also been striving to create an effective linkage between different organisations connected to skill development. With the constitution of Meghalaya State Skill Development Society, the government has taken skill development in their state to another level by training 7,700 youth in the state. Under the DDU-GKY and state-level skill development plans, the government aims to train rural youth and provide them with jobs with decent wages. Their primary agenda is to fill in the gaps in the skill sectors

which were once the pride of Meghalaya and the main source of employment generation in the state. The endeavour of the Government of Mizoram is to impart need-based training to employees so as to develop the right attitude, necessary skills, duty consciousness, competence and self-motivation to take on the challenges in their work. The Government of Nagaland has started preparation to put in action the schemes under the National Skill Development Corporation, which is helping it conduct skills and to have better ideas about the capabilities and the aspirations of the youth in the state. Most of the initiatives are also guided by PMKVY to the trainees to get jobs for themselves or be able to set up some enterprises, thereby not only employing themselves but also providing others with opportunities to prosper.

Sikkim has inaugurated livelihood schools which train the youth in various livelihood options and sectors of employment such as hospitality and tourism, driver and tour guide, computer software, medical transcription, organic farming, veterinary training, electrical trade, horticulture and teacher training. So far, Sikkim has been quite successful in initiating and running these livelihood schools. Crafts are essentially an important sector and skill for the people of Sikkim. The major goals and objectives of the Directorate of Handicrafts in Sikkim are to preserve and revive the languishing ethnic cultures of the state. The Tripura Government has decided to set up State Skill Development Mission to enable youth to experience employment. A separate directorate committee is to be formed to run various programmes of skill development in various sectors. Under these sectors, the youth of Tripura will be trained based on skill, capabilities, merit and interests. However, the government is keen on enhancing employability and making the youth skill enabled.¹

To complement all government-initiated efforts and to meet the need-based simple skills required by the rural youth of the North East region which will enable them to take up self-employment without much external support like credit, etc., Rajiv Gandhi National Institute of Youth Development (RGNIYD), an Institution of National Importance of the Union Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Government of India whose mission is the empowerment of the youth of the country, is training the youth of North Eastern states on rural technologies in collaboration with the National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRD & PR), the apex institution of the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, initiated skill training of the youth of the Northeast through simple rural technologies.

The unemployed youth of the Northeast are being trained on rural technologies skills such as mushroom cultivation and mushroom products, compressed stabilised earthen blocks making, sustainable hosing technologies, home-based products—phenyl, dishwash powder, detergent powder, solar lights assembling installation and maintenance, leaf plate and cups making, herbal beauty care products, neem products, vermi compost and vermi wash liquid, handmade paper into value-added products such as bags, honey processing and packaging, ethnic bag making and food processing through solar dehydration. During 2019–2020,

a series of skill training on the above-mentioned rural technologies was initiated by RGNIYD and NIRD & PR for the youth from the North Eastern states in the Rural Technology Park in Hyderabad in India. One such skilling of the youth of the state of Mizoram in the North Eastern region of India is described in the following section.

Case Study on Leaf Plate and Cup-Making Technology

Thirty youth (24 males and 6 females) from the districts of Mamit, Champhai and Aizawl of Mizoram were trained on 'leaf plate and cup making'. They were exposed to different kinds of leaves that are available in plenty in the Northeast and could be converted into plates, cups, glasses and spoons for replacing similar plastic products in their state, thereby using nature to preserve nature. Hands-on training was given on the machinery which is manufactured by the partner institution of the Rural Technology Park.

The youth trainees were provided inputs on introduction to leaf plate and cup-making scope, and entire process of leaf plate and cup making. Also, these youth were trained on market analysis, and developing a business plan.

The trainees were oriented on the details of machinery, leaf-stitching machines, types of moulding machines for manufacturing leaf plates and cups (pedal operated, motor operated with single die hydraulic type, motor operated with double die hydraulic type), various models of machines including automatic machines, power consumption, production capacities of various machines per hour, power/electricity requirement, motor capacity in terms of horsepower, parts of machines, dies for machines, cost of machines of different types and sources of availability of machinery.

The trainees were trained on various aspects of product pricing and its elements including the manufacturing capacity, assessing the nature and types of customers/clients, mapping the market demand (local, national, international), pricing the product, providing discounts, offers, subsidy, etc. Calculating the economics of raw material, processing the raw material, production cost, marketing cost, delivery cost, cost of utilities and overheads, labour cost and miscellaneous costs. Furthermore, they were also trained on functional aspects of marketing such as identifying the potential customers, assessing the market demand, branding, advertising, product life cycle, expanding the production capacity and marketing assistance.

The trainees were taken to a field visit to a successful small-scale industry involved in manufacturing leaf plates and leaf cups and industrial facility manufacturing various types of machines and dies for manufacturing leaf plates and cups, models of machines, operations of various types of machines (visit to M/s. Annapurna Cottage Industries, Hyderabad). They were provided opportunity to witness the actual production of leaf plates and cups with various types of raw material, the machine fabrication facility of the industry that also sells the machines for the prospective entrepreneurs.

The trainees undertook a task analysis of breaking down all the operations that involved in production of leaf plates and cups with minute details of do's and

don'ts. They later were engaged in Q&A session to clarify their doubts regarding the production process and machinery. Later, they interacted with the owner of the unit from the perspective of a Successful Entrepreneur who has won several awards including the President of India Award. The trainees were trained on the functional aspects of the computers in the computer lab of the Centre for Information Technology, NIRD & PR. They were oriented on the basic aspects of computers and the essential operations and functions that a rural entrepreneur needs to be equipped with for correspondence, marketing, sales and billing. Furthermore, they were oriented on various e-commerce platforms on which they could easily register their products for marketing globally. Later, the trainees were provided various simulation exercises for registering and creating profile of their products online. The trainees were oriented on the basics of entrepreneurship and qualities of an entrepreneur including exercises on self-assessment of entrepreneurial skills of the trainees through questionnaires. Furthermore, they were provided details on developing a business plan for starting a small business enterprise which included assessment of technical, economic and financial viabilities besides the managerial competencies which are required for managing an enterprise. The trainees were also trained on preparing a project proposal and the content of the proposal document for submission to various statutory bodies/institutions and other financial institutions for seeking financial support apart from the skills for making presentations about their proposed projects for various departments/officials.

The youth were taught about the steps to start a small enterprise, registration/statutory licences/clearances required for an enterprise, procedures and requirements for provisional and permanent registrations. The session on finance included the type of financial requirements for setting up an enterprise, types of financial assistance available through various institutions and schemes, skills for managing financial resources, books and records keeping, taxes applicable for small enterprises and means of securing exemption from various taxes. The highlight of the session was the different sources and schemes for entrepreneurship, financial support under various schemes, particularly for the youth of Mizoram, schemes for financial assistance in the Northeast, etc. were provided. They were also oriented about the use of social media tools for developing online content for marketing their products, making audio-visual promotional material on their products through use of simple online tools, e-marketing, etc.

This kind of holistic skill training is enabling the youth of the Northeast to set up their own enterprises using simple rural technologies, thereby facilitating them a reasonable livelihood. Majority of the 120 youth trained have started their own small business using the skills they were trained on.

Conclusion and Policy Implications

Youth, particularly women, from the North Eastern states have to be trained in industry-relevant skills to enable them to secure a better livelihood and to ensure that they get mainstream roles in new sectors. Efforts should also be made to

ensure they can start their own entrepreneurial ventures giving thrust to several sectors to promote employment and entrepreneurship in rural areas. The task can be made effective by leveraging the innate qualities of hard work and sincerity of the people of the Northeast.

There is a strong need to bring scale to the skill development agenda in the North Eastern region of India while creating a way-forward plan keeping in mind the local rural skills based on rural technologies that are key focus for the youth in the Northeast. There are success stories of young entrepreneurs who have started on small scale, overcome the difficulties and have grown to make a name for themselves in the region. Although small now, their number is likely to grow as more youth travel outside the region, attain education, training and skills; investment is made attractive by the states; markets linkages are developed; substantial buyers are attracted to the products from the region and trained and skilled youth can be gainfully employed within the region. There is a need to motivate the youth to undertake skills training on simple rural technologies by facilitating free boarding and lodging where they are exposed to different rural-based skill training and provided with bank loan linkages, ensuring forward and backward linkages that will boost their production and marketing thereby providing the necessary fillip to the rural economy of the North Eastern region of India.

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Note

1. <https://www.nationalskillsnetwork.in/north-east-states-india>

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