

SANKALP for Employment

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The skill training ecosystem must take an integrated view of existing and potential demand, trainees, training providers and employers. Considering the demographic, economic, cultural and resource diversity of India, putting such an ecosystem in place would continue to be an in-progress project for a long while.

The humungous reverse migration of workers during the Covid-19 lockdown, presents an unprecedented challenge for many states, the demographic dividend notwithstanding. With Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal and Jharkhand expecting the number of returnee migrant workers to run in millions, the preparedness of their home states to provide local employment is being put to test. The answer to the gainful local employment question doesn't lie in market-based opportunities alone, as there are massive regional inequalities where the regions with higher population growth have the dubious distinction of being under-developed too.

In the wake of this challenge, the governments of many of these states have announced elaborate arrangements. Registering the returnees and their skill levels and collating job opportunities in projects funded by the central or state governments are some of the measures announced. Though the process is still underway, it is becoming clear that an exercise of this nature calls for strong ground level institutions with serious capacities of planning and implementation. The situation brings old-fashioned decentralisation to centre stage. It is evident that building adequate capacities at the grassroots levels for identifying employment opportunities early and anticipating skill requirements at the level of districts

is critical for an outcome focused skills training system. But how it has to be done and why has this not been done till date, are the questions that require careful examination of the Skill Development ecosystem, its trajectory of expansion and the extent of decentralisation of its planning and operations.

India has 487 million workers and over a million join the labour force every month. However, about two-thirds of Indian employers report that they struggle to find workers with the right skills. India ranks 78 on a list of 122 countries as per Human Capital Development report of the World Economic Forum. With at least 20 government departments running skill development programmes in recent



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years, India should be doing better than that. The outcome of skill development, unlike education, varies with employers and society. Return on investment in skill development depends on the trainees' easy access to training, apprenticeship opportunities and a smooth transition to the world of work. Therefore, the skill training ecosystem must take an integrated view of existing and potential demand, trainees, training providers and employers. Considering the demographic, economic, cultural and resource diversity of India, putting such an ecosystem in place would continue to be an in-progress project for a long while.

Decentralised skill programme formulation and implementation would systematically capture demand which in turn would result in supply re-arranging itself to meet this demand. Organisation and management of training infrastructure; with the attendant issues of labour welfare and security, thanks to the Covid-19 crisis figures prominently on state governments' agenda, now will ensure better alignment of demand and supply locally. The World Bank supported programme of Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship; SANKALP (Skill Acquisition and

Knowledge awareness for Livelihood Promotion) has been rolled out to promote, inter alia, decentralisation of skill planning and implementation.

Effective decentralisation presupposes utilising the existing institutions to greater effect. At present, the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship of the Government of India (MSDE) is responsible for national skills training policy and management and is aided by many institutions. At the level of states, State Skill Development Missions (SSDM) were launched in nearly all the states to manage their skill development. Most States have also created designated district committees (generally called DSCs but known by different appellations across states) to manage skill development. Thus, decentralised planning in skills is a concept already implicit in the Skill Development ecosystem in India. It is however noteworthy that the MSDE does not always have its exactly matching counterpart at State or district level and so one would not normally find a District Skills Officer in the way from amongst 15-20 members of a DSC.

DSCs are composed of district-level government officials of various departments. Besides, DSC can also co-opt local Chambers of Commerce and Industry, civil society organisations etc. The DSCs are expected to deliberate upon and plan for access to viable skill training and employment for district human resources based upon its economic profile, market conditions and institutional infrastructure.



DSCs are expected to, inter alia, reduce supply-demand mismatch, facilitate inclusion for all marginalised sections of society, manage labour migration issues and provide for robust monitoring.

While this conceptualisation is sound, in reality, where exactly do DSCs stand today vis-à-vis the achievement of all the above? In many cases, the DSCs have not been able to arrive at action plans to achieve their objectives. They lack leadership as well as financial resources. Most do not have a working secretariat. Their positioning and role at district-level is yet to be clearly spelled out. Their efficacy is subject to the personal engagement of individuals. In many cases, a district skill development plan (DSDP) has been produced by many DSC but in reality their real contribution or even participation in the process has been illusory.



Should DSC then be the starting point of this decentralisation? Yes, simply because they offer a ready-made platform from which all skill development planning and

implementation could be given direction and focus. Governments need to strengthen DSC by providing adequate financing. Professionals and subject matter experts must be engaged for economic potential mapping and aligning skills to opportunities. A robust working linkage is needed between state skill missions (SSDM) and DSC so that opportunities and capacity at national and state level can be factored into DSDPs. SANKALP programme is attempting to create this linkage by encouraging the SSDMs to provide guidance to DSCs with respect to preparation of district plans and build the capacities of the DSCs through technical assistance and training.

In conclusion but perhaps in what is really the beginning, decentralisation has to be logically extended beyond DSCs to Gram Panchayats. A robust DSC underpinned by Gram Panchayats who are active participants in skill planning and implementation would not only help to handle the present challenges of rural distress and need for sustained livelihood arising out of Covid-19 but also improve qualitative growth of the labour market with enhanced skills for improved productivity and a sound economic position for a more equitable share in the economy. □



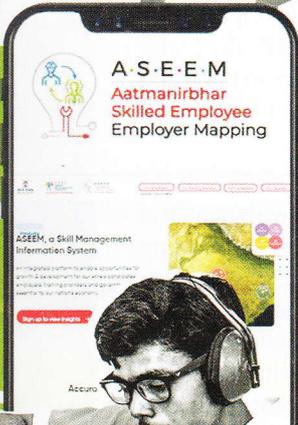
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