Chapter 16

Gram Tarang: Skills Development for Priority Sectors in India

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The acute need for skill development in India, especially at the bottom of the pyramid, is well documented in various studies including the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) skill gap analysis. This paper attempts to offer different perspectives of the top priorities in the skill development value chain. The different stakeholders identified in the ecosystem are (i) the government as an enabler of the ecosystem; (ii) skill development organizations as the providers of skills; (iii) supply side—the student, trainee, or receiver of training; and (iv) demand side—industry as a consumer of the skilled output.

Issues and Challenges

Supply Side

Important problems beset India's education system. With a population increase of 15 million people per annum, dropout rates of 50% or more at each key hurdle of the academic system (classes I, V, X, and XII) result in only 0.82 million who will find employment in the organized sector. The remaining over 14 million youth will end up unemployed, partly employed in the unorganized sector, or self-employed as mini or microentrepreneurs. This is putting serious risk on India's demographic dividend, where the youth who are left uneducated, unskilled, and unemployed may become a liability. ([Data interpreted from Economic Survey of India](#)).

An examination of the drivers of high dropout rates in the education system yields surprising results: the predominant reason has to do with students not being interested in studies and their inability to cope. This clearly indicates a fundamental problem

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B. Panth and R. Maclean (eds.), *Anticipating and Preparing for Emerging Skills and Jobs*, Education in the Asia-Pacific Region: Issues, Concerns and Prospects 55, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-7018-6_16

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in the quality of education being imparted and a flawed design of curricula. The rote-based Indian education system is suffering from a focus on theory and lack of real-world or industry connect. Moreover, there is a general obsession with qualifications and degrees and not on skills or learning. Several studies of the unemployability of Indian graduates are testimony to this systemic failure. Other main reasons for dropout include parents not interested in the studies; financial constraints; and participation in other domestic activities. ([Survey by Economic & Political Weekly](#)).

Vocational education and skill training linked with the industry requirements is the need of the hour, and a quick comparison of gross enrollment rates in vocational education vis-à-vis other countries clearly indicates the issue at hand. More young Indians need to be enrolled into vocational education programs, which need to be designed with a view of the jobs available in industry.

A sectoral view of the Indian economy shows that 17% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) comes from agriculture, which employs more than 53% of the population. The service sector presently has the lion's share of GDP, and the Government's current focus areas include campaigns like "Make in India" and "Digital India," which are pushing for a greater share of GDP and employment coming from the manufacturing sector.

Demand Side and Industry Perspective

On the other end of the value chain, industry is in urgent need of skilled manpower and faces problems of high attrition. This is a key contributor to the complete lack of investment by industry in skill development as their workers shift jobs in short duration. Labor law compliance is another major issue that contributes to industry's tardiness in investing in skill development, as the trend is toward short-term contractual engagement and not long-term employment.

Government Perspective

While skill development has been a priority sector for both the national as well as state governments, several schemes have been announced, implemented, and some even closed down in the past few years. At one point, more than 25 different ministries were involved in skill development.

Three flagship schemes of the Government of India are currently focused on creating jobs, predominantly through manufacturing and technology, in the local economy and skilling our workforce in these sectors. These schemes are "Make in India," "Digital India," and "Skill India."

To give some impetus to the skill development sector, a separate ministry (Ministry of Skills Development and Entrepreneurship) was carved out for scaling up the existing vocational education and training system in India; this also houses the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), a public-private partnership setup to fund and promote sustainable business models in skill development in order to reduce dependence on grant-based training schemes and to encourage the private sector to innovate and try out market-linked models.

NSDC built up a large capacity to train through its partners and signed up 250 of them in a short span of five years. However, the success of these models is still to be

seen, and the ministry has had to spend considerable funds on creating its own flagship scheme “Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana” or Prime Minister’s Skill Development Scheme. This funds training partners for imparting skill training as per the quality standards laid out by NSDC-funded sector skill councils. Sector skill councils, modeled on the Australian and English model, have also been largely ineffective in getting industry involved in the skilling process but have done a commendable job at standardizing and documenting National Occupational Standards and consolidating them into Qualification Packs for different job roles in each of the industry sectors. This has ensured some level of repeatability and reproducibility in terms of curriculum and training outcomes across this vast and diverse country.

A large quantum of funds have been invested in skill development through the Directorate General of Training or DGT (formerly Directorate General of Employment and Training housed within the Ministry of Labor, out of which the DGT was carved and realigned to the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship). The National Council of Vocational Training (recently absorbed into a larger National Council of Vocational Education and Training) under the DGT has more than 60 years of experience in skill development and operates a mostly archaic network of Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) across India. The DGT is also responsible for the rollout of the National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme and Apprenticeship Protsahan Yojana, which have seen an underwhelming response from industry which views any government schemes with trepidation due to the inevitable myriad regulations and compliances involved.

Proposed Solution: Training Provider’s Perspective: Centurion University—Gram Tarang Model

Labor is the most abundant asset of the poor, and effective engagement of this asset in productive activities through employment or self-employment, especially in disadvantaged areas of the world, is what the team at Centurion University and its social entrepreneurial outreach, Gram Tarang Employability Training Services (Gram Tarang means a wave of development in a village), is working toward. The strategy adopted is aimed at

- Giving the most disadvantaged sections of society in the most difficult-to-work-in areas of the country a chance to earn a sustainable livelihood, help drive equitable growth, and thereby wean them away from the clutches of extremism.
- Industry involvement in the process to assist with setting up state-of-the-art, industry standard workshops and laboratories with all relevant machines, tools, and equipment to ensure hands-on, practice-oriented, and experiential-based learning.
- Going the extra mile to support the youth beyond short-term vocational programs and helping them build career paths in industry through postplacement migration support and work integrated lifelong learning.

Gram Tarang provides these young people technical and soft skills in various sectors and trades. The generation of income and ongoing upskilling lead to wider social and economic benefits, especially through the programs focused on bringing back into the mainstream school and college dropouts who would otherwise be target recruits for the naxal (left wing extremism) cadres.

Examples of Good Practices

The typical model followed by Gram Tarang involves rural to urban migration, and counseling becomes a key component of the entire process, often as important, if not more so, than the technical training itself. This happens across three stages.

Pretraining Counseling

This process begins right in the village through mobilizers who travel with tablet PCs and videos of our training centers as well as of industries to impart a clear image into the trainees' minds of what to expect. Parents are a key part of the process as well, and they are involved at this early stage of counseling. Another key component is offering a basket of courses to the prospective trainees and explaining each course to them so that they can choose a course according to their interests, abilities, knowledge, and skills.

In-Training Counseling and Life Skills Training

A dedicated team of counselor cum life skill trainers have been put in place whose focus is to help trainees prepare for the fundamental shift they are about to see in their life ahead. It is essential to identify individual concerns rather than always address them in groups; and given that most of the students are in the age range of 18–25, they are faced with natural fears, apprehensions, and insecurities about their personal lives and professional life and the future. The in-training counseling is further enhanced through modules like health, hygiene, sanitation, AIDS awareness, change management, and how to cope with migration, industry induction, payslip understanding, Provident Fund and Employee State Insurance (PF/ESI) understanding, and financial literacy.

Pre- and Postplacement Counseling

To help the students adjust to new/big cities and new situations, preplacement counseling is given in the training center just before they travel to the workplace, and postplacement counseling continues until six months on their jobs. The key is providing proper orientation and induction about the company/industry before they go for placement/deployment, explaining to them the growth path in each industry/program, allowing them to choose the best option available to them, hand-holding them until they are well settled, and providing postplacement support.

Application of These Good Practices: Training Methodology

The direct beneficiaries are ordinary people who have been failed by the ordinary education system: school and college dropouts and others who have had limited access to any formal education.

The skill programs are practical, hands-on, and machine oriented and are delivered through tailor-made programs, including some developed in conjunction with local employers, which focus on direct placement across industries like automotive, manufacturing, fabrication, machining, retail, and hospitality. Experiential-based learning, practice-oriented pedagogy and hands-on knowledge and skills are the mantras practiced at Gram Tarang and form the fundamental design principal of any course that is offered.

A live production element is included in each course, which ensures that the trainee moves seamlessly from theory (traditional learning) to practical (applied learning) and production (action learning). Gram Tarang has also involved industry (Ashok Leyland, Godrej, Hyundai, Yamaha, Café Coffee Day, etc.) to build curricula and uses a team of trainers that focuses on developing technical, behavioral, and soft skills and imparts job-specific training to make the youth employment ready.

Implications for the Future: Career Progression, Lifelong Learning

The system of vocational training in India requires, for most courses, a minimum 10th year pass. About 50% on average clear the 10th standard examinations. Community colleges in the United States cannot deny admission to anyone who is over 18 years old and has a sound mind. It is also possible for a community college graduate to ultimately pass out from Harvard University, and this is the same in other countries with advanced vocational education systems such as Australia, Germany, etc. This is simply not possible for anyone in India. The problems faced by the average youth who migrates into the industrial areas as a blue-collar worker need urgent redress. While, in theory, there is horizontal mobility possible for ITI graduates to move to diploma and degree levels, given the socioeconomic pressure to become an earning member of the family at the earliest, most end up joining industry at whatever qualification level they finished and remaining at that level with little or no vertical progression in their organization (or similar organizations) and only marginal improvement (*vis-à-vis* prevalent inflation rates) in their income. At the same time, industry is suffering with high attrition rates, as the youth do not see a growth path for themselves in the organization.

The Gram Tarang–Centurion–NSDC partnership proposes to make a real change to this scenario by giving the youth an opportunity to continue their education while they are at the workplace. This will be achieved through a series of flexible associate diploma, diploma, and degree-level programs that will be delivered through our

proposed centers in the industrial belts and also through various delivery models that will include regular contact classes, weekend classes, evening classes, and online and distance education. The idea is to mainstream the youth with a viable career progression both horizontally and vertically. Gram Tarang–Centurion strongly believes this to be the future of vocational education and qualifications in the country and has run several pilots of these programs in the past (TVS Sundaram Fasteners, KG Mills, Café Coffee Day, Western Refrigeration) and is now rolling the programs out in more than 45 locations across the country. The underlying learning philosophy is that of blended learning where ‘on the job’ workplace learning (50%) is combined with facilitated online app based learning (30%), contact classes (20%) and proctored assessments.

Conclusion: Value of a Revenue Model

Gram Tarang has a market-driven model that is both sustainable and scalable. The $1/3 \times 1/3 \times 1/3$ revenue model it has adopted depends on training costs paid for by the three key stakeholders: individuals, government, and enterprises. The model has been recognized as a best practice and is being replicated in Assam, Meghalaya, Jharkhand, UP, AP, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Karnataka, Maharashtra, NCR and Punjab. The model also depends on partnerships with the government (both state and central) to ensure that fully residential placement-linked training is free of cost (including food and lodging) for the youth. Gram Tarang has trained more than 300,000 youth to date with a strong placement record of over 70% for age-eligible candidates; and it has received international acclaim from the United Nations, World Bank, and British Council and national recognition through five national-level awards: the overall best performer by NSDC, Best Skilling Center by NSDC, best placements by NSDC, and Skills Champions Award at the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry global skills summit, for three years running. It has also received accolades for its work in workplace retention and building career paths for students through its work-integrated programs.

Having set up 34 centers across seven states and having offices in over ten states of India, Centurion University and Gram Tarang are well on their way to achieving their mission of making 100,000 youth employable per annum by 2025.

Link to the presentation material: <https://events.development.asia/materials/20160920/skills-development-priority-sectors-indian-perspective>.

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