

VOCATIONALIZATION OF EDUCATION THROUGH RUSA

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Introduction

India has a population of over 1.35 billion and a workforce of 460 million. To be able to provide employment to such a large number of people is a challenge, which becomes even more daunting as the population grows by more than 1.6 % every year. Unemployment by the current daily status measure is 6.2% of the labour force (NSSO Round 2009-10), which amounts to 27.6 million. In terms of demographics, almost 35% of Indians are younger than 15 years of age, whilst 18% fall within the age group of 15-24. The median age of India is 24 years, making it one of the youngest populations in the world. 54% of India's rural workforce is self-employed (mainly in agriculture, 39%, but a significant share in non-agriculture, 15%), many of whom remain very poor. In urban areas, the self-employed constitute 42.6% (NSSO 2007-08), among whom the incidence of poverty may be lower, but high enough to be a source of concern. Nearly 36% in rural areas are either agricultural or other labor, usually casual workers. There are a negligible number of regular employees in rural areas, and in urban areas only about 13% are regular employees, of which two-fifths are employed by the public sector. More than 90% of the labour force is employed in the unorganized sector, i.e. sectors which don't offer social safety and other benefits of employment in the organized sector.

We churn out a large number of graduates from colleges every year. This result in excessive demand for white-collar jobs that are unavailable in the numbers required. This skewed demand–supply situation also means that individuals are forced to accept jobs that are below their aspirations and are paid less than the commensurate remuneration, thus contributing to the already growing discontent and dissatisfaction. Jobs do not grow at the same rate as the potential workforce, thereby breeding unemployment and in turn discontent. Even for the jobs that are available, a large number of our educated youth are unemployable as per certain surveys.

Impediments in Implementation of Vocational Education

The major bottlenecks impeding the movement of larger numbers of students to vocational education, from the implementation perspective in the States, include the following :

(A) . Low or non-existent linkages with industry. Vocational education would be meaningful and more popular, only if the courses, curriculum as well as learning outcomes are acceptable to the potential employers. Hence the foremost requirement is the forging of a partnership of the educational and vocational training providers with industry/employers.

(B) . The results of skill gap analysis are not known to the States. In the absence of these the States are unable to gauge the projected requirements. The sunrise sectors are quickly moving towards assuming a sizeable, important role and responsibility in the Indian and global economy. Industries are moving rapidly forward and are up-scaling but at the same time are devoid of skill and quality benchmarks. Hence a needs analysis is required at national and the State level as well as a mechanism for laying down industry driven standards for occupations.

(C) . The mind set of Indian parents and students is focused on pursuing 'degree' qualifications and higher education, which often fall short of requirements of employment.

(D) . There has been a decline in the share of agriculture in total employment from 57% in 2004-05 to 53% in 2009-10, but agriculture contributes only 17% to GDP. It is very important that the skills of these people are enhanced, so that their productivity and incomes can rise. Agriculture and allied sectors need to be brought within the NVEQF (National Vocational Education Qualification Framework), to increase productivity through modern technology and stem the rural urban migration.

(E) . Optimum development of all sectors is required for a country the size of India, viz agriculture, manufacturing, services and entrepreneurship, to be able to generate employment for the population and achieve the targets of growth.

(F) . Having established the need for a revamped vocational education, the first and foremost issue to be tackled is availability of qualified vocational teachers for the various levels of qualifications envisaged.

(G) . Youth of the less developed (industrialised) States aspire to move to more 'developed' States, in search of better employment options. In the present scenario this mobility is and often limited to low end jobs. The development of nationally recognised standards and qualifications as envisaged in the National Vocational Education Qualification Framework (NVEQF) would be help fulfill the ambitions of the youth.

(H) . The skills imparted should be gender sensitive in order to empower women. At the same time gender barriers for taking up certain courses need to be broken to make way for a level playing field for boys and girls.

(I) . The provision of Recognition of Prior Learning in the NVEQF needs to be formalised at the earliest so that the expertise of the traditional artisans/craftsmen/experts can be mainstreamed and

their skills honed further. They would be excellent master trainers too. This would lead to reservation and conservation of our rich heritage.

Objectives

Vocationalisation of higher education would seek to achieve the following broad objectives;

- To create a skilled and productive workforce that matches international standards of quality and productivity through integration of competency based vocational education and training with the general education.
- To facilitate flexible learning and competency building paradigms.
- To facilitate the improvement and diversification of skill set of the workforce, based on a defined set of standards (SOS).
- To enable progression to a university level degree through a mechanism of credit accumulation and transfer and bridge courses.

Approach

Vocational education at the higher education levels should ensure:

- ✓ A course credit method as well as horizontal and vertical mobility in the courses leading to qualifications at higher levels is desired.
- ✓ A vast majority of the candidates seeking progression in vocational education are likely to be working people. Hence the time frame provided for completion of credit requirements for award of diploma / Degree should be open ended.
- ✓ Candidates may be interested in completing credits by taking modules in different but related skill sets. Working people may have to relocate for taking up courses as flexibility through open and distance bearing will be provided. Hence flexibility would need to be provided for enrolment of various modules at different institutes.
- ✓ It may not be possible to provide a variety of skill sets through a single Institution. Other academic institutions, polytechnics, ITIs, private institutes and also industries with their available infrastructure should become the knowledge providers.
- ✓ To avoid language becoming a barrier in progress of student at higher levels, the different modules may be taught in different languages. However all students should be encouraged to take least one English language module in the first two levels of the proposed program.
- ✓ Traditional Universities in India generally do not provide much flexibility in their curricula and functioning. The higher level of flexibility envisaged in vocational programs can only be provided if are sensitized and reoriented.
- ✓ Universities providing vocational education should aim to offer degree and diploma programmes in vocational higher education. Such universities should emphasize specialised teaching – learning pedagogy with focus on skill based and practical learning/training. The curriculum should emphasize life coping skills and general educational, English competency,

etc. The University should develop a credit accumulation and transfer system to enable students to pursue opportunities for life-long learning and skill development. Industry participation must be ensured in governance and curriculum design. Industry collaboration should also be sought for funding, placements and apprenticeship for students and in-service training for employees of industries for regular skill development and up-gradation. An important aspect of vocational education should be teachers training.

Vocational Education and RUSA

Under RUSA (*Rashtriya Uchchattar Shiksha Abhiyan*) the following support to vocational education can be considered.

- Funding of universities to vocationalise higher education and strengthening governance, management and financing for vocational education.
- Modernization of management and governance policies, procedures and instructional structures, design and implementation of an effective mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation of the projects, support for project coordination, implementation and management.
- Developing educational standards and core curriculum as the basis for the institutional to design new program, preparation of teacher-training programs for design and delivery of a competency based and modularized curriculum
- Enhancing skills delivery including development and delivery competency based training and continuous skills up gradation.
- Counseling for choice of training and career planning.
- Infrastructure support towards the creation and delivery of new programs.
- Promoting industry academia partnerships.

The success of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) has laid a strong foundation for primary and secondary education in India. However, the sphere of higher education has still has not seen any concerted effort for improvement in access or quality. In the coming decades, India is set to reap the benefits of demographic dividend with its huge working age population. The International Labor Organization (ILO) has predicted that by 2020, India will have 116 million workers in the age bracket of 20 to 24 years, as compared to China's 94 million. India has a very favorable dependency ratio and it is estimated that the average age in India by the year 2020 will be 29 years as against 40 years in USA, 46 years in Japan and 47 years in Europe. In fact, we have more than 60% of our population in the age group of 15 to 59 years. This trend is very significant on the grounds that what matters is not the size of the population, but its age structure. It would be a lost opportunity if we don't take advantage of this dividend. Here in lies the significance of higher education. We must strive to prepare an educated and productive workforce through a concerted effort to improve the quality and relevance of higher education.

The XII Plan continues to maintain focus on higher education in the country, to make it more relevant to the global needs and to remove the inequities in access to education amongst various social groups. Such objectives are sought to be realized by providing adequate inputs and implementing much needed governance and regulatory reforms in the sector. Greater emphasis will be laid on the improvement of the quality of teaching learning processes in order to produce employable and competitive graduates, postgraduates and PhDs. With respect to the planning and funding approach, some key changes are envisaged; (a) funding will be more impact and result oriented, (b) various equity related schemes will be integrated for a higher impact, (c) instead of unplanned expansion, there will be a focus on consolidating and developing the existing system by adding capacities and (d) there will be a greater focus on research and innovation. A paradigm shift proposed by the Planning Commission is in the arena of funding of the state higher education system. Strategic funding of this sector has been strongly proposed in order to make a marked difference in the overall resource endowment for the state higher education sector.

The higher education system in India today suffers from many shortcomings. Our Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) is only 19.4%¹ this means that only a fraction of the population in the age group of 18-23 years is enrolled in higher education institutions. In addition to very low access to higher education in general, there are wide disparities between various social groups. The GERs for SCs, STs and OBCs are far below the average GER and those of other social groups. There is also a wide gender disparity; GER for males is 20.9% while that for females is only 16.5%. There are also differences in the quality of institutions and enrolments between rural and urban areas and between developed states and not's developed ones. Given these myriad challenges, a drastic change is required in the approach that has traditionally been adopted for the development of higher education in the country. There are four broad categories of higher education institutions in India, centrally funded institutions, state funded institutions, deemed institutions and private institutions. While the centrally-funded institutions (Central Universities, IITs, NITs, IISERs, Institutes of National Importance etc) receive generous funding from the center, they have a limited coverage in terms of enrollment. About 94%² of the students enrolled in government funded (48% of total enrolments) or government controlled private institutions come under the state higher education system. It is worth noting that most private education institutions (52% of all enrolments) are affiliated to state universities and come under their academic and administrative control. Thus, any efforts for development in this sector must recognize the importance of state higher education institutions and aim to improve their status. While state universities cater to a large number of students, their funding is only a fraction of that provided to central institutions. Over the years most states have not been able to allocate enough funds to higher education; these meager funds are thinly spread as a result of being shared amongst many institutions. Plan expenditure on higher education in states is almost stagnant. As a result, the quality of infrastructure and teaching in state universities is far below the acceptable

levels. Shortage of funds and procedural bottlenecks cause vacancies in faculty positions and also compel the state public institutions to look for alternate funding options. Linked to faculty quality and availability are the issues of quality of teaching, research output and general management; in state universities these areas have been grossly neglected.

In order to raise funds, most universities rely heavily on the affiliation fees they receive from affiliated institutions and on self-financing courses. Treating affiliation fees as source of income and starting courses for revenue-generation have led to further dilution of quality and perpetuation of inequity. Except a few institutions, most affiliated institutions depend heavily upon the University for administrative, examination- related and curricular matters. This amounts to an unnecessary burden on the university as it is reduced to an administrative and exam conducting body rather than an institution focused on promoting teaching, research and faculty development of associated colleges. This system also takes away the autonomy of affiliated institutions in teaching and conducting examinations. Instead of increasing access in a positive way, the affiliation system creates a highly centralized and inefficient institutional structure, which does not allow its constituents any room for creativity in teaching, learning, curriculum development or research. In such a structure, quality enhancement can only be brought about by reducing the burden at the university level and giving greater autonomy and accountability to the constituents through affiliation reforms. In addition to general issues about the quality of infrastructure, teaching and learning in state universities as compared to central universities, there is also an element of intra- state difference within the states, this leads to better institutions developing in urban or industrial areas and consequent neglect of rural and tribal areas. At the state level, there is a lack of vision and planning for the development of institutions and the higher education sector.

Given the complexities of managing access and equity issues within and amongst states as well as the large number of institutions that already come under the state university system, there is a crying need for holistic planning in higher education focusing on the state as the basic unit. This planning should be done by an autonomous body, which can raise and allocate funds from the state as well as central government and explore options of revenue generation through research, consulting, private and industry partnerships. The State Universities are already provided some funds from the central government through the University Grants Commission. However, UGC's mandate allows it to fund only a limited number of institutions that are Section 12B and 2(f) (UGC Act) compliant.

Given the pitiable resource condition, wide reach of the state university system, and the limitations of the UGC, there is a strong need for a strategic intervention for the improvement of access, equity and quality in Indian higher education, that focuses on state universities and state institutions through a special centrally sponsored scheme in a mission mode. This document proposes a new centrally sponsored scheme for higher education which will be spread over two plan periods (XII

and XIII) and will focus on state higher educational institutions. The scheme will be called Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA).

There are 3064 state universities and about 8500 colleges that can be covered under RUSA. The funding will be provided in the (Center:State) ratio of 90:10 for Special Category States ie North-Eastern States, Sikkim, J&K, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand and 65:35 for Other States and UTs. Funding will be available to private government-aided institutions also, subject to their meeting certain pre-conditions, for permitted activities based on pre-determined norms and parameters.

RUSA will have a completely new approach towards funding higher education in state universities; it will be based on key principles of performance-based funding, incentivizing well performing institutions and decision-making through clearly defined norms. A management information system will be established to gather essential information from institutions. RUSA will aim to provide greater autonomy to universities as well as colleges and have a sharper focus on equity-based development, and improvement in teaching learning quality and research. It will be a new flagship scheme of the government that will pave the way for far reaching reforms at the state level. Many of the problems in the state universities are linked to the archaic systems and regulations that govern them. Without bringing about reforms in the existing governance and regulatory systems, it will not be possible to unleash the potential of the state universities.

Conclusion

The reforms initiated under RUSA will build a self-sustaining momentum that will push for greater accountability and autonomy of state institutions and impress upon them the need to improve the quality of education. In order to be eligible for funding under RUSA, states will have to fulfill certain prerequisites, which include the creation of a State Higher Education Council, preparation of the state perspective plans, allocation of a stipulated % of GSDP towards higher education, academic, sectoral and institutional governance reforms, filling faculty positions etc. Under the scheme, an initial amount will also be provided to the State governments to prepare them for complying with these a-priori requirements. Once eligible for funding under RUSA, after meeting the prerequisite commitments, the states will receive funds on the basis of achievements and outcomes. The yardstick for deciding the quantum of funds for the states and institutions would comprise the norms that reflect the performance in key result areas (access, equity and excellence). The State Plans will capture the current position of the states and institutions with respect to these indicators, as well as the targets that need to be achieved.

The State Higher Education Council will undertake this process of planning, execution and evaluation, in addition to other monitoring and capacity building functions. The detailed institutional structure of RUSA is also presented in this document. At the national level, the scheme will be implemented by the RUSA Mission Authority and assisted by the Project Approval Board, the Special Purpose Vehicle that will create and run the Technical Support Group and the Project Directorate. The

main agency through which RUSA will work in the States will be the State Higher Education Council (SHEC), an autonomous body that will function at an arm's length from the state governments. It may be immediately created through an executive order to be issued by the States, but must be accorded statutory status within 5 years. RUSA has suggested a composition and structure for the Council. The Council will be expected to perform planning, monitoring & evaluation, quality assurance and academic functions, as well as advisory and funding functions. It will plan for the development of higher education at the state level and the State Higher Education Plan prepared by it would constitute the main instrument to guide the entire transformative process in the state higher education sector.

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