CREATING A RIGHT ECOSYSTEM

'Skill India' heads North East

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There is a need to look at the skilling initiatives in the North Eastern region in a different light. The region's population comes with a dominant agrarian mindset. There is an opportunity and a requirement to inculcate need based skill development and entrepreneurship promotion in North East Region. The young and growing population is the region's prized possession and asset and to realize the economic potential the region holds, it is imperative to utilise the demographic advantages and parameters that will lead to market linked skill development.

Resonating to the clarion call of the Prime Minister to 'Skill India', the mission is branching out to all corners of the country. And with the north eastern region receiving renewed attention from the central government, it is imperative that one of the key central missions of the Government of India, the Skill India mission too, is looking to establish ground there. The NE region has a great potential to develop not just as a self-sustained economic unit of India, but also contribute to the overall economic growth story of the country. The Centre had recently announced to take up its Skill India initiatives in the Northeast in a "big way" by setting up skill development centres and industrial training institutes (ITIs) in new districts. The Union Skill Development and Entrepreneurship Minister, had urged the industry of the north eastern region to actively participate in skill development of the region and also recommended one member each for all the 40 Sector Skill Councils from Federation of Industry and Commerce of North Eastern Region (FINER). The minister also proposed to restructure National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) and include FINER as a member.

Need of the hour in the North Eastern India is:

- Dedicated Government single point of contact (SPOC) needs to be deputed to manage skilling in each of the NE States.
- Dedicated Project Lead needed for each state from the Execution Partner (NSDA, NSDC etc.)
- Leverage the Central and State schemes or funds effectively

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The eight north-eastern states—Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim (added in 2002) and Tripura—are growing fast, educating their people at a rate much faster than the rest of India, reducing their dependence on agriculture and inching towards prosperity. But unfortunately the growth is not creating enough jobs and livelihood opportunities, creating a huge mismatch. To address the region's development challenges, including infrastructure, the Central government created the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region.

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in 2004, allocating Rs 2.362 crore to the ministry in 2015-16.

The region has certain distinct advantages with its strategic location having access to the traditional domestic market of eastern India. Also, with its proximity to major states in the east and adjacent countries such as Bangladesh and Myanmar, the region has the advantage for being the vantage entry point for the South-east Asian markets. The resource-rich north-east with its expanses of fertile farmland and a huge talent pool could turn into one of India’s most prosperous regions.

To realise the economic potential the region holds, it is imperative to utilise the demographic advantages and parameters that will lead to market linked skill development. However, owing to its unique challenges, the conventional market-based solutions may not work here, given the issues related to poor infrastructure and connectivity, unemployment and low economic development, law and order problems, etc.

Though India has the edge of a young workforce, the quality of skills is still a challenge. A survey conducted in 2014 reveals that around 78 per cent of the surveyed employers said they are concerned with the growing skills gap in India, while 57 per cent said they currently have open positions for which they cannot find qualified candidates. Of the 14 million people that enter the workforce every year, barely 2 million are formally trained. Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship data reveals that only 4.5 persons out of every 100 are skilled, according to the latest National Sample Survey, with the percentage even lesser in the North-East. Countries such as Korea with 96 per cent skilled workforce and Japan having 80 per cent skilled manpower are way ahead.

Lack of skilling models that are workable and can be practiced is one of the major factors hindering the skill development practices in the region. Although many agencies were doing skill development through various approaches, yet most of them lacked innovation and were not scalable.

**Skillling Challenges in the North East**

A “Skill University” in the North-East needs to be urgently set up as “engaging” with the aspirations of India’s youth is a “challenge”. Setting up “Migration Support Centres” at big hubs can provide better retention and career opportunities for candidates. This measure will be more essential for trainees coming from the North-East, hilly states and other difficult areas, including LWE (left-wing extremism)-affected districts.

**Jobs and hiring in India needs to shift from being ‘qualification based’ to ‘skill based’. With ‘Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao’ and ‘Digital India’ schemes being rolled out by the Government, youth and especially women must be compulsorily taught to use computers and be skilled (in any field). Government also needs to take specific steps for differently-abled people and help create job opportunities for them by building relationships with employer and industry groups.**

Employment opportunities can be created swiftly in agarwood plantations in Meghalaya vis-à-vis local resources and livelihood opportunities. The South East Asian countries’ business model based on creating a vertically integrated business from the management of plantations to the inoculation, harvesting, distilling and processing of agarwood inputs into a multitude of agarwood end products, including the highly-prized Oud oil can be replicated.

According to a study on development and employment generation potential of the north-eastern states, between 2011 and 2021, the region will have only 2.6 million jobs. And half of this demand will be in Assam alone, which is about 1,234,357 jobs. As opposed to the low demand, there will also be a supply of 17 million people in 2011-2022, an excess of 14 million job seekers. The region will generate 2.6 million jobs, but the manpower supply will be 16.8 million persons. So there is a need for a twin approach for developing skills for both local employment and for those who seek to migrate.

Another big challenge facing the implementation and execution of any skill development-related scheme is reaching out, educating and motivating youth in the rural and remote parts of the country. With over thirty years of experience in learning and development, we have realized that the only way to increase the efficiency of the employees in the corporate sector is through innovative training methodologies which need to be upgraded from time to time.

I have often talked on various platforms, about how the Government should make vocational education mandatory for women not pursuing full time education. Jobs and hiring in India needs to shift from being ‘qualification based’ to ‘skill based’. With ‘Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao’ and ‘Digital India’ schemes being rolled out by the Government, youth and especially women must be compulsorily taught to use computers and be skilled (in any field). Government also needs to take specific steps for differently-abled people and help create job opportunities for them by building relationships with employer and industry groups. If the Government can get the major chunk of the above target groups in its umbrella, the dream of empowering and transforming lives will be achieved to a great extent.

**Building bridges**

There is an urgent need to facilitate introduction of multi-skilling institutes for NE states. Along with this, higher education in the region needs to be connected with apprenticeship. Work based learning will lead the career-
pathways. There is also a need to make skilling attractive, relevant and be able to serve the demand to address the major challenge of migration.

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It is necessary to address the issue of employability and design a roadmap for capacity development and skill upgradation in the North East to keep the local talent reap the best of the opportunities and not migrate for employment. A number of sectors can emerge as important sources of employment in the region and it is crucial to identify the relevant education streams and skill sets that need to be developed among the people to enhance their employability.

NE being home to diverse and exotic variety of fruits and other crops could emerge as major centre of food processing industry that can generate huge employment opportunities for the youth in the NE states. Another potential sector with immense opportunities is handlooms that are used for both local consumption as well as for supplies all across the country. Developing skills there with the right kind of technological know-how can add to the overall growth rate of the region whilst preserving the local talent and heritage.

The efforts to promote startup companies and develop entrepreneurship particularly in NE have resulted in favourable changes in the entrepreneurial scenario in the North East. A right ecosystem for the startups has to be created by accessing the right skill, smart capital, networking and exchange, entrepreneurial culture and sound marketing strategies.

Some of the other sectors that could change the face of skilling and employability in the region include hotel and hospitality management, medical and paramedical degrees, agribusiness management, ITeS, BPO and KPO skills, engineering degrees, business management, vocational skills dealing with automobiles, construction, electronics, plumbing, textiles and apparels etc.

While big-ticket investments may be the overall game changers, what is also important is to empower rural communities to create sustainable institutions so that they manage common activities around microfinance, livelihoods and natural resource management. The need for economic empowerment and partnership development follows close as all these initiatives require a committed effort from both the public and the private sector to make a countable impact.

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Paryatak Mitra Programme

The Ministry of Tourism has launched Paryatak Mitra Programme, for college going students to inculcate appropriate tourism traits and knowledge and to enable them to act/work as Tourist Facilitators (Paryatak Mitra).

The development and promotion of tourism is primarily the responsibility of the State Governments/Union Territory Administrations. The Ministry of Tourism as part of its ongoing promotional activities releases campaigns in the international and domestic markets and also undertakes other promotional activities under the Incredible India brand-line to promote India as a holistic destination for tourists and to showcase its various tourism destinations and products.