

Higher Education and Skill Development in Rural Assam

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Abstract

Higher education is the most matured level of education and hence regarded as the backbone of the modern society. It has the power to transform human beings into human resources. Along with primary and secondary education, higher education is also an important instrument to build future generations. Along with higher education, the concept of skill development is also central to improve employability, to improve livelihood opportunities, to reduce poverty, enhance productivity as well as to promote environmentally sustainable development. Rural India is the real face of our country. In India, majority of the higher educational institutions are urban centric. Therefore, most of the higher educational institutions in rural areas lack quality. As a result, rural population are deprived from getting quality education. They also faced problems like lack of availability of capital, lack of industrial development, lack of scientific method in agricultural sector, lack of technical skill, lack of educational facilities, lack of entrepreneurial skill etc. which leads them to restrain from engaging in various productive activities or jobs. So skill development in rural areas is a key part of overall development of a country and higher education institutions have an important role to play in this regard. To address the needs of skill development in rural areas, government has taken various initiatives. However quality of the skill development programmes is still a challenge. The objective of this paper is to highlight the role of higher educational institutions in skill development in rural areas. Moreover, the paper will also highlight various government initiatives on skill development programmes along with identifying challenges that hinders skill development practices with special reference to the state of Assam.

Keywords: higher education, skill development, rural population, productivity, employment

1. Introduction

Education is a key enabler towards driving the agenda of inclusive and sustainable development. Stepping forward and expanding facilities to higher education can enhance India's competitiveness in the global economy, thereby reinforcing the social and economic development of the country. Therefore ensuring access to quality education for all, in particular for the poor and rural population is essential for the economic and social development. In the wake of changing economic development, it is very important to emphasis on the skill development of young aspirants those who are basically studying higher education. Higher education institutions are the only platform to provide the opportunity of quality education that decides the quality of human resources of the country. Since education, vocational training, skill development course are the central pillars of employability and employment of workers and sustainable enterprise development, so skill development needs to be connected to enhance the quality of the students of higher education centre. In India, millions of people are living in villages and majority of

them still living below poverty line. Hence, for alleviation of poverty and to eradicate unemployment problems, skill development among educated youths and workers is most essential. Thus various skill development initiatives are being taken up by the Central Government as well as by the Government of Assam. Every year, State Institute of Rural Development (SIRD), Assam organizes a number of training programmes on skill development and management development for youths, entrepreneurs, farmers and women etc. It has an important role to play for nation building as well as for nation moving. The North-Eastern region is comparatively underdeveloped region of the country, so it needs special attention. For the overall development of the region, the states have important role to play for the effective implementation of job oriented schemes and programmes.

The main objective of this paper is to discuss the motivational role of the institutional support in rural areas of Assam, different skill development facilities provided by State Institute of Rural Development for rural entrepreneurship development and also its challenges and provisions for further improvement.

2. Methodology

Regarding the methodology part, the paper is primarily analytical in nature and is extensively based on secondary sources such as books, journals, research papers, e-sources etc.

3. Analysis and Discussion

The role of higher education in the development of human resources for national development can never be disputed. Higher education can produce high level professionals, technical and managerial personnel, generate new knowledge through research and impart such knowledge leading to development of human resources. Along with higher education, the concept of skill development is also central to improve employability, to improve livelihood opportunities, to reduce poverty, enhance productivity as well as to promote environmentally sustainable development. Furthermore, coordinated efforts are needed to develop an integrated approach that improves access to relevant, good quality education and training to all rural people. Rural India is the real face of our country. In India, majority of the higher educational institutions are urban centric. Therefore, most of the higher educational institutions in rural areas lack quality. As a result, rural population are deprived from getting quality education. They also faced problems like lack of availability of capital, lack of industrial development, lack of scientific method in agricultural sector, lack of technical skill, lack of educational facilities, lack of entrepreneurial skill etc. which leads them to restrain from engaging in various productive activities or jobs. So skill development in rural areas is a key part of overall development of a country and higher education institutions have an important role to play in this regard.

3.1 Role of higher education institutions in skill development

Across the developing world, the challenge of providing appropriate education and relevant skills to rural youth needs to be met. It is necessary to provide a basic education that motivates them to study, training to give those skills for the labour market and opportunities for some to pursue higher education.

3.1.1 Creating effective convergence

Higher education aims to create effective convergence between school education and the government's skill development efforts

3.1.2 To enhance the efficiency of the students

To develop relevant vocational, skill and competence among students improves their quality of life. With their formal education, higher education has to play an important role to make the student efficient and

all-rounder one. Higher education tries to provide the students different skill development program to increase their efficiency.

3.1.3 To enhance the computer knowledge of students

Along with the formal education, higher education should introduce different computer based knowledge to make them educated in the field of information and communication technology. Since the economy is growing with the ICT based education, so higher education should provide the proper knowledge regarding the computer related works with their formal education. Curriculum for skill development has to be reoriented on a continuing basis to meet the demand of the employer. Educational institutions should appoint faculty having expertise for giving a smooth and lucid knowledge to the students.

3.1.4 To enhance the expectation of students

Higher education should emphasis on build awareness about career and employment options for the students; provide education, training and work place experience. It should be develop the future aspiration of the students. Therefore, higher education institutions should conduct seminar, workshop and conference on skill development.

3.2 Role of Higher Education in Rural Entrepreneurship Development

In the development of rural India, entrepreneurship is of immense importance. In India more than 76 per cent people are living in rural areas. The rural people are expected to participate in the process of economic development. In this regard the Government and its sponsored institutions has important role. It acts as an umbrella of participatory approaches in rural development as well as poverty alleviation programmes.

With the macro objective to achieve the above, State Institute of Rural Development (SIRD), Assam had come up with various training courses covering cost effective techniques, management development programmes, technology support, capacity building on skill upgradation etc. Seminars and workshops on issues like education, health, sanitation, drinking water, social justice, equity, social problems for officials and non-officials, NGO and other organization representatives are being conducted. Pilot projects from the entrepreneurs are called for.

3.2.1 Role of SIRD, Assam in Rural Entrepreneurship Development

The State Institute of Rural Development is the apex body in the broad field of training and research in rural development which came into existence on April, 1998 under the Society's Registration Act, 1860. The SIRD plays an important role for entrepreneurship development in rural areas of Assam. The main objectives of the institute is to organize training courses on various operational areas such as implementation procedures, appropriate technologies, cost effective techniques, convergence of services, habitation development etc. for officials and non officials involved in implementation of rural development programmes, elected representatives of Panchayati Raj Institutions and representatives of Non- Governmental Organizations and Community Based Organizations. The Institute created a wide range of infrastructure for providing quality inputs and other support services required for the growth of micro enterprises in rural areas. Every year SIRD organizes a number of training programmes like self employment oriented training programmes on skill and management development for youths, entrepreneurs, farmers, women etc. Government of India has declared the institute as resource centre on information, education and communication activities in the North-Eastern states to enhance awareness about prospects and problems pertaining to rural development. Moreover, institutional support services are one of the most important aspects of micro enterprise development in rural areas. For that purpose SIRD has set up growth centre in different places in the State. These growth centres provided theoretical

and practical training to the local youth, women and farmers for taking up income generating activities in the most scientific manner as far as possible. The SIRD organizes various training programmes for officials and non officials involved in implementation of rural development programmes such as elected representatives of Panchayati Raj Institutions, members of different NGOs etc. and institute also organizes skill oriented training programme for local youths, farmers and women etc. The Institute has also created essential infrastructure like Mushroom Laboratories, Pig Breeding Centres, Poultry Hatcheries, Brooding Centres, Parent Stock Rearing Farms etc. so as to ensure timely availability of quality inputs to the SHGs at reasonable prices. Demonstration units have also been set up at different places to motivate the rural people to take up such activities in a scientific way to make micro- enterprises sustainable in the rural areas. The SIRD, Assam has set up the Resource centre in IT and Skill Development at Kahikuchi in order to ensure and transfer the technology development benefit directly to the communities to uplift the rural youths at the grass root level. The Centre will help SIRD to organize intensive courses in the broad field of Panchayati Raj, decentralized planning, IT, courses on various management, courses on skill development for livelihoods etc. Since 2001-2013, the Extension Centre set up by the institute has provided managerial and skill development training to 1.6 lakhs persons comprising youths, farmers, weavers, artisans and women for livelihood. About 6000 persons have undergone skill development training on different activities during 2013-14. The State Level Satellite Studio is completed at SIRD's Kahikuchi campus for satellite based training programmes. The North Eastern Space Application Centre under ISRO, Shillong / ISRO, Ahmedabad has been providing technical guidance and support. Fifteen Receiving Stations have been set up in Extension Centres and selected Block HQs for satellite based training programmes.

From the above discussion it has been observed that SIRD plays an important role in the entrepreneurship development in the rural areas of Assam which will help the rural development of the region. Though the role of SIRD in the area of rural entrepreneurship development is indeed commendable for its contribution towards socio-economic growth of the state, but still the growth of enterprises in Assam particularly in rural areas are far behind in comparison to the other states of India.

3.3 Government Initiatives on Rural Skill Development

The government of Assam in collaboration with the Central Government have embarked on skill development missions to meet the aspirations of the youth in the rural areas through training, enhance employability and employment. Moreover, several training partners, academic institutions and vocational training centres are actively involved in a range of programs that enable livelihoods, increase productivity and income levels of people in the state. Most initiatives are a part of national schemes like PMKVY and DDUGKY apart from regional schemes from the state. While the central government has taken various skill development initiatives for rural youth such as creating infrastructure by setting up ITIs, Polytechnics, community ITIs, secondary schools in under-served areas, upgrading existing ITIs, polytechnics, introducing Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gram Kaushal Yojana (DDU-GKY), Director General of Training- Modular Employable skills (DGT-MES), MGNREGA, Ajeevika Skills etc., the present Government of Assam also has taken various initiatives under its skill development mission. Some of them are mentioned below.

- Department for Skill, Employment and Entrepreneurship has been formed and notified on 26th September, 2016.
- Assam Skill Development Mission (ASDM) is being operationalised with District level connect. District Mission Management Unit has been set up in every district with the Deputy Commissioners

as the Chairman, District Executive Committee.

- MoU has been signed with ITE Education Services, Singapore for the purpose of establishing a North East Skills Centre (NESC) in Guwahati to cater to students from all over the North Eastern Region of India.
- Setting up of Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Kendra (PMKK) in unutilised ITIs is in process.
- Setting up of Skill Universities in the State is being explored.
- Potential collaboration with Australian Government for setting up of Training of Trainers (TOT) and Training of Assessors (TOA) institute is being explored.
- State Govt. is in process of formulating a “Skill Development Policy” to meet the challenges of skilling at scale with speed, standard, sustainability and inclusiveness.
- Setting up skill development centres pertaining to rural sector job roles providing gainful livelihood to the rural population and focus on promotion of organic sector through training, is being explored by utilizing KVKs.
- Formulation of a comprehensive strategy to provide skill training programme for more than 8 lakh tea garden workers is in process.
- Setting up of Drivers Training Institute is under process.
- Discussion is going on for sharing or providing of underutilised/unutilised ITI infrastructure to CIPET, NSDC training partners, industry houses etc.

These are some of the major initiatives taken by the government of Assam for skill development in the state.

3.4 Challenges and suggestions for skill development programs

There are so many challenges and problems in skilling the underdeveloped rural youths particularly in Assam. Some of them are-

- Government put emphasis only on the skill development of youth people and neglect the skill development of women, disabled and disadvantage sections of the society.
- The population growth in rural Assam is faster than the rate of job creation. This is due to lack of knowledge among people, lack of health concern, illiteracy etc.
- There is lack of awareness among people about the government schemes and initiatives on skill development.
- Compared to other parts of the country, the N-E region and particularly Assam is more remote in terms of industries and technologies. In Assam, the few industries are there which are in pathetic condition or total collapsed.
- Most of the Assamese families are living below poverty line and they are only living from hand to mouth. They are not concern about knowledge and education.
- Lack of proper vocational trainings in rural areas is another reason. The literacy rate is increasing significantly even in rural areas but they are deprived of proper vocational courses.
- Seasonal nature of agricultural labour is also to blame. Agriculture in rural Assam is still traditional and people engaged in it for few months. They are seasonal worker and most of the time they have nothing to do.
- Lack of good infrastructure in most of the training centres and poor quality trainers are also the main problem.

- Majority of formal training institutions are located in urban areas. Hence large proportions of rural population do not possess any training on skill development.
- Demand supply mismatch- the number of people skilled under the schemes is low as compared to the demand created by them.

Suggestions

- The Government needs to take specific steps for skill development of women's, differently abled and disadvantage sections of the society.
- The government should set up more standardized skill based institutions or skill development centres across the country, particularly in rural areas with a view to provide equal access to all segments and sections of the society.
- The government needs to invest heavily on skill development programs and pursue new models to improve the quality and relevance of education and training.
- Government should also encourage and develop agriculture based industries in rural areas of Assam and provide modern technology to it.
- Enhance the capability of the existing system to ensure equitable access for all.
- Striking a right balance between school education and the government's skill development efforts.

4. Conclusion

To sum up, we need to recognize that the knowledge, skills and productivity of our growing young and dynamic workforce form the backbone of our economy. To reap the benefits of such a young workforce, we need to implement the reforms in the education system and also bring forth new factors of production, namely knowledge, skills and technology which have the ability to unleash the productive frontiers of the economy in the most efficient and dynamic way. It is time to bring in the changes that will give us the momentum to find a place in the global scenario. Govt. and public both should work hand-in-hand to support each other and look for the required upliftment of education. There is an urgent need to facilitate introduction of multi-skilling institutes, particularly in rural areas of Assam. Along with this, higher education needs to be connected with apprenticeship. The training provided for skill development should empower the rural youths to promote a culture of innovation based entrepreneurship thereby providing an institutional framework to reach the expected outcome. Awareness camp for skill development should be set up in aggressive manner. There is a necessity to build up a single window operation, one stop solution to cater various needs of the citizens and bring government, business and education services to rural India through an expanding network of village level franchise partners. In fact, the overall success of the skill development programmes as well as the economic development of the rural areas of Assam is fully depended on the effective implementation of the various schemes of rural and skill development with full participation of the youth.

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