The Need for Skill Development in India and Contribution of Public-Private Partnership: The Case of National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC)

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Abstract

India is growing as a prominent destination for almost every market among the developing nations world over. Increasing manufacturing capacity and export of commodities; incline towards the substantial growth of the country. The changing composition of the Indian economy in terms of its structure has affected the demand pattern of the industrial labor. In the past, Indian labor was chiefly engaged in agriculture sector but in recent decades the shift has been towards the industry and service sectors. As a matter of fact, the Indian workforce lags far behind the required expertise and skills to perform the jobs in an efficient mode. This skill gap not only leads to the loss of productivity but also adds to huge financial losses of the nation. To ensure a comprehensive economic growth of the country, skill development has emerged as a matter of immediate concern. The present study is an attempt to document the initiatives of National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) for improving the skills of the Indian workforce. The NSDC is a unique example of the Public-Private Partnership in this field. An intensive review of NSDC publications, impact studies of NSDC activities and direct interaction with skill development centre members assisted by NSDC has helped to unravel the changes that NSDC has brought for skill development in India.

Key Words: Skill Development, Skill Gap, Indian Workers, National Skill Development Corporation, NSDC, Public-Private Partnership, PPP, Vocational Training, ITI, ITC.

Introduction

India today is home to approximately 1.3 billion people second only to China. The country boasts of having one of the youngest populations in the world. The economists are perhaps more interested in the fact that the workforce in the working age group exceeds to those dependent on them. This trend is expected to continue for many years more years to come. India has a massive work force, which if utilized in a proper and efficient manner can speed up the national economic growth rate.
Most of the developing nations working population are dependent on agricultural activities for their sustenance and India is no exception to this fact. Agriculture even today is the biggest employer followed by the retail sector in India. As per International Labour Organization survey in 2012, a total of 54% of the Indian workforce in one or other form is engaged in agricultural activities. The contribution of agriculture that employs more than half of the workforce was only 13.7% for the year 2012-13 to the GDP which was 51.9% for the year 1950-51.

According to the 'India – Vision 2020' report, issued by the Planning Commission of India, by the year 2019-2020 workforce engaged in agriculture would come down to only 39%.

Though people have started shifting to high productivity sectors, yet many of them lack the basic knowledge and skills to perform their job efficiently. Most of the time its only experience that helps them gather the required expertise to perform their job. The slow and unplanned learning not only leads to loss of production but many times cause accidents. The vocational training is seen as the primary method of imparting skills to the work force.

Today skill development is one of the major concerns of the nation. The expected and the present level of skill, the 'skill gap' of the Indian work force is huge. A lot is done by government and private companies to meet the issue of imparting skills to the work force in order to make them more productive and efficient. Among various forms of initiatives, one is the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) mode to undertake the skill development programmes. One fine example of (PPP) and the focus of this paper is National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) that works for bridging the skill gap and thus helping trainees grab better job opportunities.

**Skilled & Unskilled Labor Scenario In India**

Though India is high on the number of work force, it is still far behind the quality of the same. The number of skilled labor has increased in the recent years but it still continues to be significantly lower than that of other neighboring Asian countries like Singapore and China. The shortage of skilled labor in terms of quality as well as quantity has posed problems in productivity and caused losses to the companies.

In the coming years India is expected to witness an addition of around 200 million people to its
working age i.e., between 18 to 60 years population. About 400 million people are presently working in India. By the year 2020 the country expects to have about 700 million people in the working age out of which 200 shall be graduates and the remaining 500 need vocational skills.

Entry of more global companies in the future shall witness major technological advancements in the subsectors and thus raise the need for skilled labor to operate machineries.

From the following figure is evident that these 14 subsectors account for about 55% of the total employment in the industry and services sectors. The greatest demand is expected to be in construction, transportation, hospitality, automobile and textile & food processing subsectors.

![Figure 2: Industry and Service Sector Employment in India - 2010](image)

Source: National Sample Survey Organisation (2009-10); Sector Skill Reports, National Skill Development Corporation (2009)

With the changing economic environment, the demand for better-quality products and services has given rise to huge demand for skilled labor. According to the Eleventh Five Year Plan, only 10% of the Indian workforce has formal skill training in the form of higher education, technical or vocational training. The percentage of the workforce that receives formal skill training is 68% in the United Kingdom, 75% in Germany, 80% in Japan and 96% in Korea. In 2008-09, India had an annual skilling capacity of 4.3 million, against 12.8 million youth joining the workforce annually.

3. NEED TO ATTEND THE SKILL GAP AND ITS COMPLEXITIES

As per a study conducted by the International Labour Organization, the difficulty to fill up jobs in India is 48%, far higher than the global average of 34%. The MSMEs are the worst hit as they lack funds to invest in the recruitment process and they are also unable to set up captive skill training institutes. It is worth mentioning that if the unavailability of the skilled labor in India is not contained, the multinationals and other employers may opt to substitute labor with technology by more automation in their processes.

More automation generally tends to reduce the amount of labor involvement and is therefore seen as a huge threat by many as it will reduce the chances of inclusive growth of the Indian economy in the long-run.
Indian government estimates suggest that 93% of workforce is employed in the unorganized/informal sector, which lacks sustainability by a structured skill development system. It is difficult to target this section of the population for skill development programmes due to some inherent limitations. Moreover, the opportunity cost of skilling, in the form of loss of employment and wages for the duration of the skill training session acts as a barrier to skill acquisition.

In India the skill development atmosphere is a complex one and the stakeholders face many challenges. For years the public sector has dominated the vocational trainingscene in India. Nevertheless, the private sector's participation and prominence in this area has seen a gradual increment over the years, specifically in the high demand services sector. Additionally a lot many NGOs also put efforts to enhance the employability of the vulnerable sections of the society by the means of skill development training programmes.

Vocational training is in Concurrent list in India i.e., the responsibility and the jurisdiction is shared by both – the central government and the state government. Ministry of Labour coordinates the activities regarding public sector training infrastructure by the Directorate General of Employment and Training. At the state level this activity is undertaken by the Department of Employment and Training. The training infrastructure takes the shape of Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and Industrial Training Centers (ITCs) at the ground level. According to the National Council on Skill Development reports, presently there are about 9,400 ITIs and ITCs running in the country with a capacity to train nearly 1.3 million people in total. The courses offered vary in duration ranging from a few weeks to three years.

Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and Industrial Training Centers (ITCs) are unable to deliver the needed quality education and suffer from limitations. The industry and service sector have serious concerns over the outdated course curriculum and the absence of appropriate equipments and infrastructure in these institutes. These shortcomings often lead to the students enrolled to re-learn the skills at their work place. Many studies suggest that such workers get wages that are at par with those workers who are simply 10th or 12th pass, serving as a dissatisfaction source in terms of time & money investment in acquiring skills for the former.

ITIs/ITCs' evaluation framework does not offer a competency-based certification, which makes it difficult for the employers to interpret the level of skill acquisition through such courses. Additionally, till recent time vocational education and the blue-collar jobs were perceived as a low level dignity domains. Majority of Indian youth still prefer the white-collar jobs, creating difficulties in their mobilization for skill training programmes. Vocational training is not seen as a viable alternative for formal education most of the times.

Socio-economic factors also act as barriers to skilling activities. Women participation in the skill training programmes particularly in rural and backward regions is very low, the reluctance still continues. Unawareness about skill development opportunities, unawareness about industry specific skill training and the mind set of not migrating to other areas in search for work are among the most important related concerns.

Unskilled workers are mostly unemployed or at best work at the least possible wages and thus suffer from acute exploitation and live in poverty. The wages earned by the skilled workers are manifold higher than those earned by unskilled workers. Skill training provides every chance to the individuals to expand their employment opportunities and thus, earn better and live a better life.
The Indian Government Initiatives For Skill Development

Skill development is considered among the prime concerns as essential for a comprehensive and balanced economic growth of India. Under the Coordinated Action Plan for Skill Development (2008), the Government of India established a three-tier institutional framework consisting of the Prime Minister’s National Council on Skill Development, the National Skill Development Coordination Board (NSDCB) and the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), in order to bridge the existing skill gap in the country.

Prime Minister’s National Council on Skill Development

This is the apex body of the three-tier structure. It includes Prime Minister and Union Ministries like – HRD, Finance, Rural Development, Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation and Labour and Employment. The Chairperson of National Manufacturing Competitiveness Council, Chairperson of NSDC, Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission and 6 skill development experts are also a part of this Council.

National Skill Development Coordination Board (NSDCB)

NSDCB works in coordination with 17 Union Ministries, State Governments and the NSDC. It includes Secretaries of the Central Ministries of Labour and Employment, Rural Development, Finance and Higher Education along with the Chief Secretaries of four states by rotation (for a period of two years), three skill development specialists, the Chairperson of the National Skill Development Corporation, the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission and the Secretary of the Planning Commission.

National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC)

NSDC is unique among the three; being a Public Private Partnership body. It runs chiefly under the supervision of Department of Economics Affairs, Ministry of Finance of the Government of India. Among the private sector partners are Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) and Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM).
The National Skill Development Corporation (nsdc)

The Indian government formed the NSDC in 2009 to work with private companies and such organizations to more people who would have the skills necessary to be productively employed by the year 2022. Under NSDC guidance more than 2500 physical and mobile training stations have been created to support VET trainees in about 352 districts across the nation. The aim is to make the one-fifth of the world’s working-age population (Indian population) accelerate on the way of high performing assets. The responsibility of imparting scalable, market-relevant skills to the youth is pivotal to the working of NSDC.

Introduction

The NSDC was set up as a part of a national skill development mission to fulfill the growing need in India for skilled manpower across sectors and narrow the existing gap between the demand and supply of skills.

The National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) was established in the year 2009 as a non-profit company under Section 25 of the Companies Act with an equity base of Rs. 10 crore. It is one of a kind Public-Private Partnership in India. The government of India has a 49% share and the Private sector industry associations have a 51% share. It aims to promote skill development in India by promoting large, quality, for-profit vocational institutions. Its mandate is also to enable support systems such as quality assurance, information systems and train the trainer academies either directly or through partnerships.

The NSDC seeks to catalyze investment by the private players in skill development area. It has been given the task of attaining the goal of skilling 150 million people by the year 2022, which is roughly 13 million a year. The Labour Ministry and the Ministries under National Skill Development Board have been entrusted with a target of 100 million and 250 million respectively. The differentiated focus for 21 sectors under NSDC’s purview and its understanding of their viability shall make these sectors attractive to private investment.

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Source: www.ncdcindia.org

Table 1: 21 sectors under NSDC’s purview
NSDC has a 14 member board headed by the Chairman who is from the private sector. The National Skill Development Fund is a 100% government owned trust that invests in the NSDC, and is run by professional fund managers. The structure provides NSDC with autonomy, stature and continuity. The corporation has a tiered decision making structure comprising – The Board of Directors, Board SubCommittees, Executive Council, National Skill Development Fund. Each is given a clear role in the NSDC's operations, its activities and strategy to facilitate the corporation's mandate of coordinating and simulating private sector skill development programmes with enhanced flexibility and effectiveness. It offers different funding-modes to assist the private skill development initiatives - loans, equity infusion and in special cases even grants are offered.

Figure 4: Structure of the National Skill Development Corporation

The Asian Development Bank provides technical assistance and funding to NSDC. Along with giving funds to the institutions, NSDC also supports students to undergo skill development programmes by providing soft loans. The chief revenue sources for the NSDC are the interest on loans and dividends.

The NSDC adopts a phased and detailed due-diligence procedure to evaluate and select proposals for funding the vocational training initiatives. The process is done across six sets of criteria:

- Employer view of demand for the specific skills.
- Alignment with the NSDC's mission.
- Robustness of overall plan and operating model.
- Ability to leverage partnerships.
- Ability to leverage financial requirements.
- Ability to leverage management capacity.

So far, NSDC has disbursed in excess of Rs.2,235 million for funding various skill development initiatives across the nation.

The Sector Skill Councils (sscs)

Sector Skill Councils are industry-led organizations that are responsible for coordinating skilling initiatives for each sector. SSCs try to ensure that the industry is actively involved in the skilling activities, thereby minimizing the imbalance in the industry requirements and the relevance of the training imparted. It is an attempt to attain and maintain the requirement of skilled workforce, both – qualitatively and quantitatively.

SSCs have the following functions:

Research

- Skill development needs identification.
- Labour Market Information Systems set up.
- Sector-wise skill development plan development and skill inventory maintenance.
- Human resources productivity analysis.

**Delivery Mechanism**

- Development of skill competency standards and qualifications.
- Planning and implementing training programmes for course trainers.
- Employee training programmes.
- Development of training-delivery mechanisms.

**Quality Assurance**

- Setting standards for affiliation and accreditation process.
- Certification tests for the trainers and employees.
- Accreditation of sector-specific courses.
- Promotion of academies of excellence.

The standards developed by the SSCs will help the companies to assess the employee performance and skill development needs. The institutes will benefit by making proper fit between skill demand and supply, making it easier for the candidates to get an appropriate job.

The collaboration between the government and the private sector in the skill development sector has different forms ranging from the Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs), to private skill training institutes.

Some of the examples on this line of effort are – Centrum Work Skills India (Partnership between Bharti Group and NSDC) which aims to train 12 million people across 11 states in 383 districts by 2022, iStar Skill Development (Bangalore based firm) which focuses on training needs for the financial services industry, NIIT Yuve Jyoti Limited (NYJL), (Partnership between NSDC and NIIT) which aims to train approximately 70 lakh youth across the nation in multi-skilling mode by 2022.

**Special Initiatives By NSDC**

**Udaan**

This initiative by the NSDC has a special focus on the population of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. The NSDC tries to bring along the private players in the skill training sector for imparting skills to the people of this state. NSDC has been successful in getting some of the India's biggest corporate groups interested in the skill training programmes for graduates and post-graduates in J&K. Under the “Udaan” scheme, up to 40,000 people would be skilled and placed over a period of 5 years. A dedicated website for “Udaan” has been launched as well.

**Business Plan Competition**

NSDC in collaboration with private institutes organizes Business Plan Competition occasionally to encourage students of colleges nationwide to come up with business models of skill development. Emphasis is given on innovation and sustainability along with other parameters.

**Skill Gap Studies**

NSDC has made attempts to study & add new and emerging sectors and state specific skill gap analysis in order to meet the skill gap. District-wise skill gap studies were commissioned for Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and others. Studies on financing of vocational training and up-skilling of trainers were also commissioned.

**Investment in Skill Sonics**

In June 2013 NSDC invested an amount of Rs. 22.5 crores in SkillSonics wherein it took equity and offered debt. SkillSonics provides an industry-led public partnership vocational training model in India. It is adapted from the highly victorious Swiss Vocational Education and Training system and intends to train about a million engineering technicians by the year 2022.
Built on a pilot project that commenced in 2009, they have trained over 600 apprentices and have plans to step up their presence to eight states, covering all the major engineering clusters across the country.

Skill Sonics courses are designed in collaboration with Swissmem (Swiss Mechanical and Electrical Manufacturing Industries) and SFIVET (Swiss Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training). Skill Sonics adapts the world-renowned Swiss content and pedagogy to the Indian environment. The trainees spend about 65% of the time doing course-work (mostly practical work and projects), and the remaining time is spent on productive activities on the shop floor or company-specific training. This helps the companies to benefit from immediate increase in productivity of entry-level technicians. Courses are also offered to existing technicians that lead to continuous improvement of existing workforce.

Skill Sonics conducts rigorous assessments at regular intervals during the course and on successful completion of the course; the apprentices take the Indian National Apprenticeship and Swissmem Certification exam. The dual certification and thorough appraisal of the skills, teamwork ability and on-floor behavior significantly improve the employability of these apprentices. NSDC hopes to attend the skill gap problem through Skill Sonics as the Swiss VET model is credited to be the backbone of Switzerland's thriving economy. Industry, Academia and other stakeholders are also extending their support to NSDC to achieve its goal.

The 'STAR' Scheme

Standard Training Assessment and Reward (STAR) is a scheme launched by the Indian Government as an attempt to encourage skill development for youth by providing monetary rewards on successful completion of approved training programs. As per NSDC publications, the scheme has covered 35,000 youth and is on a way to achieve 1.2 lakh mark by March 2014. Through STAR scheme NSDC also aims to standardize the skill certification process.

NSDC's Role In Promoting Skill Development Initiatives

NSDC aims to develop partnerships with multiple stakeholders and build on current efforts, rather than undertaking too many initiatives directly or duplicating efforts currently underway. To scale up efforts necessary to achieve the objective of skilling/up-skilling 150 million people, NSDC strives to

- Develop ultra low cost, high quality, innovative business models.
- Attract significant private investment.
- Ensure that its funds are largely 're-circulating', i.e. loan or equity rather than grant.
- Create leverage for itself.
- Build a strong corpus.

Keeping the above mentioned dimensions, NSDC plays three important roles:

Funding and Incentive Providing

This includes providing loans or equity, providing grants and supporting financial incentives to select private sector initiatives to improve financial viability through tax breaks etc. The nature of funding (equity, loan, and grant) depends on the viability or attractiveness of the segment and to some extent on the type of player (for-profit private, non-profit industry association or non-profit NGO).

5.4.2 Enabling Support Services

The institutes require a number of inputs or support services like- curriculum, faculty and their training, standards and quality assurance, technology platforms, student placement mechanism and so on. The NSDC assists the institutes by plating an enabling role in some of these support services, most importantly, setting up
standards and accreditation systems in partnership with industry associations.

**Shaping/Creating**

In the near term, NSDC proactively seeds and provide momentum for large scale participation by private players in skill development. NSDC identifies critical skill groups, develops models for skill development and attract potential private players and provide to these efforts.

**Challenges Before NSDC**

While India churns out hundreds of thousands graduates each year, very few of those are really employable. A study conducted by NASSCOM has suggested that only 25% of the engineers that graduate every year are employable in terms of the required abilities. The country produces less than 2 million skilled, vocational trained workers every year whereas the expected figure for the year 2020 is much higher. The 2 million mark constitutes hardly 2% of the total number of students in the age bracket of 15-25. The Europe and the East Asian countries have this figure as 80% and 60% respectively. This is a data only for one section and is good enough to realize the huge skill gap India faces in the near future.

![Figure 5: Incremental Labour Requirements - 2022](source: National Sample Survey Organization (2009-10); Sector Skill Reports, National Skill Development Corporation (2009))

**Construction, automobile, textiles and transportation** are among the highest skilled labor demanding subsectors by the year 2022. Collectively these subsectors tend to generate a demand of more than 282 million skilled workers. Studies show a skill gap in these subsectors, signifying that the total demand may be higher than the incremental demand.

Following are the major challenges before NSDC:

**Shortage of Qualified Trainers**

Shortage of well qualified and quality trainers adds to the limits of value addition from these courses. The students thus passing out suffer from a serious qualitative gap and get employed in sectors that are unrelated to their educational qualification, indicating a mismatch between the skills required for performing jobs and training imparted. The skill training institutes and industries tie up is not strong enough to provide campus placements at every training institute.
Matching of Skill Supply with Industry Demand

Companies look for domain specific skills in the individual. Numerous skill development centers still work on the retro style of training and the trainees are given training in the skills the institutes run and not what the industry demands. This adds to the un-employability of the trainees. If the scores of training institutes mushrooming in India can deliver the country a skills edge, the country could perhaps reap the benefits of its demographic dividend.

Dropout rate of Trainees Enrolled in Skill Development Programmes

The dropout rate out of training institutes has always been a headache for the government and others involved. Though there are number of incentives provided to the students who enroll with these institutes, this issue seems to be still painful. One of the primary reasons for this phenomenon is the weak basic education in the country, which ultimately makes it difficult for the students to clutch the basic concepts taught at such institutes.

Attending the Geographical and Sector-Wise Skill Gap

The skill capacity distribution across the country is quite uneven. Market forces, extent of industrialization and the state governments view for the same are some primary contributing factors. The eastern states have a very low per capita provision of skill training capacity relative to the northern states such as Himachal Pradesh, Haryana and Punjab. More industrialized states witness a higher number of vocational training institutions than the ones with lower industrial activities.

Creating Opportunities for the Trainees

Imparting training to the people is only side of the coin and the other being the opportunity creation on the part of these training institutes. There are quite a few examples where the skill development centers assist the trainees to get jobs and many even arrange for campus selections. The ratio of people getting jobs and the opportunities available is going to see a drastic change in the near future. Skills are a necessary condition for improving incomes and being fit for a job, they don't create jobs by themselves.

Up-gradation of the training institutes

The lack of proper infrastructure and out-dated equipments in the training institutes, especially those running under direct government aid, like state run ITIs and ITCs act as a hurdle in quality training. Absence of latest machineries keeps the trainees deprived of learning the skills to operate the automated equipments thus pushing them behind in job fetching race.

Attain the mark of 150 million in the quality terms

With issues cited above and the giant figure of 150 million people in itself is a huge challenge before NSDC to achieve. The quality of vocational education has been time and again criticized by industrialists and economists both. Most of the training in India is out-dated that complicates the un-employability issue.

Conclusion

The Indian workforce is much behind in terms of the skills expertise as compared to many other Asian countries. The shift from agriculture to the industry and service sector sectors speaks a lot about the considerable requirement for the skilling/up-skilling of the workforce. The biggest challenge in the sphere of skill development seems to be the unavailability of infrastructure and the outdated practices in most of the training institutes like ITIs and ITCs.

NSDC has a tough job to do looking at the educational and workforce-development system that is struggling to respond to the rapid growth in the demand for skilled labor. The NSDC also needs
to ensure not only the quantity but equally important is the quality of the people trained. The NSDC reports show that different sectors have varying requirements of skilled workforce; therefore, special and adequate focus should be laid so that the resources are optimally utilized. More interaction with the corporate for the specific skill they require and running relevant courses is one way to get fruitful results.

The government should extend all the possible help to NSDC and should also actively engage in attempts to create more job opportunities for workers with the help of private sector companies. Women enrollment should be encouraged to ensure a balanced socio-economic growth of India. Last but not the least, Indian skill sector provides ample opportunity for the private companies, training institutes and entrepreneurs to enter a growing market, earning profits and of course adding to the strength of the skilled workforce of India, thus contributing to the efforts of NSDC to boost the Indian economy growth by the means of skill development.

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