

The Skills Milieu of India: Pathway to Social Inclusion and Decent Work

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Abstract

Purpose – *This paper explores how skills acquisition leads to getting a ‘decent job’ and increases youth employability while augmenting social and economic wellbeing.*

Design/Methodology/Approach – *Descriptive multiple case study design was adopted, and data collection involved a variety of approaches: semi-structured interviews, conversational interviews, group interviews and reflective diaries.*

Findings – *The findings highlight the value of skills acquisition for youth employability. Skills training reduces poverty at the household level and improves the social worth. Additionally, it encourages self-employment, making trained members of the community act as catalysts of socio-economic transformation. Skilling offers unparalleled access to gainful employment for women thus ensuring their participation in the labour force.*

Research Limitations/Implications – *Although results are largely in line with some of the existing findings, it would be difficult to generalise beyond this sample without further conducting a comparative skill development assessment across different programmes within the Asia Pacific region. Even though findings have been interpreted with caution, a detailed quantitative analysis could further establish themes and correlations.*

Originality/Value – *Though not entirely new, an assessment of the socioeconomic impact of employability on employment and future prospects of the youth from a programme and policy perspective is essential.*

Keywords: *Skill Development, Social Inclusion, Employability, Employment, Decent Work.*

1. INTRODUCTION

“Neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both” - C. Wright Mills

Mills’ aphorism holds true for today’s India’s demographic dynamic and the opportunities therein. On gaining independence in 1947 India was a nation plagued by communal strife, poverty, and a poor industrial base. By the time the first industrial revolution started unfolding around 1970s, India started rapid mechanisation that boosted production and profits but shrunk job opportunities for the low and medium-skilled workers. This scenario continued till late 1970s resulting in large unemployment in the country since the masses lacked necessary vocational skills.

Similar concerns emerged in the Asia Pacific region, where jobs and skills pose various developmental challenges such as higher urbanisation rates in East and North East Asia; high unemployment in North and Central Asia; and severe poverty in South and South West Asia (UNESCAP, 2011). Asia Pacific account for half the global unemployment. In China, 25 million unemployed need jobs against available 12 million (UNESCAP, 2011). India, too, faces a challenge to create 500 million skilled workers by 2022. “For large economies, such as China or India, this means rebalancing their growth strategy from being dependent on foreign demand towards a greater reliance on domestic and regional demand” (Martinez-Fernandez *et al.*, 2013, p. 13).

India enjoys a demographic dividend with 50 per cent of the population in the working age group between 15 to 59 years, which is expected to grow to 65 per cent by the year 2020 (UNPD, 2014). However, despite a growing GDP and declining dependency ratio, unemployment among youth

remains the biggest challenge aggravated by low school completion rates, strained facilities and questionable practicality of the curriculum. To harness the 'demographic bonus' India needs to revise her education regulatory policies, making these more purpose-oriented. Skilling as a solution will not only mitigate the high unemployment rates but also absorb the impact of demographic and technological advances, adjust skills mismatch, and spur global competition for talent. The World Economic Forum's *Human Capital Report 2013* argues that while "long-term thinking around human capital often does not fit political cycles or business investment horizons; ... lack of such long-term planning can perpetuate continued wasted potential in a country's population and losses for a nation's growth and productivity" (p. 3).

Defillippi and Arthur (1994) argue that by investing in continuous learning, individuals can develop their human capital leading to employability. They point to the '*knowing-how*' competencies of the human capital: "the career-related knowledge and skills built via occupational learning and professional development activities" (Quoted in McArdle *et al.*, 2007, pp. 248-249).

Skill development, therefore, is the vehicle for social transformation in developing countries. Having the right skills and competencies coupled with the opportunities to use and develop these attract better jobs that have a spill-over effect on the earning potential of the youth. Much of the literature on skill development focuses on its positive and functional aspects and how it provides a platform for growth. A number of impact assessment studies of government projects are available as well.

This paper proposes that skills training provide a socially cohesive environment that empower youth and form the pillars that support lasting developmental reforms. Concurrently, the paper attempts to explore the importance of employment and income security as essential ingredients of a 'decent job' while boosting social wellbeing. To prove this, many case studies are being used to illustrate how decent work leads to social inclusion and addresses the associated challenges.

2. GLOBAL YOUTH DEVELOPMENT TRENDS

The United Nations emphasizes change through human development and political institutional reforms. "Skills development relates to the effectiveness, efficiency, accountability and responsiveness of the state" (Pillay *et al.*, 2012, p. 19). Youth are a powerful positive force for transformational change for a nation's economy. UNDP's first Youth Strategy 2014-2017 suggests a "four-pronged approach: capacity development, advocacy and mainstreaming, thought leadership, and national policy, with economic empowerment, civic engagement and strengthened youth engagement in resilience building as the main outcomes.

UNFPA supports "youth transition from being dependent...to being economically productive in their own right...through vocational education and training, information sharing through job counselling and registries, job creation through public works projects, self-employment and enterprise-creation through livelihood schemes" (Chalasan, 2013, p. 3).

Pieters (2015) argues that "most developing countries are making progress towards universal primary education, but many are less successful because of the weak links between vocational education and skills demanded by private sector, insufficient funding, poor monitoring and evaluation, stigmatization, and low (perceived) returns" (p. 5).

Kilimani (2017) argues that in order to promote job-rich inclusive growth in developing countries, youth employment promotion in the long-term is a possible solution. IEG (2013) argue for strategies that expand labour demand to complement interventions targeting more short-term and youth-specific goals, such as wage subsidies and skills training in achieving job-rich growth.

3. INDIA AND THE DECENT WORK AGENDA

Internationally, in the pursuit of a 'fairer globalisation' and the formalisation of the informal labour, the 'decent work' approach was introduced by the ILO in 1999. The importance of decent work in achieving sustainable development is also highlighted by Goal 8 of the Sustainable Development Goals which aims to "promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all" (Parisotto, 2015, p. 2). Decent work, thus, ensures amalgamation of economic and human development which ultimately leads to poverty alleviation. Such an amalgamation of the different aspects of development make youth employable. Enshrined in the Directive Principles of the State Policy of the Constitution of India, is the ideal of social security which guarantees, besides other items, the right to work, and to education.

India has the largest youth population of the world but over 20 per cent (between 15-24 years of age) i.e. around 47 million are still jobless (UNPD, 2014). Experts argue that the consequences of this are particularly acute for those who spend extended periods outside learning and work. Scarpetta *et al.* (2010) argue that such a period of unemployment in young age can lead to permanent ‘scars’ on earnings. Coupled with this is the problem of low skill levels of the youth. De Grip and Zwick (2005) argue that low skills and qualifications are associated with a lower likelihood of being employed. It is, therefore, imperative that majority of the working age population is made employable.

A shortage of skilled workers across industries does not augur well for sustaining India’s economic growth. To fill this ‘skill gap’, a number of government initiatives have emerged which follow the dictum that “while skills are not ‘the answer’ to problems of work, there can be ‘no answer’ without skills” (Buchanan *et al.*, 2001, p. 33). There is also extensive evidence that higher skills lead not only to increased prosperity but to greater social engagement, better health outcomes and improved well-being as well (OECD, 2012).

“Young people are a major human resource for development, key agents for social change and driving force for economic development and technological innovation. But harnessing these resources is a major challenge. The youth challenge is considered as the most critical of the 21st century’s economic development challenge” (Dev, 2014, p. 1). Realizing this challenge to equip the youth with higher skills, the Government of India has set out to create a 500 million skilled workforce by 2022. Over two-thirds of this target is to be met from existing vocational training initiatives offered by 17 central government ministries. India’s Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) has created a separate department called Deen Dayal Upadhyay Kaushal Vikas Yojna (DDUGKY) to drive the large skills initiative to create 70 million jobs during the 11th Plan (2007-12).

For the remaining one-third, a private-public partnership based National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) was created in 2013 with the aim of imparting multiple skills to achieve ‘*social objectives*’, which include overcoming gender bias in employment, motivating low achievers, generating employment through industrial tie-ups, overcoming labour market problems of the disadvantaged and reducing demand for higher education (Middleton *et al.*, 1993).

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

4.1. The Employability and Empowerment Conundrum

Conger and Kanungo in 1988 recommended that empowerment be defined in terms of motivational processes in workers. Empowerment is “the active participatory process of gaining resources [and] competencies needed to increase control over one’s life and accomplish important life goals” (Maton and Salem, 1995, p. 631). Further, Zimmerman and Rappaport (1988, p. 726) argue that “Empowerment is a construct that links individual strengths and competencies, natural helping systems, and proactive behaviours to social policy and social change.” It refers to “the process of gaining influence over events and outcomes of importance” (Fawcett *et al.*, 1994, p. 76). This process may “unfold at multiple and interconnected levels including the individual” (Zimmerman, 1990, p. 89), group or organization (Chavis and Wandersman, 1990), and community (Fawcett *et al.*, 1982).

Empowerment is both a multifaceted social process and outcome that involves individuals and groups gaining control of the events that take place in their lives (Page and Czuba, 1999, p. 25) and improve their life circumstances. Most empirical research on empowerment has focused on the intrapersonal component of psychological empowerment, which refers to self-perceptions of efficacy and control within the socio-political domain. Most studies of youth empowerment focus on “at-risk” populations (Einspruch and Wunrow, 2002; Kim *et al.*, 1998). Positive youth development frameworks employed by Chinman and Linney (1998) offer a model designed as a prevention/intervention strategy for youth risk behaviours. “The model proposes an adolescent empowerment cycle in which youth develop a stable, positive identity by experimenting with roles and incorporating the feedback of others. Empowerment experienced by the youth is the result of a continuous cycle of participation in positive, meaningful activities, learning useful and relevant skills, and reinforcement (being recognized for contributions). As a result of the “bonding development process (action - skill development - reinforcement), this empowerment model predicts that adolescents will feel more confident, and have critical awareness and self-efficacy” (Russell *et al.*, p. 4-5).

Swift and Levine (1987) suggest that the theory of empowerment includes both processes and outcomes. The theory suggests that “actions, activities, or structures may be empowering, and that the outcome of such processes result in a level of being empowered” (Zimmerman, 2000, p. 46). Though, Perkins and Zimmerman (1995) argue that “both empowerment processes and outcomes vary in their outward form because no single standard can fully capture its meaning for all people in all contexts” (p. 570). It is critical to provide a distinction between empowering processes and outcomes. Empowering processes include an attempt to gain control, obtain resources and gain an understanding of one’s environment through an empowering process: the development of skills that makes individuals problem-solvers and decision-makers. Empowered outcomes, on the other hand, is the “operationalisation of empowerment” to be able “to study the consequences of citizens’ attempts to gain greater control in their community, or the effects of interventions designed to empower participants” (Zimmerman, 2000, p. 46)

Being able to determine one’s identity is the greatest freedom. Identity has employability at its heart as the tool for empowerment. Employability equips individuals with necessary tools to not only obtain employment but also the opportunity to ‘control their employment fate’ (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996). Gazier (2001) defined employability as empowerment that makes “each worker a more aware and a more independent organizer of the succession of activities and commitments that, combined, constitute his/her working life” (p. 23). Scholars argue in favour of employability especially with the disappearance of job security owing to the rapid technological changes worldwide, employees can derive security only from their employability (Kanter, 1989). Jacobsson (2004) argued that training, which is an investment in employability, can exist as a joint responsibility of companies and employees.

This paper follows a simple rule: employment follows employability (Korver, 2000). Employability ensures social and economic participation of the youth. It can be reached by enhancing individual competences through the acquisition of relevant skills, and by policies that improve the fit between individual competences and jobs in the changing world of work. As Layard (1996) expressed it in the context of long-term unemployment, “the main thing that determines the number of jobs is the number of ‘employable’ people in the economy” (p. 327). Interventions that target employment and employability enhance wellness while also ameliorate problems, provide opportunities for participants to develop knowledge and skills, and engage professionals as collaborators instead of authoritative experts.

4.2. The Psycho-social Model of Employability

Fugate *et al.* (2004) explored employability along three separate, yet inter-related dimensions: adaptability; career identity; and human and social capital. Adaptability is the “willingness and ability to change behaviours, feelings and thoughts in response to environmental demands” (p. 57). Career identity represents the way individuals define themselves in the career context, and can be conceptualised as a ‘cognitive compass’ used to navigate career opportunities (Fugate *et al.*, 2004). Hall *et al.* (1997) suggests that “in a world where the economic scenario changes rapidly and jobs become scarce, identity needs to be decoupled from a specific job or organisation, instead should represent an individual’s personal values, motivations and broader career interests” (p. 89).

4.3. Social Inclusion and Mobility

The emphasis on ‘inclusion’ in the Sustainable Development Goals compels us to identify how socially inclusive the youth of the country are and how we accomplish it. Goals 8, 10, 11, and 16 refer to inclusion. Particularly, *Goal 8* states that, “...to promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable growth with employment creation”; and *Goal 10*, “empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status.” Atkinson (1998) argue that “people may be poor without being socially excluded...people may be socially excluded without being poor” (p. 9). By providing the right opportunities to the youth in the form of jobs and skills, can develop their confidence and self-esteem. “Income is important, but only part of what is required; a means, with human development the end” (UNDP, 1997, p. 14).

There are differing perspectives about the causes and solutions of social inclusion. Silver (1994) and Levitas (1998) have identified three distinct approaches to social exclusion, and both agree that the

different uses of the term “are embedded in conflicting social science paradigms and political ideologies” (Silver, 1994, p. 6). Social integration view of social exclusion views “unemployment as the main cause of exclusion. Paid employment is seen as a critical component of identity and self-esteem, and therefore, necessarily the principal means of inclusion. Skill development enables youth to “transfer those skills and competences to new situations and to be able to communicate in a way which suits individual circumstances and aspirations” (EU, 2011, p. 3). **“Skills have a profound relationship with economic and social outcomes... [They are] key to tackling inequality and promoting social mobility”** (OECD, 2012).

4.4. SEAM: Skilling for Impact

This paper analyses the impact of the skill development initiative launched in 2007 called Skills for Employment in Apparel Manufacturing (SEAM) by the Ministry of Textiles, Government of India. It is a placement linked programme based on the public private partnership (PPP) model with the industries and IL&FS Skills as other stakeholders. The textile and apparel sector is a major employer in both developed and developing countries, often as the first point of entry for many unskilled workers (Berger *et al.*, 1997). In India, the industry provides direct employment to 35 million and indirect employment to 45 million Indians (Ministry of Textiles, 2015). Apparel being at the end of the value chain requires the highest level of value addition to make the end-product a value-for-money item.

To test the viability of this approach a pilot project was initiated from 2007-10, to train and place 30,000 rural BPL youth in the country. The program was implemented in 70 training centres in 12 states. After its initial success, the Company expanded the programme in 19 more states in about 212 training centres. SEAM programme ran in phases from SEAM-I to SEAM-XI to achieve the target employment numbers. A total of 1, 05,145 unemployed youth were enrolled throughout India, as shown in Figure 1.

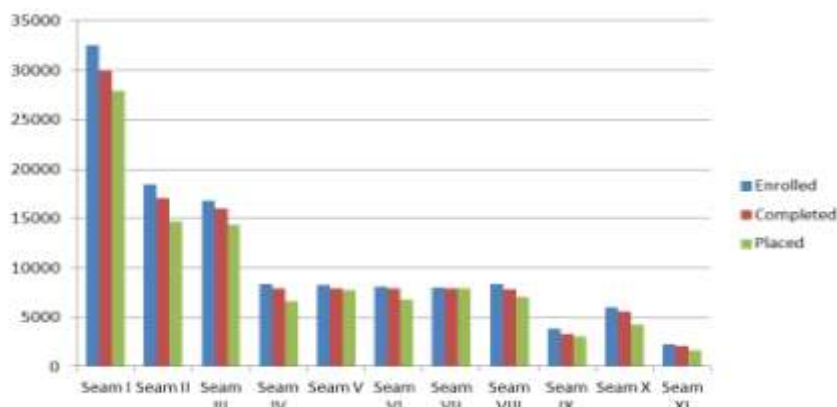


Figure 1. Candidates enrolled and placed for SEAM I to SEAM XI

Source: SEAM MIS data

Around 85 per cent of the youth completed training and had a 95 per cent retention rate in their jobs. The core component was group education on employable skills with focus on rural women in their late teens to mid-30s.

4.5. Training

“Training is a reward and nice training is a nice reward” (Holly *et al.*, 1998). Training was conducted for a month with an intake of 32 trainees per batch and centres were equipped with imported Juki machines (industrial sewing machines) conforming to industry skill requirements. Innovative content was developed in consultation with industry experts to meet the global best practices. Training modules with a grading system was prescribed by Methods Workshop, a leading South African organisation that develops industrial engineering solutions, training and certification for the apparel industry.

The use of multimedia technology with audio-visual content ensured students’ professional cognition, operating skill cognition and level of learning satisfaction during the learning process. Workplace, for the candidates was a ‘site of tertiary socialisation’, after the family and the education system (Purcell,

1988). Wang (2010) observes that “the primary goal of skills training is to provide youth with practical techniques and skills based on professional knowledge rather than manufacture well-trained basic operators” (p. 47).

4.6. Skill Sets

The objective of the programme was to impart basic skills necessary to become a shop floor level operator, so that the initial wages are at least equal to the prescribed minimum wages. Candidates were given both technical and soft skills training on health and hygiene, social security, self-management, workplace etiquettes, group/team behaviour etc. Life skills help young people navigate the challenges of everyday life. They enable them to develop into healthy, responsible, and productive adults.

This article presents the pathway through which skills acquisition improves the lives of unemployed youth by making them employable. It is observed that enhanced employability and increased earning potential has a positive effect on the economic security for youth and improve living conditions (economic well-being) of the affected households.

4.7. Research Methodology

Case study research organised around various issues was chosen as the method of inquiry because it allows the researcher to capture and describe the complexity of real-life events (Stake, 1995). A case study researcher was charged with the responsibility of conducting in-depth analysis of a case and emphasise “episodes of nuance, the sequentiality of happenings in context, [and] the wholeness of the individual” (Stake, 1995, p. xii). Case study method provides holistic and meaningful descriptions from the perspectives of the youth who associate acquisition of skills with employment.

4.8. Participants

The sample is drawn from diverse geographical locations. 110 candidates between age group 18 to 35 years trained and placed under the programme were interviewed. Out of the 110 youth interviewed, 75 youth stayed in the job for more than six months as *permanent workers* and 35 left jobs within four to five months for various reasons, and started doing casual jobs. Such youth are called *drop outs*.

4.9. Data

Data was collected from three sources. First, the researcher was a participant observer, collecting observation data while participating in interviews and also observing their living conditions. Guidelines for participant observation notes ensured consistency in recording information (Jorgensen, 1989). Notes captured body language, dialogue, and participant reflections and responses to informal interview questions. Second, individual interviews lasted between 20 to 25 minutes each. Third, MIS data captured at the start of a project and updated yearly was also analysed.

Semi-structured interview guides allowed the researcher to obtain information on emerging theoretical concepts and new information through participant stories. Questionnaire was tested on a pilot sample and questions were further refined. Each interview started with a general conversation about the participant’s family life and proceeded to other questions pertaining to employment history, training, placement and wages. Participants were encouraged to discuss and reflect upon their experiences in their own words. Participants were given considerable liberty to pursue themes that were not covered in the interviewer’s question list. The taped interviews were later transcribed and translated into English. All subjects are referred to with pseudonyms in this article.

4.10. Analysis of Data

The analytic tools and coding procedures of Strauss and Corbin (1998) seemed appropriate for analysing the data for this study, since they “have something to offer in the way of techniques and procedures to those researchers who want to do qualitative analysis but who do not wish to build theory” (p. x). They suggest building theory is not the only reason for doing research and that high-level description, called “conceptual ordering”, which is also important to the generation of knowledge. Analysis of data began with the questions which were used to generate ideas from the respondents. These questions aided in triangulation of data because the stimulus for a question sometimes occurred in one data source while the answer to that question appeared in a different data source. Additional tools of analysis included analysis of a word, phrase or sentence and analysis through comparisons (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

4.11. Within-case and Cross-case analysis

Open coding was performed on each individual participant’s data set. Relevant data were broken into data ‘bits’ and grouped by emerging themes. Eventually, these themes led to concepts and categories that were not necessarily congruent. This process was repeated. Youth’s exact words and observer descriptions were filed within each category. Open coding was completed for each participant before any comparisons and descriptions were attempted across participants. During the cross-case analysis, open-coding was done again. Categories were generated for the collective data set. Again, each data bit was filed appropriately. After all data were filed, the researcher looked for patterns or ways to group the categories. For the cross-case analysis, the categories for individual participants seemed to cluster naturally into the themes, which were analysed further after re-examining the raw data.

4.12. Sample Demographics

A primary sample survey of 110 youth consisted of 62 (56.4 per cent) females and 48 (43.6 per cent) males. The religious background of the respondents reveals that majority of respondents 89.8 per cent belong to Hindu religion while 9 per cent are Muslims and 1 per cent form other religious categories. About 41 per cent of the youth belong to the age group of 16 - 25 years and 21 per cent belong to the 26 - 45 age group. Over 80 per cent of the sample population were Grade X drop outs. A large majority of the youth families earned less than Rs. 40,000 a year. Around 68 per cent of the youth accepted the job offers and 32 per cent dropped out of the course.

5. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Youth empowerment is a transformational process, with the constant interplay of factors that emanates from the environment in which the youth live, train and interacts and which affect their belief systems. Such a process creates a dynamic purpose oriented skills relationship between the youth and the organisation (Figure 2). The youth is made the focal point of development equipped with the right environment for empowerment. Synergy was achieved by the socialization of attitudes and the subsequent internalization of these. The ‘purpose’ of investing in human talent entails an alignment of *skill acquisition, Employability, and Employment* that ultimately has an ‘impact’ on youth *Empowerment*.

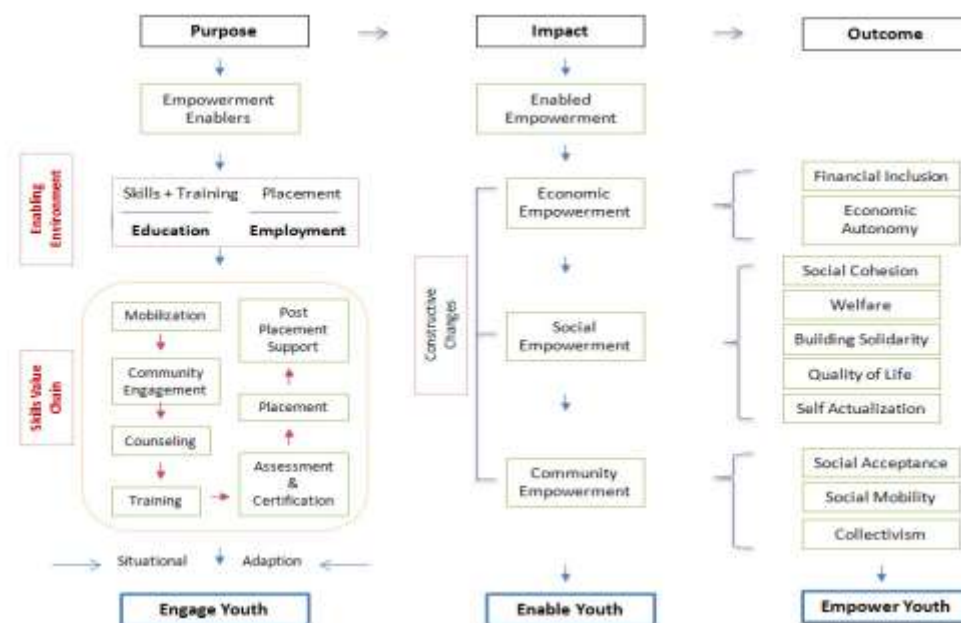


Figure2. Conceptual Framework for Youth Empowerment and Decent Work

5.1. Empowerment Enablers: ‘Engage Youth’

A conceptual framework guides our analysis that illustrates how youth can be made employable as a result of skills training. The ‘enabling environment’ under the skills ecosystem is characterized by the creation of a social context for the youth which facilitates the skill acquisition process.

Youth were trained in simulated industry settings to receive first-hand experience on the latest technologies used in the apparel sector. Certification was mandatory to ensure recognition of skills learnt by the trainees. Thus the youth had a ‘road map’ to assess their Quality of Life (QOL)

consequent to successful completion of training. Their trainers, through quality training and targeted motivation the youth, inculcated a sense of belonging and confidence in them. This was evident from one of the candidate's narrative:

"I was counselled at the beginning of the training. Throughout the training I was asked about my goals and aspirations and this kept me motivated. Even after we were placed, I was counselled on various issues and this helped me adjust well in the workplace" (Anitha)

Simulated workplace learning created in the classrooms conditioned the youth to adjust to their future work place and acclimatized them to absorb the eight hour work day. The entry job was a route to a better job and for some it was a 'revolving door' which led to a quick return to self-employment. Classroom activity was designed as a 'site of primary socialization' to enable better assimilation of both vocational and life skills.

"I didn't know what I was capable of. I feared I'll find it very hard to understand the machines. But now I have passed my training and received an A grade for SMO (Sewing Machine Operator). I feel confident and know in my heart I am good at this" (Simran)

The skills process was suitably configured to reflect the nuances and difficulties of the prevailing unemployment situation in the country. Realistic picture of the possible employment available on completion of the training and its attendant problems was repeatedly shared with the candidates to keep their aspirations in check. This 'enabling environment' thus, reduces these uncertainties through a skills ecosystem that caters to both, learning and an employment outcome.

"I received a very good grade - A.I feel, I am ready to face new work challenges and apply my skills and training." (Kunal)

5.2. Enabled Empowerment

The empowering process for the youth is characterized by the transformation of their emotions of low worth to a fruitful internalization of being 'in power' and 'in control' of their psycho-social reality. It is observed that the youth who were engaged in full employment transformed from invisibility to powerful agents of development for themselves and the community. Skill development enabled "personal growth" and "development/progress" as some interviewees put it.

"I was sceptical of working in an industry. I have always done menial jobs. My family, friends and community elders helped me decide and showed confidence in my potential. Training helped in gaining employment and also improved my personality" (Sohail)

These outcomes brought about 'positional change' (Merton *et al.*, 2004) by enabling young people take up self-employment, education or avail higher training for a better future. 'Personal change' therefore, acted as a stimulus for a 'positional change' and a 'psycho-social change.' The overall improvement in the socio-economic environment of the youth who were trained and given jobs led to other unemployed youth view these training institutions as agencies that redefine and shape their identity. Empowerment was viewed as a path out of poverty.

"I was always looking for work and here was a company who came to us to give us a job. I feel in control of my life situation" (Kanika)

5.3. Human Capital to a Skills Capital

'Work' is not just a means to an end but a way to integrate into the society while building self-esteem and identity. For the poor, work is a major route for overcoming poverty. Work is considered as the driving force of economic development and social cohesion. But it is imperative to understand that just the provision of a 'job' does not mean driving a family out of poverty. Enough jobs are available in the developing countries, but these are largely in the informal sector. What is missing is the availability of these 'quality jobs' in the formal sector. The social and economic outcomes for individuals, enterprises and economies are determined by the quality of work performed. Two dimensions viz.; the 'quality of work' and the 'quality of skills' determine whether a job is a 'quality job' or not.

Emergent Theme 1: Acquisition of human capital for careers is perceived positively by the youth

Unemployed youth, once exposed to the benefits of being skilled workers, perceived the accumulation of human capital along with individual traits (such as determination and ambition) as critical in the

development of their careers. They realised how they were unable to capitalize on their human capital and found skills training as the right medium to explore the same. A male candidate narrated his experience:

“I never realized my potential till I was exposed to the different skills I could choose from. I also gained confidence from the interactions with my colleagues and realized the importance of training.” (Sanjay)

A woman candidate expressed how her human capital has made her more employable:

“As a woman we were not allowed to explore outside our homes for any work. I was always engaged in the house work. My parents were counselled and they allowed me to take up the stitching course. Now I earn for my family and I am confident of my skills. I feel confident to face the world. This is whole new wonderful feeling of being able to help and shoulder responsibility” (Sunita)

In short, exposure to different skills in an industrial setting made youth aware of their potential, confident and ready for successful full employment.

5.4. Social Capital: Connections of the Skills Capital

Research revealed that the foundation of a strong skills capital is based on its social capital. The constant interplay of the social capital with the human capital produces the advantages or constraints for the youth. Social capital leads to acquisition of quality knowledge, creativity, and self-realisation that represents youth development.

Emergent Theme 2: Acquisition of social capital is both a conscious and subconscious process for the youth

Networks and associations established during training and their continuation in the workplace, takes place on both subconscious and conscious levels of the members. Social capital networks facilitate the acquisition of human capital. With greater interaction among the peer groups and the resultant visibility, instilled confidence in the youth during training, at the workplace and in the community.

“Once training started I began making friends and wanted to be part of the group. Seeing my friends, their confidence and capabilities, encouraged me to improve myself.” (Tanya)

5.5. Places for integration

Workplaces offer valuable support and a sense of ‘safety’ to the youth. By enabling youth to share experiences and ideas with others, these associational spaces can contribute to personal and social outcomes in a wide range of realms such as human and social capital and health and well-being. By encouraging young people to mix with others, they can also contribute to civic and political outcomes, such as changes in young people’s attitudes, values and behaviours toward others. It is clear that for the youth, such an acquisition of social capital begins at the subconscious level whereby there is a natural propensity to become part of the group and exchange ideas.

“When I am with my friends at work and we also interact after work, I always think of how being part of the group benefits me emotionally and socially” (Suman)

The informal relations among the youth at the work place have an impact on their retention and success. It is the conscious effort of the youth to reach out to their peers in times of distress or joy.

“We were a group of 15 girls that migrated and joined a company in the South (India). It was because of my friends that helped me sustain and continue at the place of work. Many girls left but I didn’t because we worked together to resolve issues at work and hostel, besides feeling at home as a group” (Pragya)

The chance to interact with people helps youth develop social networks and social capital, a key personal and social outcome, and thus contribute to changes in their attitudes and behaviours toward others.

5.6. The influential work domain as the content of the Skills Capital

The interviews produced an array of examples that provide support to the relevance of the skills capital and the way it is perceived by the youth.

Emergent Theme 3: Strong temporal and psychological borders protect work domain

The texts of the interviewees suggest that youth give primacy to the work domain and perceive it as more urgent and it dominates the course of action that the youth take in their lives:

“I incline in favour of the job. My family comes second unless something serious happens. Because without job there is no money and without money there is no worth” (Rani)

More specifically, it was found that psychological borders do exist and protect the powerful work domain. The following excerpts are characteristic:

“If a task has to be completed today you cannot say it is 4 p.m. so, I am leaving” (Ram)

“We cannot carry a bad temper at work because of non-availability of enough water or living issues. I get paid to do my job and I have to control my bad temper and be polite” (Varun)

Additionally, the location of the job, which at places stretches to over an hour of driving, enervates the work domain and is viewed in conflict with performance of the employees. As expressed by one of the youth:

“I travel and at times I reach late. The company demands work to start on time and any delay means I will have to sit late and finish the work without being compensated for it. It discourages me” (Ramesh)

Work relationships, interactions and learning influence opportunities for the development of work-relevant skills, knowledge and understanding.

Emergent Theme 4: Employees’ participation in the work domain is promoted through leaders’ behaviour and leadership style

Two employers in charge at a factory floor that participated in the interviews, compassionately referred to employees as ‘our workers’. They are supportive, care for and protect the workers, are constantly present and visible and lead by example. In return, they expect appreciation of the company’s values, conventions and decision-making premises. One of the female workers stated:

“Whenever I have a problem at work, my manager takes note of it and suggests a solution accordingly. The manager’s behaviour and attitude towards the women is a motivation for me to continue in a place which is not my home town” (Samita)

Thus, it is not surprising that employees exhibit high degrees of respect and trust for their supervisors. Furthermore, trust in their leaders impels employees to focus less on self-protection and more on dedicating their time and energy to the work at hand.

Emergent Theme 5: Employees’ participation in the work domain is associated with work attitudes and employees’ expectations for personal gains

Most of the interviewees reported high levels of: job satisfaction, commitment, job security, loyalty and trust in their supervisors and belief in their own skills. The following quote characteristically illustrates this:

“I would definitely recommend to my friend to gain skills at the IL&FS Skills Institute, particularly in my trade (Industrial SMO)” (Rohan)

The positive work attitudes appear to override the supposedly negative/stressful contextual factors e.g. working under constant pressure, unpredictable managers and long work hours, etc.

“At this moment I am really satisfied with my job and work pressure doesn’t discourage me. It will help me grow in my career and as an individual, and make me more robust to undertake challenges in future” (Nirbhay)

Emergent Theme 6: Interactions at work are a source of higher skills development through learning while working

Acquisition of diverse skills through On-the-Job Training (OJT) by youth increased their likelihood of securing employment. Productivity at work appeared receiving a boost from the social abilities like good work habits, people and cognitive skills that are specific to a job, and the occupational cluster. Knowledge gained at work thus became a stepping stone for higher skills development.

“My job gave me the opportunity to grow. I learnt new skills in the company I work in and we get Rs. 1000 for receiving such certifications” (Sana)

5.7. Identities at work became identities of development for life

Skills development at work leads to better understanding of one's career, and facilitates transition to a better opportunity. It was observed that strong attachment to work instils a sense of stability. But it might also hold an individual 'in chains' and prevent him / her from attempting a career transition.

Emergent Theme 7: Permanent workers demonstrate better job satisfaction, stability and outlook for the future compared to casual workers.

It was observed that the casual workers exhibit significantly poorer work outcomes compared to permanent ones.

5.8. Economic Empowerment

Research revealed that enhanced economic opportunities had positive impact on the youth, their households and their communities.

Emergent Theme 8: Enhanced employability and increased earning potential has significant positive effects on the economic security for youth and improves their economic well-being.

Job was the most important determinant of living standards and a change in the earnings was the singular contributor to poverty reduction. Better economic conditions and positive salary progression translated into social, cultural and physical assets. Over time, absence of these opportunities caused casual workers to acquire undesirable social trajectories.

Drop out: *"I completed training and was given a job. I didn't continue there because I had insufficient water issues where I was living. I left and since then I haven't been able to get a good job. I work as a daily wager"* (Lucky)

Male permanent worker: *"I am still in my first job, the one I was offered post training and it's been three years since then. I am now at a higher position and earn around Rs. 20,000 a month. I was able to save money for my sister's marriage, built a small house and bought necessary household items as well. My family is very happy with the change of fortunes and I feel elated"* (Ganesh)

Female Permanent worker: *"I have been working for four years now and earn good money. I renovated my house and also completed a course to enhance my opportunities for even better employment"* (Seema)

Most of the youth interviewed, who stayed in their jobs for more than six months (permanent workers) reported better living conditions and economic well-being.

5.9. Preventing Alienation

Often, youth employment programmes focus primarily on formal sector employment in the form of preparing young people for one job. SEAM, on the contrary also encouraged self-employment as a pathway out of poverty. Youth under the programme, especially women started their own small ventures and purchased better sewing machines that could increase their productivity.

"I learnt how to stitch during training. I enjoyed working on the machines. I worked for some time, saved money and bought the sewing machine used in the factory. I now stitch clothes at home and earn a decent livelihood" (Simmi)

The skills strategy that blended learning, earning and saving not only addressed short-term needs, but also helped build stronger coping and support mechanisms for the youth.

5.10. Building solidarity

Trained candidates interact with unemployed youth in their community, promote positive attitudes towards skilling and jobs and encourage them to join training. Skill training thus, makes people 'agents of change'. Youth create a 'ripple effect' **i.e. the reverberating positive impact on communities.**

"Many unemployed men and women from my village were encouraged to take up training and guided them to the training centres. I mobilized around 10 youth from my village" (Himanshu)

Skilled youth were empowered who then encouraged other youth in their community and became mobilisation agents for the company. Decent work for young people has multiplier effects

throughout the economy, boosting consumer demand and adding to tax revenue. It shifts young people from social dependence to self-sufficiency and helps them escape poverty.

6. DISCUSSION

The research findings revealed that investing in the human capital of a country builds resilience (Martinez-Fernandez *et al.*, 2013). Although the provision of decent work to the youth ensures economic and human development, thereby empowering them, it is in fact the ‘individual change’ that is a necessary precursor for larger social and community change (Chavis and Wandersman, 1990). Therefore, it is clear that a skill-enabled environment has a significant impact on the youth’s internal ‘drivers’ of change. Results suggest that an investment in continuous learning develops the human capital of the youth and build employability (Defillippi and Arthur, 1994).

This research supports Swift and Levine’s (1987) theory that empowerment can be both a process and an outcome. As a process, youth experience empowerment when they have control and access to resources and gain an understanding of their environment through the development of their skills that helps them think critically. The outcome of such a process is finding an appropriate job, which amounts to retaining and controlling their ‘employment fate’ (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996). Results also suggest that the youth have a greater sense of empowerment and confidence in their employability when both parties viz.; the employees and the employer understand their respective stakes (Jacobsson, 2004).

The programme, was to a certain extent, able to reduce the ‘scars’ (Scarpetta *et al.*, 2010) on earnings by providing job-linked skills training, although long-term retention issues did surface post the acceptance of placements. This was particularly reported by women candidates who were unable to continue work given the long distances they had to cover to work. Few women also complained of their employers lacking compassion and understanding and even denying appropriate remuneration for extra hours. The tendency to become part of the group (the construction of social capital at the subconscious level) sometimes had a negative impact on the youth. The programme was able to handhold youth only for a limited time and therefore, was unable to address retention issues adequately. Contrary to the findings of Middleton *et al.* (1993), a focus on skills development for work that did not cater to achieving the ‘social objectives’ of overcoming gender bias in employment, motivating low achievers, and overcoming workplace problems. This was a major shortcoming of the programme.

On the basis of the above discussion, it is possible to construct a realistic picture of movements into and out of poverty as a result of skills training. In Figure 3, it is clear that youth trained under SEAM (in red) move out of poverty as a result of the newly acquired skills which resulted in their employment and subsequent prosperity. At the same time, it is evident that not all youth trained under such placement linked programmes are able to acquire enough vocational expertise to land a well-paying job.

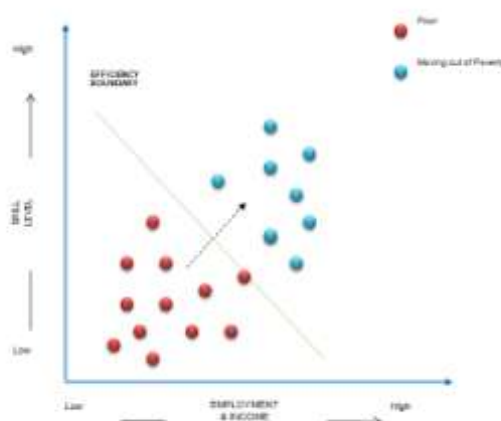


Figure3. Trade-off between Skills Training and Knowledge gained

The programme has a curriculum that supports the decent work agenda and provides structured career trajectories to the candidates. Awareness of their rights and decent work attributes are inbuilt in the

curriculum. This empowers candidates sufficiently during their training to negotiate their rights vis-a-vis the environment once they are placed in employment, as depicted in Figure 4. The programme not only prepares a candidate for wage / self-employment but also empowers him / her for social inclusion (Levitas, 1998). Though, Standing (2011) maintains that, on a global basis “many millions” of people can be described as belonging to the ‘precariat’, due to the labour market instability they endure through unemployment, underemployment and unsatisfying employment. Such precarious jobs do not support a decent work agenda and do not provide structured career trajectories. Vocational skills are evolving with the rapid changes in technologies and the necessary curriculum is being developed by imparting agencies accordingly. With the skills model as a base, such curricula can be evolved to greater advantage in alleviating the poor conditions of the large unemployed masses.

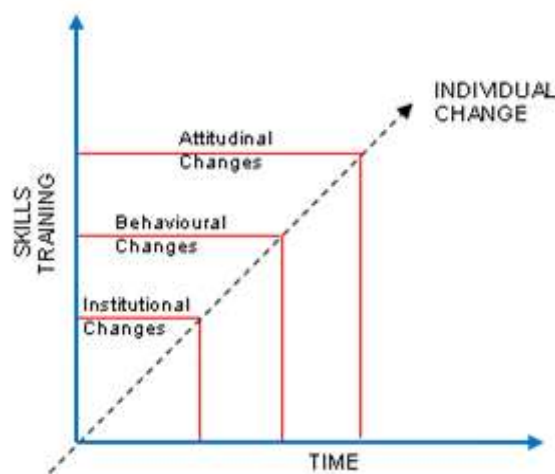


Figure 4. *Positive Learning and Behavioural Changes*

In the programme candidates are sensitised to the vagaries of workplace. The labour market is fraught with challenges in view of the larger sections of workforce not being aware of their rights, weak law enforcement mechanism, contractor-police nexus and many other such anti-labour issues. The component of training that delves on workplace sensitisation takes adequate care of such fears and adequately instils awareness in the candidates to take on such challenges. Research has shown that this sensitisation during training has made a big difference.

A shortcoming of the programme was the time period for which the tracking details were maintained. Training centres should maintain both permanent addresses and phone numbers of the candidates for a minimum of five years in order to facilitate a longitudinal assessment of outcomes. Further, each candidate should submit a copy of their ration card or any other government denoted identity to the training centre where they are enrolled initially. Such documents should be maintained at the training centre and verification of each of the addresses should be done once in six-months.

7. CONCLUSION

Full productive employment and decent work for all, particularly for women and young people, is reported as one of the most effective routes out of poverty (ILO, 2015). The programme provides a basic framework to implement large skills programmes in both rural and urban areas with issues related to tracking and migration fully taken care of. The programme has evolved procedures and guidelines to facilitate seamless social inclusion of the trainees with appropriate awareness, skills for wage and self-employment and necessary work-life sensitisation. Candidates are handheld and given monetary assistance to support their migration related financial issues. This ensures their social protection which is one of the main pillars of Decent Work Agenda. The programmes are scalable, suitable to current Indian environment and help create sustainable pockets of work clusters to facilitate worker groups to work in close proximities. The skills milieu in India is thus poised to take off with a good start.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Embedded within the study are some methodological limitations. Findings cannot be generalised beyond this sample without conducting a comparative skill development analysis across the Asia Pacific region. Further, a detailed quantitative analysis could further establish themes and correlations.

Despite the acknowledged limitations, this study highlights the real outcomes of the programme and does not limit itself to only perceived impact. Future research may quantitatively analyse how skills development improves human productivity.

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