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BOOSTING ENROLMENT
in
TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING:
STRATEGIES FOR POPULARIZATION
in
PAKISTAN ADMINISTERED STATE OF AZAD JAMMU & KASHMIR

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Boosting Enrolment in Technical and Vocational Education and Training: Strategies for Popularization in Pakistan Administered State of Azad Jammu & Kashmir

1. Background

Socio-economic development is not possible through capital investment alone. Nations who invest in education can draw upon a mix of skilled workers, technicians, technologists and engineers, and research scientists to support and sustain their socio-economic development efforts. Vocational training is one strategy to build human assets and capabilities, especially for poor and vulnerable people who may not have the opportunity for higher education. Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) is a key instrument of any public policy aimed at socio-economic development, employment generation and poverty alleviation. The Government of Pakistan recognises this and gives priority to TVET development through its Medium Term Development Frame Work (2005-10) and, principally, the National Skills Strategy (2009-2013).

There is a very large gap between Government aspirations for TVET and current realities. The TVET sector across Pakistan faces many challenges, spanning issues to do with the quality, quantity and relevance of TVET. All these challenges are also present in the Pakistan Administered State of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), with additional challenges posed by the poor economic environment, the remote geography of the region, traditional attitudes of the population and also the devastation still evident from the 2005 earthquake.

Whilst quality of TVET remains uneven, it is not surprising that enrolments are low. Yet other factors also contribute to low enrolments, such as unrealistic pre-requisites that limit numbers of potential students, low levels of knowledge about TVET options and social taboos.

By releasing *Skilling Pakistan: The National Skills Strategy 2009-2013*, a comprehensive document which outlines strategies to reform the TVET system, the Government of Pakistan has signalled its commitment to reform and improvement in a number of areas. It has three key objectives:

- a. Providing Relevant Skills for Industrial and Economic Development,
- b. Improving Access, Equity and Employability and
- c. Assuring Quality.

The second of the three objectives set by NAVTEC for TVET reform covers areas such as expanding coverage (cultural as well as geographic), offering student guidance services, and improving the status of TVET to help attract more students.

This paper offers some suggestions to help operationalize that national objective. The ideas are suggested for implementation in AJK, although there is broad applicability. It may be that these strategies could be developed first for AJK, and then later modified for use in other provinces/areas.

2. Current Situation

Nearly 4 million people live in AJK, yet the total number of enrolments in the public TVET system is estimated to have been around 5,000 students in 2005-2006¹. If these statistics were collected prior to the earthquake, the number is likely to be lower now. Even allowing for activity in the non-formal training sector, which is not captured by the statistics, this is a very low enrolment rate.²

The number of students who appeared for the AJK Secondary School Certificate Examination (SSC) examination of Board of Intermediate and Secondary Examination (BISE) Mirpur during 2008 was 53,288 out of which 24,516 passed. This represents a pass rate of 46 per cent. During the same year another 14,700 students appeared for supplementary examination out of which 5,783 passed (39.3%). This makes a total of 30,299 secondary school matriculates.

Matriculates may opt for further studies in general education, TVET or enter the job market directly. According to AJK EMIS Education Statistics for Azad Jammu & Kashmir, the total enrolment in Class XI in government institutions for 2007-2008 was 13,044 i.e. 43%. If enrolment in private sector institutions is taken in to account the ratio would further improve.

Very few matriculates opt for TVET courses. Total enrolment in TVET courses requiring SSC as minimum entry qualification is dismally low; about 500 i.e. only 1.6% of matriculates. Even if the enrolment in private sector institutions is considered the proportion in TVET stream may not be over 2%. This may be partially due to poor access and partially because of poor image of TVET as a career. Total enrolment in other courses offered in TVET institutions under TEVTA, DSWWD and Small Industries Corporation, where there is no age limit or minimum entry qualification, is four times higher at around 2,000 – but still low.

In a country with extremely low levels of education and low levels of adult literacy, matriculating from secondary school is a substantial achievement. TVET is generally considered as the choice of the academically weak and of those belonging to economically and socially lower classes of the society. This poor image contributes to the low interest.

The public's social bias against TVET as a career is further exacerbated by the dismal state of affairs of TVET. The quality of TVET is generally poor. The TVET pass outs do not get jobs soon after graduation. Studies carried out in the past revealed that it required up to 3 years waiting in some provinces for pass outs of polytechnics to get employed because of mismatch between supply and demand and lack of skills required by the employers. Basic services for career planning and guidance to assist the students in the choice of a course, career mapping, job placement and promotion of TVET are lacking.

Achieving a substantial increase in TVET enrolments would require sustained action in the following three areas:

- a. An increase in the overall quality and relevance of TVET in Pakistan. This would result in greater confidence in the TVET system and greater perceived value of a

¹ AEPM Pakistan Education Statistics 2005-06

² The State of Victoria in Australia, with a population of around 5.2 million people, has approximately 300,000 people enrolled each year in the TVET sector. The vast majority are part-time, and this includes very short courses and refresher courses.

TVET qualification, leading to more people wanting to undertake TVET courses. This is the most important area, and is the focus of NAVTEC strategies.

- b. A review of TVET programme pre-requisites to ensure that unrealistic pre-requisites do not act as a barrier to people who could otherwise enrol and complete a TVET qualification. Consideration should be given to allowing entrance to some without formal pre-requisites, and to offer numeracy and literacy as part of the TVET programme. This would result in an increase in the potential number of TVET students.
- c. An increase in the public's knowledge of TVET options and knowledge of the value of a TVET qualification as a channel for acquiring employable skills and the means of a decent living.

The following ideas focus on the third point; popularizing TVET to boost enrolment interest.

3. Measures for Popularization of TVET

It is common practice that when a product or service is introduced in the market, some times even before introduction, a vigorous advertising and motivational campaign are launched to mould the public opinion to buying the product / services. TVET as a kind of product /service also needs social marketing in order to improve its public image as an alternate channel for acquiring employable skills and means of decent living. The difficulty is if the service is known to be of poor quality, then the promotion will not have continued trust. When promoting courses it is therefore suggested to promote specific courses of quality, in occupations where there is a demand for labour.

Some ideas for measures to boost enrolment in TVET follow. These could be piloted in AJK ahead of refinement and national rollout.

3.1 Promotion of the dignity of labour and the value of skilled occupations

- a. **Campaign Through Pulpit.** People particularly in rural areas are greatly impressed by what is preached through the prayer leaders and other religious leaders. Their services may be used to highlight dignity of labour, usefulness of TVET and avenues of earning good living it offers. For this purpose, they may be provided necessary material.
- b. **Television Panel Discussion.** Panel discussions with TVET experts may be held to develop awareness among viewers about employment opportunities for skilled labour in Pakistan, and the sorts of training necessary to get those jobs, relevant TVET courses available, and so on.
- c. **Short Television Documentaries.** Five minute films highlighting success stories of TVET graduates could be produced and shown on TV as 'fillers'.
- d. **Posters and other resources.** Printed materials highlighting the dignity of labour, the value of studying for a skilled occupation avenues and the good living resulting from skilled work may be prepared with the help of media experts and displayed in schools with a particular emphasis on encouraging young people (including young women) to undertake TVET training.

- e. **Selected verses from religious teachings.** Newspaper editors may be persuaded to publish translation of verses from religious teachings highlighting dignity of labour and work ethics at appropriate places in the newspapers. It is common to see other messages (not paid advertisements) published in the newspapers. AJK TEVTA could take such action without any financial implications.

3.2 Promotion of TVET programmes

- a. **Advertisements on TV, radio and in newspapers.** Advertisements could be developed, for TV, radio and print media, to promote TVET programmes in occupations that are likely to have good employment prospects and where there are vacancies in the relevant programmes at the training institutions. These advertisements should only mention institutions where the quality of the programme is acknowledged as good.
- b. **Telling local stories.** AJK TEVTA could sponsor publication of special supplements in local newspapers highlighting importance of TVET and avenues of employment. The supplement could feature young women and men from within AJK telling their stories and how TVET training helped them achieve their goals.
- c. **TVET awareness for school students.** Study visits to various enterprises, and to TVET institutions, could be arranged for high school students to give them a better understanding of the labour market and of the pathways to work. Similarly, TVET graduates now in employment could be invited back to their local schools to speak to current students and encourage them into skilled occupations.

3.3 Career counselling and guidance

- a. **School based services.** The establishment of student service centres in schools to provide guidance and counselling to high school students is urgently needed to assist students in their choice of further education after school. Such services should be available not only to senior school students, but also to local young people who dropped out of school but could be interested in TVET.
- b. **Institution based services.** Students in a TVET institution have already made their basic choice of course, but guidance can help them with further directions and can help them with job placement services.
