

## **Challenges of Vocational Education in North East India: Role of IGNOU Institute for Vocational Education and Training (IIVET)**

The challenges of Vocational education in an Open University like ours are many and impinge upon the very mechanisms and methodologies of a Distance Education and Open University such as IGNOU. These are: technology aided instruction, the use of broadcasts, telecasts and the internet for delivery services. However, in vocational education and training face to face mode of instruction and especially skill based activities have also to be emphasized.

Vocational education has to be viewed from different multi-layered practices. One is of course the hands on training component. The other is employment generation and sustainability, whether the training programmes or courses can lead to employment/self employment. If so there has to be follow up measures to see what the participants in a vocational training programme have achieved and whether there has been a progress in terms of employability and income generation. Also, whether any industry has employed any participant, especially when there has been in plant or in house training. Another perspective of VET is studying a course on vocational education in a college or a university with the hope that the certificate will lead to an acquisition of jobs. The industry-education alliance which is gradually becoming a force in the country, one reckons that this will play a significant role in the future, what with a Skills Development Council being set-up under the aegis of and with the active support of the CII, will also, I hope, shape future events in this regard.

Skill development is one of the components and outcome of VET but training programmes should also concentrate on unskilled workers thereby giving them an opportunity to learn and earn. The unorganized sector is also a catchment resource in areas such as retailing, marketing and micro businesses.

The history of VET is not very sanguine in India especially as EDPs and allied training programmes have not been followed up. Simply leaving a participant with a certificate to fend for himself/herself has added to the plethora of the unemployed. However, with the Govt. of India's accent on the Public Private Partnership model, one can only hope that such tie-

ups will give a prod to the conscience of the industry and corporate houses, especially with Corporate Social Responsibility being such a major issue of debate today internationally, notwithstanding the polemic on ethics and CSR.

In North East India there are hardly any industrial houses worth the name and the local industry in terms of agro based products and raw material remain untapped, the potential being exploited by middlemen. Jute, rubber, bamboo and cane, ginger, turmeric are grown in the different states but how are these to be encapsulated as micro units to generate employment? The other business houses which have come to the region are basically setting up franchisee units in mobile phones, internet connection, computer courses etc. all for marketing strategies and the youth who are employed look unsettled and are trying constantly to search for better opportunities.

Coming again to the context of the Region, indigenous knowledge such as weaving, textile making, music and the arts, performing arts, the oral tradition, medicinal plants can be brought into the gamut of trades. But with the increasing modernization and the technological wave many of such indigenous methods are on the verge of becoming extant. One can only strive for a revival. Technology has no doubt led to the creation of a global community, one world, but it has exacerbated the tension between the local and the global. Local needs are to be addressed perforce as community needs especially in a country with low literacy rates. Compared to the literacy of the country, the literacy of North East India is fairly better, thanks to the Mizoram boom and this could be a marginal advantage. Yet literacy levels for women are strikingly low in some states and it is here that vocational education training programmes can intervene as basic literacy programmes to earn livelihoods.

Livelihoods have also to do with living in good if not salutary conditions. Floods in Assam every year are cataclysmic but precious little is done to take long standing measures to combat this problem. Flood control management – how to live intelligently with floods, could well serve vocational and training needs of the common populace who finally bear the brunt of such disasters.

VET in the North East Region can be integrated into a whole, a complex process since we have to trace it to components of agriculture and the current despair of the educated unemployed or even the plumber or the

technicians eking out a living. This is of course true of the entire country but in a Region where industrial development is in backwaters then education is a strength with the presence of some very good academic institutions in the Region. These institutions should come forward in partnership whether they are general colleges or professional colleges to re-appraise vocational education in the context of the small industries and local habits mentioned above. More than having vocational education courses, short term training programmes will benefit the people keeping in mind the changing order of the 'world' market such as repair of mobiles and computer hardware.

IGNOU's intervention into the area of VET in the form of the establishment of the IGNOU Institute for Vocational Education and Training (IIVET) could well be a benchmark for revival (indigenous knowledge) and survival (linking such knowledge with trades) as well as looking into contemporary realities and needs keeping in mind the training factor. The target group is the youth in particular and the public in general, taking also into cognizance rural women. And of course the oeuvre of distance education technology is always there as a ready support system.

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