

THE CHALLENGES OF PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS IN REALISING THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION

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PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

by

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Education is the key for sustainable social, political and economic development and a fundamental sector that every country needs to develop. Governments in developing countries have limited resources for providing even basic education of good quality. This has resulted in greater involvement of the private sector in the field of education. Private providers have stepped in for provision of education over the last couple of decades. This is also linked with Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) in education.

An important role devolves on PPPs in the field of technical and vocational education and training (TVET). The main challenge is to take national level measures which will promote skills development through TVET and meet the requirements of enterprises and industry. Skills development is an area which has not received consideration commensurate with its importance in the context of PPPs.

A schematic of Public Private Partnership is crucial in addressing the challenges of skill gap. What is important is to engage with the industry as a stakeholder. For instance, my recent project work involves one of the largest commercial vehicle manufacturers in India and has contained and controlled attrition to a substantial extent just being proactive and taking our suggestions on board. A wholesome scaling up of automotive workforce through skill upgradation of 1600 service technicians annually is being done in partnership with industry, engaging with the appropriate government machinery. PPP in TVET is of special importance since it can be comprehensive to encompass all aspects of this level of education – such as financing, infrastructure, quality, in-service training of TVET instructors, establishment and review of vocational trades and technical courses etc.

Skills development programmes necessarily involve close collaboration with industry and enterprises under the overall coordinating role of government. The institutionalised collaboration between TVET institutions and enterprises or industry is very weak in most developing countries, whereas this is a key to running these programmes in a fruitful manner, as demonstrated by policy and programmatic approaches in developed countries, notably Switzerland, Austria, Germany, Australia, Nordic and several other developed countries. In conducting TVET programmes, where industry and enterprises collaborate with Government, this is not propelled by private interest but by industrial and economic growth as overall objective shared and jointly accomplished by public authorities and private sector.

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“Dual” system as practiced in industrialised countries such as Australia, Switzerland and Germany in which students while pursuing TVET programme undergo apprenticeship in an enterprise is premised upon PPP - there is huge potential for private sectors to contribute to school infrastructure and equipment's, TVET instructors' training programmes as well as giving student stipend when they undergo training in an enterprise. Private partners from industry and enterprises can also contribute to TVET school development programmes, particularly when such enterprises have collaboration with foreign enterprises.

The skill development strategy should aim at fostering national level action at developing public-private partnerships under the overall responsibility of States, within the framework of an institutionalised collaboration between TVET institutions and enterprises. Such partnerships are necessary to mitigate prevalent weaknesses in this area. In developing world, much stronger linkages between TVET institutions and enterprises are essential for making the system better responsive to growing skill demands, and better capacitated for contributing to industrial and socio-economic development.

Government in developing countries must meet the challenge of establishing and strengthening public TVET institutions through PPPs working closely with industry and enterprises, with the objective to impart skills and foster entrepreneurship. Such challenge should focus on Government role in devising nationwide uniform norms and standards and a system of national assessment of students' acquisition of skills and technical competencies. Public policies especially in developing world can draw upon the work of international agencies like the World Bank, UNESCO & ILO.

In industrialised countries, private enterprises and entrepreneurs collaborate with public TVET educational institutions with the objective of not making profit out of education but contributing to skills development through TVET. This requires enduring national commitment and sustained national investment in this area of strategic importance.

A potential danger and possible area of caution is that, as the skills training sector becomes a profitable sector, more and more firms enter it but do not keep in the mind that the ultimate goal is to create a labour force that possesses the skills needed in a changing economy. Hence, policy reforms should include regulatory frameworks and the setting of industry-wide standards for consistent delivery of TVET initiatives. There is need of a paradigm shift where private partners only play a complementary role till such time as public education system is revitalized and strengthened.

Government should ensure that PPP's in education do not lead to private sector stronghold on education system, to the detriment of public interest in education. They should carefully analyse any offer of private partners in terms of its implications for the right to education. The principles of social justice and equity should be of overriding concern for guiding any PPP measures or schemes in education.

I would also like to stress that education is a social responsibility and should be shared by all stakeholders in education including corporate sector. While private sector should be harnessed for imparting skills, care should be taken that their programmes effectively contribute to safeguarding education as a societal good and to national development.