

GENDERED TRANSITION TO LABOUR MARKETS AND EMPLOYMENT: EVIDENCE FROM MICRO AND SMALL ENTERPRISES IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR

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ABSTRACT

Successful harnessing of demographic dividend of youth depends significantly on levels of education and market-oriented skills they attain. Youth in Jammu and Kashmir have indeed made progress in terms of educational and vocational skills attainment in recent past. Yet it is not clear that youth particularly women in conflict zones of Kashmir are prepared for challenges they will face in a globalised world. With above backdrop, the paper probes the following questions: To what extent are gender gaps in vocational educational attainment narrowing? Are opportunities available to youth that enable them to complete vocational education, increasingly a pre-requisite to participation in the labour market in the context of globalisation? Are opportunities available that enable youth to overcome skill mismatches through vocational skills training? Are youth in conflict zones succeeding in finding productive employment and becoming integrated into labour market? Are they transitioning into work roles at appropriate ages and with adequate skills? And are opportunities available for young women to make most of their productive potential? The study has been confined to a sample of 796 pass outs of industrial training institutes across conflict zones of Jammu and Kashmir. Structured questionnaire based field survey method has been used to collect primary data and information and data analysis has been done using simple descriptive statistics.

The study reveals that 68.1% of vocational graduates were in youthful age of below 25 years. Nearly 60.3% and 39.7% of them were males and females respectively reflecting gender imbalance in enrolments in vocational courses. Less than half of them (48.8%) were unemployed and 22.6% were self-employed, and 6.7% have also educated up to graduation and post-graduation level, which have paved their ways up to managerial position. Of unemployed, 82% were looking for a job at the time of survey and duration of job search was up to 2 years in case of 22.9%. Low standard of English was main reason of failure to obtain permanent employment in case of 33% of non-permanently employed. Self-employment has been comparatively more lucrative avenues for technical graduates. The paper argues that significant investments in terms of appropriate policies and programmes are required to achieve higher employment rates and elimination of

gender disparity in vocational education, harness its demographic dividend and enable youth to participate in and benefit from global development. Alternative methods of delivering vocational training need to be explored. Good vocational training practices for youth in conflict zones are innovative approaches to skills acquisition, employment and income generation, which include procedures for systematically identifying employment- and income-generating opportunities at local level, designing and delivering appropriate training programmes, and providing necessary post-training support services, including credit, technical assistance and market information.

Keywords: Employment, labour market, micro and small enterprises, policy

JEL Codes: J01, J08, J18, J21, J28

1. INTRODUCTION

In the recent past, the issue of youth transition from education to labour market has gained increasing attention (Ryan, 2001), due to increase in youth unemployment rate (OECD, 2005) and decrease in their relative earnings (OECD, 2006). The first transition from education to labour market has a remarkable effect on future employment prospects (Korpi et al., 2003). There has been a significant shift in the trajectories of youth transition from school-to-work (Fergusson et al., 2000; Bynner, 2001; Lawy, 2002). Economic expansion and changes in training and labour markets have made youth transition from school to work much more varied, complex, lengthy, uncertain and unpredictable (Pollock, 1997; Bynner and Parsons, 2000; Cohen and Ainley, 2000) and their labour market status is less protected (Gangl 2002). Educational attainment of youth has significant role in shaping their life chances, transitions and participation in labour market (Bynner, Joshi and Tsatsas, 2000; OECD, 2005a), which influence the risks and uncertainties, aspirations and attitudes towards work (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; Lowe and Krahn, 2000). Entering a first job or taking up an apprenticeship does not necessarily complete integration into the labour market. Therefore, youth transition from education to labour market involves more than one single transition between education and employment or unemployment (Hillmert, 2002).

Youth transition from vocational education to labour market is uncertain in conflict settings of Jammu and Kashmir State in India. Youth display higher rates of unemployment and appear to be more sensitive to violent conflict. Youth unemployment in conflict zone is largely attributed to the weakness of the economy and overall lack of labour demand (Freeman and Wise, 1982; Blanchflower and Freeman, 2000a, 2000b; ILO, 2000; Card and Lemieux, 2000). Disadvantaged youth appear to bear a disproportionate share of the cost of violent conflicts (Freeman, 1991; Freeman and Rodgers, 1999). With

deteriorating employment prospects, youth tend to work less, stay longer in school and reside with parents (Card and Lemieux, 2000), or even commit crime (Freeman 1996, 1999).

Despite recovery from violent conflicts and modest sustained economic growth in the recent past, the labour market outcomes have not improved desirably in Jammu and Kashmir State in India. Unemployment problem is compounded by poor performance of education in general and vocational education in particular. The prospects of youth in labour markets appear rather dim. Getting employment in public and private sector is often the only ways and means for educated youth for eking out a livelihood. Youth unemployment is not only an urban phenomenon in conflict zone of Jammu and Kashmir. Labour market outcomes are also not much rosier for rural youths. Rural children transits into work at very early ages and end up in low productivity tasks. Violent conflict also results in increasing migration from rural to urban areas. With rapid urbanization, there are serious doubts that youth unemployment problem will disappear in near future. With above backdrop, understanding the youth transition from education-to-work is significant for educational policy-making and reforming vocational education and training. However, there is rarely any documentary evidence on the youth transition from vocational education to labour market in conflict zone of Jammu and Kashmir. Therefore, the present paper aims to fill this information gap.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The link between education system and labour market is strong (Gangl, 2001; Scherer, 2004; and de Grip and Wolbers, 2006). The labour market transition process refers to a period between completion of general education and beginning of vocational education or beginning of gainful employment (Rauner, 1999). Youth transition from education-to-work has changed structurally in recent past. Young people are forced to adapt to changing demands and some youth have developed successful strategies to cope with these requirements. However, less educated and disadvantaged youth often face serious problems in transition process (DuBois-Reymond, 1998). Longer transitions lead to a greater vulnerability and to risky behaviours (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997). Generally, young people are unable to judiciously plan for the future (Sennett, 1998). Consequently, they are imploded by unpredictability as the future unfolds (Nilsen, 1999). There are discontinuities in the transition process (Chisholm and Hurrelmann, 1995). Youth become increasingly proactive in situation of

risk and uncertainty (Wyn and Dwyer, 1999). Youth with weak social networks tend to be poor achievers and more reactive in planning the life course (Evan, Behrens and Kaluza, 2000).

Youth today does not necessarily follow traditional model of finishing school, completing vocational training, getting a job, and building a family (DuBois-Reymond, 1998; Thomson, Bell, Holland, Henderson, McGrellis and Sharpe, 2002; Wyn and Dwyer, 1999). The school-to-work- transition is often crucial point in one's life course, since they have long lasting effects on labour market entry, lifestyle, and upward mobility (Heinz, 1996). Traditional dual educational system offered a relatively tight link between initial vocational training, first jobs, and subsequent employment (Evans, Behrens and Kaluza, 1999). Many youth go through apprenticeship through their employers (Ryan, 2001; Hannan et al., 1997). Therefore, apprenticeship is the main screening device for recruitment (CPB, 1997). Apprentices trained in large firms are more likely to experience a smooth transition to regular employment (Winkelmann, 1996). Apprenticeships develop transferable skills across jobs and employers. Low-pay persistence and increased mobility between low pay and unemployment is a well-established fact (Dickens, 2000; Cappellari and Jenkins, 2004; Stewart, 2007). Youth who stumble early in their transition from school to apprenticeship to work have fewer chances to obtain a job (Roberts and Foti, 2000). Although apprenticeships provide an entrance key to the labour market, increasingly employers are reluctant and unwilling to provide full-time positions to apprentices.

School leavers experience serious problems finding employment shortly after entering the labour market; however, their employment situation tends to improve with the passage of time (Kogan and Schubert, 2003). Youth with tertiary and engineering qualifications have shorter unemployment than social science graduates. Longer employment search is positively related to higher unemployment rate prevailing at the time of completing education (Blazquez, 2005). Educational investment enhances access to first job in labour market (Albert *et al.*, 2008). Several studies have documented the phenomenon of over-education and first job in labour market (Allen and Van der Velden, 2001; Battu *et al.*, 1999; Dolton and Vignoles, 2000; Chevalier and Lindley, 2006; Dolton and Silles, 2008). Employers also use educational attainment as a signal for their productivity (Spence, 1973). Employer may offer an initial lower wage until additional information on abilities is revealed (Farber and Gibbons, 1996). It takes time to resolve the initial uncertainty about the worker's productivity (Lange, 2007).

Investment in education and training will be lost if young people do not move into productive jobs. Excluded youth are more vulnerable to personal and socially destructive behaviour and more prone to engage in illegal and dangerous activities. Vulnerable youth may become 'discouraged youth', who lose faith in governance and failed to live up to their expectations and in severe cases this can lead to political instability and the rise of extremism (ILO, 2006). Youth in developing countries are especially vulnerable to extreme poverty (ILO, 2008a). Many young people are struggling to eke out a living in the informal economy of developing countries. Therefore, providing young people with the opportunity to secure productive employment and decent work is a big challenge (ILO, 2008b).

3. OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

Successful harnessing of demographic dividend of youth depends significantly on levels of education and market-oriented skills they attain. Youth in Jammu and Kashmir have indeed made progress in terms of educational and vocational skills attainment in recent past. Yet it is not clear that youth particularly women in conflict zones of Kashmir are prepared for challenges they will face in a globalised world. With above backdrop, the paper probes the following questions: To what extent are gender gaps in vocational educational attainment narrowing? Are opportunities available to youth that enable them to complete vocational education, increasingly a pre-requisite to participation in the labour market in the context of globalisation? Are opportunities available that enable youth to overcome skill mismatches through vocational skills training? Are youth in conflict zones succeeding in finding productive employment and becoming integrated into labour market? Are they transitioning into work roles at appropriate ages and with adequate skills? And are opportunities available for young women to make most of their productive potential? The study has been confined to a sample of 796 pass outs of industrial training institutes (ITIs) across conflict zones of Jammu and Kashmir. For assessment of demand of industries of the courses run by ITIs, a sample of 193 small and micro enterprises (SMEs) has been selected. Structured questionnaire based field survey method has been used to collect primary data and information and data analysis has been done using simple descriptive statistics.

4. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The contribution of technically trained manpower to the economic growth and development is a well-accepted factor. Technological change and dynamism

in industry is positively related with the quality of technically trained workforce engaged therein. In order to attain industrial and technological self-reliance, the planners envisaged the development and building up of indigenous expertise and stock of technically trained manpower as an inalienable part of the State's development strategy. As a sequel to this policy, tremendous efforts were made by the Government to create a massive infrastructure to train and built up locally groomed expertise and skilled manpower. Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) are one of the major institutions that provide technically trained manpower in the State of Jammu and Kashmir. As a result, the State has turned into the one of the largest reservoir of technically skilled manpower in the country. The over production of young vocational graduates with less regard to the absorption capacity has resulted in failure to smoothen their transition to the labour markets. In view of rapidly changing social, economic, political and technological climates in the context of ongoing violent conflict, the demand of young vocational graduates has also change in the labour markets. The following paragraphs present the empirical analysis of the major results obtained during the course of the present study.

4.1. Gendered Transition to Labour Markets

Out of sampled 796 vocational graduates, 15%, 53.1%, 25.4% and 6.4% were found respectively in the age group of below 20 years, between 20-25 years, between 25-30 years and above 30 years. Thus, significantly high proportion of them was found in the youthful age groups. In district Kupwara, 85.7% respondents were concentrated in the age groups of 20-25 years and the rest were 25-30 years old. In other districts, they were distributed across the age groups, except the districts of Pulwama, Leh, Kargil, Doda and Poonch where none of them were found in the relatively older age group of above 30 years, which reflects that a higher proportion of them are very young and energetic, and highly productive if they could be provided with suitable job opportunities. Nearly 60% and 40% of the vocational graduates were males and females respectively, clearly reflecting the gender imbalance in enrolments. However, Leh, Kargil and Udhampur were exceptions, where the proportion of young female vocational graduates was significantly high (70.4% in Leh, 64.1% in Kargil and 62.5% in Udhampur). In the districts of Badgam and Anantnag, the proportion of female vocational graduates was 44.5 and 45 respectively. Overall, there has been a clear trend in narrowing down in the gender gaps in vocational educational attainment in the conflict zone of the State of Jammu and Kashmir.

Two-third of the vocational graduates was unmarried. In Leh, more than half of them were married, whereas the proportion of married youth was much lower in Doda (4.7%), Kupwara (14.3%), Badgam (22.2%), Poonch (27.3%) and Kathua (29.13%). Therefore, the social understanding of the youth with vocational education was comparatively high in most of the districts due to which they enter the nuptial ties at later ages. However, this may also be due to higher prevalence of unemployment among the vocational graduates in these districts and a significant proportion of them had not transitioned to work at young ages, which may be delaying their entry into the marriage. The above finding is in tune with the global recognition that entry into the labour market at young ages competes with their schooling and vocational educational opportunities. Besides, the ongoing policy and programme interventions to the prevention of early entry into the labour market are also responsible for delayed transition of youth with vocational education to the work. Thus, there is no denying the fact that the opportunities are available to youth to enable them to complete vocational education to participate effectively in the labour market in the context of globalization. However, a significant proportion of them had transitioned to labour market not at early youthful ages and urban youth, specifically the young urban women have been experiencing delayed transitioned to labour markets than their rural counterparts.

4.2. Labour Market Transition and Employment

Out of 796 vocational graduates, 51.2% were transitioned to labour markets at the time of the survey and those who failed to do so, of them 89.2% were never entered labour market and rest were resigned, laid off or separated from the previous employment. Those who successfully transitioned, of them 48.3%, 22.4% and 22.4% respectively were employed locally, within the respective districts, and outside their respective districts and 22.6% were self-employed. The district-wise analysis reveals that 62.5% and 37.5% of vocational graduates were locally employed and self-employed respectively in Kupwara. Nearly half of them were gainfully employed in all the districts except Pulwama and Leh, where the proportion of successfully transitioned youth stood at 43.6% and 42.6% respectively. About one-fourth of the transitioned vocational graduates were self-employed in Srinagar, Badgam, Leh, Kargil, Doda, Poonch and Rajouri, whereas in other districts the proportion of self-employed vocational graduates was about one-fifth except Kupwara, where self-employed vocational graduates were 37.5%. Thus, self-employment is one of the lucrative options for young vocational graduates to eke out a livelihood and there is need to promote

awareness regarding self-employment programmes and schemes among the prospective vocational trainees during the tenure of their stay at training institutes.

Out of 407 youth transitioned to the labour markets, 78.4% and 21.6% were males and females respectively. In Kupwara, all the transitioned vocational graduates were young males. In all other districts, the proportion of young men transitioned to labour markets was higher than young women except the district Kargil, where they were in equal proportion. In Leh and Udhampur, the gender imbalance in transition to labour market was not as sharp as in other districts and 43.5% and 41.1% of the transitioned vocational graduates were females. The main reason for lower women transition to labour markets is their enrollment pattern, as a higher proportion of them were enrolled in the cutting and tailoring course, which provides them meager job opportunities in organized as well unorganized sectors. However, they could be motivated to take up self-employment as the market for their services is very large and returns are also very lucrative, for which there is need to make them aware regarding various schemes being run by governmental and non-governmental agencies for assisting them to start their own small enterprises on individual as well as group basis.

The private sector is the dominant employment-providing sector to the vocational graduates, wherein about half of them were transitioned and 22.6% each were transitioned to the government and self-employed sector. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were providing job opportunities to a very small proportion (5.4%) of the vocational graduates. In most of the districts, the NGO sector jobs for vocational graduates were virtually non-existing. Therefore, the programmes and schemes of self-employment needs to be propagated among the young vocational graduates so that they could productively transitioned to the labour markets and engaged in building and advancing the economy of the State of Jammu and Kashmir.

One-fourth of young vocational graduates were transitioned to the labour markets as technician followed by supervisory position (15.5%), sales and service personnel, and operator (11.1%), and skilled workers (10.2%). About 6.7% of young vocational graduates were transitioned to managerial position and 8.3% of them were working as clerks. A smaller proportion of them were also engaged as craft workers (6.3%) and elementary workers (5.1%). All of the transitioned young vocational graduates in Kupwara were engaged as technician (60%) and operators (40%). Similarly, technician was dominant cadre in Baramulla also. The districts of Anantnag, Jammu and Kathua represent all the positions

occupied by young vocational graduates. Leh and Udhampur were dominant in terms of managerial position occupied by young vocational graduates transitioned to the labour markets. This is mainly due to the fact that these young people were also educated up to graduation and post-graduation level, which have paved their ways up to managerial position. Thus, the vocational education supplemented by higher education has helped the employed vocational graduates to attain better employment status.

All the vocational graduates in courses of tractor mechanic and information technology were successfully transitioned to the labour markets, which may also be attributed to the fact that they were very few in the sample and these courses were offered to a very small number of trainees in few institutes. Besides above, the highest proportion of young vocational graduates were transitioned to the labour markets in the vocation of plumber (82.5%), motor mechanic, welder and carpenter (80% each), followed by the fitter and machinist (75% each), and electrician (62.04%), computer operator (60.93%), and radio and T.V mechanic (60.71%). A high proportion of young women in the vocation of cutting and tailoring, followed by stenography (61.8%), electronic mechanic (45.84%), electrician (37.95%) and computer operator (39.07%) were failed to transit to the labour markets, which may be due to comparatively large sample and intense job competition.

Of the young people not transitioned to labour markets 82% were looking for a job at the time of the survey and the duration of job search varies from less than 6 months for 12.6% to less than 2 years for 22.9% of unemployed vocational graduates. Job search interval was not very long for majority of the young men and women transitioned to the labour markets. The lack of initial capital to start own business, lack of confidence to venture into self-employment, and generally parents expectation to be supported after they have done their part in educating their children may be compelling reasons for the vocational graduates to seek employment as opposed to self employment, which may have increased the duration of job search. Recent economic slowdown and non-availability of jobs (46.27%), very few job opening and strong competition (58.3%), lack of work experience (more than three-fourth), poor preparation/training (about one-half), lack of professional requirements (more than one-half), and no personal connections/no strong referrals (more than two-third) were cited as the main reasons for non-transition to the labour markets. Besides, more than half of the youth transitioned to the labour markets have changed their jobs. Thus, there is low level of job satisfaction among the currently employed youth.

Besides, due to liberalization measures, the employers in government as well as private sector prefer to employ the labour on non-permanent basis, so that they could be retrenched as and when required, which is causing a lot of hardships to the vocational graduates and needs careful examination by the manpower planners and decision-makers. Out of 267 young people who transitioned to the labour markets temporarily, one-third of them cited low standard of English as the sole reason for the failure to get a permanent employment. Not only this, the poor performance at tests and interviews conducted by recruiting agencies (more than one-fifth), and discrimination by race, caste, religion and politics, and poor performance in vocational course (more than one-tenth) were cited by young vocational graduates as reasons for their failure to transition permanently to the labour markets.

4.3. Work Satisfaction and Obstacles Faced

Nearly 30.04%, 37.14%, 23.81% of young vocational graduates respectively perceived the content of work, the working conditions and opportunity to learn while working as very useful and satisfying. About 30.0% of them have used the knowledge and skill acquired during vocational course very significantly and 20.31%, 18.14%, 15.24% and 13.96% of them were very satisfied with job security, income, promotion opportunities and other fringe benefits respectively. More than one-fifth of young vocational graduates perceived that they have realized the career expected and used the knowledge acquired during training highly and one-third of them perceived their current employment position appropriate with their level of education. About one-fourth of them were modestly satisfied with career expectation, use of acquired knowledge and appropriateness of position with the level of education. More than 39% of them were marginally satisfied with key aspects of job characteristics.

Out of 407 transitioned youth, 363 young vocational graduates (89.18%) were temporarily transitioned to labour markets and were looking for a job and/or intending to change the current job. Main obstacles in successful transition to the labour markers by young vocational graduates were absence of required work experience (28.37%), absence of opportunities in the field of specialization (21.46%), and lack of knowledge in information technology (17.35%). Other important obstacles include lack of knowledge of English (9.9%) and lack of knowledge of management (8.81%) by the young vocational graduates. Thus, there is need to diversify the vocational course structures to make them more competitive and employment oriented and emphasis should

be paid on equipping them with knowledge of English language and information technology by arranging special classes during the training programmes.

4.4. SMEs and Labour Markets

Youth vocational training is not the sole instrument to transit to the labour markets. A supply of skilled labour does not automatically create its own demand. Skills' training is unlikely to transit youth to employment if the labour markets are not expanding. If the demand for labour by industrial units and enterprises is low, vocational training and active labour market policies will have little effect on young men and women transitioning to the labour markets. Therefore, vocational training programmes should be guided by the needs and demand of industrial units and enterprises and the labour market. Economic growth and labour market stimulating macroeconomic policies provide better environment for relevant and effective vocational training programmes. However, in Jammu and Kashmir, vocational training programmes are still often determined by supply considerations, which are irrelevant and ineffective.

Out of 193 sample SMEs, 83.93% and 16.07% respectively were proprietary and partnership firms. SMEs were engaged in various activities such as manufacturing (21.24%), assembling (9.84%), processing (19.17%), job working (27.46%), repairing (17.09%) and services (5.18%). About 68.91%, 20.21%, and 10.88% were small scale industry (SSI), ancillary and tiny units respectively. Thus, SSI units were dominant. None of the tiny units were operational in Doda, Leh, Poonch, Udhampur, Kupwara, Kargil and Badgam, and the ancillary units were found in all the districts except Leh, Kupwara and Kargil. These SMEs employ 1461 workers, out of which 35.18%, 37.57%, 17.45% and 9.79% were technical, skilled, unskilled and other category workers respectively. More or less the same pattern was noticed across the districts of Jammu and Kashmir.

The transition of young technically trained and skilled personnel was very high in the SMEs compared to unskilled and other workers. The potential for further transition of these workers was high, if there is improvement in political scenario followed by large infrastructural investment in the SMEs by the government and private sector. Manufacturing is dominant activities of the SMEs followed by food products, hosiery and garments, beverages, plastic products and wool and silk products in the proprietary firms and manufacturing of plastic products and hosiery and garments products are dominant activities in partnership firms. Technology level of the SMEs was mixed as they use simple hand tools, machine-driven tools, powered hand tools and automatic

machineries. Machine-driven tools were used by all the SMEs engaged in manufacturing food products, beverages, paper products and printing, plastic products and machinery parts. All SMEs engaged in beverages, plastic products, chemical products, and machinery parts were using automatic machinery. Besides, they also used simple hand tools and powered hand tools.

The vocational training course of electrician was rated very high and high by one-third and one-fifth of the SMEs respectively in recruiting new employees and 40% and 6.67% of the SMEs respectively in recruiting new employees. One-fourth and one-fifth of SMEs rated the vocational training course of instrument mechanic as very high and low respectively in recruiting new employees. The vocational training course of electronic mechanic was rated high and middle by one-fourth of SMEs each and 31.25% and 18.75% of SMEs rated it middle high and low respectively in recruiting new employees. Besides, the vocational training courses of machinist and motor mechanic were also rated very high in recruiting new employees and computer operator and information technology were also rated high and middle high by 33.33% and 44.44%, and 36.36% and 54.54% respectively in recruiting new employees. It is significant to note that none of SMEs rated the vocational training courses of electrician, fitter, welder, machinist, motor mechanic, computer operator and information technology as low, which implies that these needs to be propagated more and their course curriculum and programmes should be restructured to cater to the growing demand of the SMEs and make them more competitive.

SMEs had reported educational certificates, vocational training certificates, experience, recommendations from employees/employers, and recommendations from referees were the basis for new recruitment with varying degree of importance. Nearly 43% of the industrial units have reported that educational certificates as the main considerations and 29.01% of them reported experience as the main consideration in recruiting in professionals/managers, while recruiting new technicians, 39.38% and 36.27% of them gave main importance to vocational training certificates and experience respectively. Thus, technical qualifications and experience was the main considerations in recruiting new technicians and technically trained workers, whereas in recruiting the low skilled workers, the main consideration was experience and recommendations from employers/employees and referees.

About 75 SMEs have recruited technically trained workers in recent past, out of which majority of them were recruited by SSI units (42.10%), followed by ancillary units (33.33%) and tiny units (28.57%). Out of 56 SSI units, which

have recruited technically trained workers, 76.36% of them were vocational graduates, whereas the pass outs of the vocational training institutes have also been recruited by SSI units (57.14%), ancillary units (28.57%) and tiny units (14.28%). Out of the 75 SMEs, which have recruited new technically trained workers, 72.0% have reported their performance as satisfactory and the highest level of satisfaction has been reported for technical level and craft and related workers. About 34 industrial units have the provision of additional training after new worker's recruitment to expose them to the work atmosphere. About half of the tiny and ancillary units and 42.86% of the SSI units have gone for additional training to newly recruit technical workers. They have given varied reasons for additional training after worker's recruitment, which includes lack of relevant theoretical knowledge, lack of adequate practical/application skills, lack of proper attitudes, values, work ethics, and to provide firm-specific training. Lack of adequate practical/application skills followed by lack of proper attitudes, values and work ethics on the part of newly recruits calls for needs to be taken care of at the vocational training institutes itself during their trainings by making appropriate provision for practical training and application skills and imbuing in them the proper attitudes, values and work ethics, so that their employability and competitiveness can be enhanced in labour market.

Out of 55 SMEs, wherein vocational graduates have been transitioned recently, 61.82% of SMEs rated them better than the school leavers who have acquired skills on-the-job in the firm. Nearly 23% of the SMEs rated vocational graduates as good as good as the school leavers who have acquired skills on-the-job in the firm. More than one-third of the SSI units perceived lack of knowledge and skill in the use of computers and drawings, communication and teamwork practices and knowledge of labour laws and industrial relations as the failure to transit successfully to the labour markets, which calls for improving their competitive edge and performance in job market in aforementioned areas. Lastly, the perceptions of the management of SMEs were ascertained to know the types of vocational graduates with better chances to transition to labour markets. It was revealed that the vocational graduates with apprenticeship trainings and sound secondary educational qualifications have better prospects to transit to the labour markets on long-term permanent basis than the young men and women with incomplete secondary education but with long years of experience as well as the youth with sound secondary educational qualifications with on-the-job training in the firm. One thing which is quite clear that secondary school qualifications may or may not significant in industrial jobs and not a potent qualification in better job prospects and smooth career progression than

better technical and apprenticeship training and this should be taken due weight-age, while admitting the prospective trainees in vocational training institutes.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The mismatch between demand and supply of vocational graduates may only be corrected through better understanding of the labour market scenario, for which the following policy recommendations would go a long way in improving the functioning of vocational training institutes in facilitating smooth and successful transition of the youth to the labour markets.

To improve the competitive edge of vocational graduates in the labour markets, on the supply side there is need to review and update the curriculum and syllabi, add more major subjects, upgrade facilities, limit the class size, impart the theory of technology, propagate the use of computers, tools, machines, drawings and written instruction to improve their competitive edge. There is also the need to impart the theory and practice of equipment maintenance, skills in communication and teamwork, knowledge of labour laws and industrial relations, safer working practices, discipline and accuracy, employ competent faculty, provide faculty development programmes, and provide job placement. Besides, there is need to forge suitable linkages with different line departments in the government sector and business firms/organizations in private sector, which should provide placements to the vocational graduates in their respective firms/organizations.

At present, the industrial training institutes are not following the practice of job placement and the faculty and staff members are not trained in performing the task of job placement. Therefore, there is need to forge suitable linkages with local institutions of higher learning for providing job placement training to the faculty and staff. One of the options could be that the Management Faculty in the local universities may be contacted to impart short-term courses to the selected staffs of the vocational training institutes in job placement. In all the vocational training institutes, there is need to create a job placement cell, which should devise the mechanism of job placement. In order to evaluate the performance of vocational training institutes, there is need to add one more criterion of the number of placement made by them. The better performing institutes should be given additional infrastructure development grants, which could act as a bait to perform well in job placement.

Making industrial training a demand driven exercise is a challenging task, which call for a fundamental reorientation of vocational training policies and

sharing of the costs of industrial training by the beneficiaries. In the conflict zone of Jammu and Kashmir, the public sector is a small and possibly declining source of jobs for growing labour force. Industrial and service sectors including the urban and rural informal sectors are absorbing more and more workers. Therefore, the big challenge for the industrial training institutions is to equip trainees with the skills and motivation them to engage in industrial work, self-employment and viable informal types of economic activity.

Self-employment is one of the lucrative options for vocational graduates to eke out a livelihood and there is need to promote awareness regarding self-employment programmes and schemes among the prospective trainees during the tenure of their stay at vocational training institutes. The main reason for lower proportion of the young women in labour markets is their enrollment in the vocational courses such as cutting and tailoring, which provides them meager opportunities to transit in organized as well unorganized labour markets. However, they could be motivated to take up self-employment as the market for their services is very large and returns are also very lucrative, for which there is need to make them aware regarding various schemes being run by the governmental and non-governmental agencies for assisting them to start their own small enterprises on individual or group basis.

Economic situation has been changing rapidly in the conflict ridden State of Jammu and Kashmir and the State is recovering slowly from the insurgency and political turmoil. With improved investment climate, both the government and private sector SMEs will have better prospects of absorbing young men and women with vocational skills and trainings in the labour markets. Self-employed and unorganized sector has more labour absorption potential, which needs to be propagated by the relevant agencies. The potential of unorganized sector needs to be tapped in a significant manner by introducing new guidelines and policies.

The transition of the young men and women with vocational skills and trainings raises the issue of relevance of training courses to the local labour markets. Most of vocational training institutes continue to focus on producing basic industrial skills, such as fitters, welders, etc. that are long-term and orientated towards formal employment. Given the current labour market environment, the course structures and programmes should be reviewed to improve the successful transition of young vocational graduates to the labour markets. New vocational training courses relevant to the local labour markets needs to be introduced, which may includes auto mechanic, AC and refrigerator mechanic, handicraft and handloom weaving, multi-skilled fabricator, etc. Besides,

vocational courses in travel, tourism and hospitality, sales and service, and hotel and catering need to be introduced.

Duration of the vocational training courses remain a major problem as a majority of young people look for shorter courses that more flexibly reflect job possibilities, which needs to be given due consideration by the relevant authorities. Major obstacles faced in transitioning to labour markets such as lack of knowledge of English language, information technology and management needs to be removed by inculcating these skills through suitable training.

The combined duration of vocational training and apprenticeship may amount to three-four years, which is quite long period of time, ending up with small salaries. Thus, there is need to rationalize the duration of training and apprenticeship and their content enabling integration of vocational courses with apprenticeships and the total duration of training plus apprenticeship should be within two to three years, which should lead to the skilled worker qualification. Besides, the programming of vocational courses is done at the State level, which is not based on the assessed potential demand for skills in the labour markets and results in mismatch between local demand and supply of the skills. Thus, there is need to assess the potentiality and employability of the vocational graduates in the local labour markets.

In sum, significant investments in terms of appropriate policies and programmes are required to achieve higher employment rates and elimination of gender disparity in vocational education, harness its demographic dividend and enable youth to participate in and benefit from global development. Alternative methods of delivering vocational training need to be explored. Good vocational training practices for youth in conflict zones are innovative approaches to skills acquisition, employment and income generation, which include procedures for systematically identifying employment- and income-generating opportunities at local level, designing and delivering appropriate training programmes, and providing necessary post-training support services, including credit, technical assistance and market information.

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