Relevance and effectiveness of the Current Skill Development programs in the Chittoor district

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Introduction

Chittoor district in Rayalaseema Region is one of the 26 newly formed districts in Andhra Pradesh. Before the bifurcation of the districts in 2022, Chittoor district had a huge industry presence in the form of Sri City SEZ, Electronic Manufacturing Clusters, Amara Raja Industries, and Chittoor was also home to the famous Tirumala temple. Undivided Chittoor had a wide array of income sources and there was potential for many sectors. For administrative ease, the Government of Andhra Pradesh divided 13 districts of Andhra Pradesh into 26. In this process, Chittoor district has been bifurcated into two districts, Sri Balaji and Annamayya. The district is re-organized with 31 Mandals and 4 Revenue Divisions, which are Chittoor, Palamaner, Kuppam, and Nagari, and has a population of 18 lakhs.

The major economic activity in Chittoor is the primary sector, whereas it was the service sector in the undivided Chittoor. Sugarcane, groundnut, and paddy are the major crops and the tamarind cluster is an emerging source of livelihood. Chittoor also has a large no. of dairies, with an average monthly procurement of 9 lakh metric litres. Some of the major industries in the district are in Automotive sector, food processing sector, solar sector, and textile sector. There are a total of 49 large industries in the district with a total investment of Rs. 5500 crores and an employment outlay of 17,500. The service sector has the least contribution to the district's GDP with very limited activities happening in the district.

To meet the skill needs of various sectors, there are few skill training institutes set up by either the central/state govt. or by private institutes (Table 1). These training centres are offering industry-relevant courses and are providing jobs to all the trainees at the end of their course. To further strengthen the skill development ecosystem, the Andhra Pradesh government has introduced a cascading skill development system, where each assembly constituency in the state will have a Skill Hub, each parliamentary constituency will have a Skill college and there will be one state-level Skill university. Under this initiative, 4 assembly constituencies in the Chittoor district are getting Skill hubs in the project's first phase (refer to Table 1).

Table 1: Short-Term Skill Training Institutes in Chittoor District

S.No.	Scheme	Institution Name	Trade	No. of seats per batch
1	DDU GKY	SEEDAP Retail Training Institute	Retail Trainee Associate	70
2	NRLM/RSETI	INDSETI	Self-Employment training	60
3	--	National Academy of Construction	Plumber General Assistant Electrician Mason General Field Engineer	30/course
4	State Govt. Initiative	Skill Hub - Chittoor	Junior Software Developer	30
5	State Govt. Initiative	Skill Hub - Kuppam	Junior Software Developer	30
6	State Govt. Initiative	Skill Hub - Punganuru	Assistant Electrician	30
7	State Govt. Initiative	Skill Hub - Palamaner	GST Accounts Assistant	30
8	NAPS	Amara Raja Skill Development Centre	Multi Skill Technician	70

Opportunities in the district

After the bifurcation of the districts in Andhra Pradesh, Chittoor district lost many of the industries to Sri Balaji district and the farming land where major crops such as tomato, paddy, and mangoes now fall under Annamayya district. This resulted in very limited job opportunities being available in the district. In the primary sector, which is the major contributor to the district's economy, the district has huge potential for self-employment in sectors such as dairy and its allied activities. Farming is the major activity in the primary sector and the majority of the farmers still rely on either traditional or semi-traditional methods of

farming. There is a need to upskill farmers in modern methods of farming which increase the output and income of the farmers. Farmers and milk producers should also be trained in entrepreneurship development. Currently, short-term training related to primary is very limited in the district. Even though government agencies such as DRDA, DWCRA, Agriculture and Horticulture departments conduct few trainings for farmers on modern farm techniques and entrepreneurship development programs, they are very limited and not as much as required. RSETI, which is a central government-funded institute, conducts one or two batches of dairy farming courses a year for interested candidates.

As mentioned above, Chittoor district has a few large industries in the Automotive sector, food processing sector, solar sector, and textile sector. Some of the major industries are Amara Raja Batteries Limited, Srini Food Park, Charoren Pokhand India Pvt. Ltd., Dhayanidhi Solar Pvt. Ltd., etc. There are also more than 4000 MSMEs in the district in a wide range of sectors including Textile, Food Processing, Dairy processing, and so on. At present some of the job roles that the industry requires are various food processing machinery operators, sewing machine operator, embroidery machine operator, Solar PV technician, etc. (ICRA, 2020). Currently, the short-term skill courses related to the secondary sector that are available in the district are Assistant Electrician, Multi Skill Technician, Field Engineer, and Mason general. District also has 16 ITIs offering long-term vocational courses such as Welder, Automotive Mechanic, Fitter, Turner, Draughtsman, Industrial Electrician, etc. These courses are offering industry-relevant courses, but the current needs of the industry are far more, and varied and are not meeting the industry requirements.

As part of the service sector in the district, some of the major sectors where there is demand for skilled manpower are the Retail sector, Beauty & Wellness sector, IT/ITES sector, and BFSI. The job roles that are in demand by the industry currently are Retail Sales associate, Beautician, Spa therapist, Junior software developer, Data entry operator, domestic appliances technician, etc. Retail sector units such as Reliance, Vishal mart, pharmacies by Medplus, Apollo, etc. are being set up even in tier 3 cities and there is a growing demand for beauticians in the district, where there is a lot of potential for self-employment. Even though institutes such as DDU GKY, RSETI, and Skill Hubs are offering relevant courses, the demand is not being met due to high manpower requirements from the industry.

Chittoor district is also very quarters to metro cities such as Bangalore and Chennai, where there is a constant need for skilled manpower. Sri Balaji district, which is carved out of Chittoor has Sri City SEZ, Electronic Manufacturing Clusters, Automotive industries, and a flourishing tourism & hospitality sector, IT/ITES sector. The skill demands of these nearby places can also be met through skilled manpower from the district because these industries are always in demand of skilled manpower. There are a wide variety of job roles that can be introduced keeping the demand of these cities in mind.

Quality of training

Chittoor has a total of 8 well established still training institutes under various central/state government schemes and 6 more upcoming training centres. Each course in the training centres typically has a classroom and a domain lab with either one or two trainers per course. These trainers are certified under NSDC guidelines in their respective domains and are required to renew their certification periodically while also upskilling themselves with latest developments in their domain. The syllabus for these courses is decided by National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) and for courses not aligned with NSQF, the syllabus is decided either by Sector Skill Councils (SSC) or the scheme implementing agency. The trainees go through periodic assignments either by the institute itself or a domain expert invited by the institute. Only at the successful completion of the course, the trainee is awarded with a certificate and is eligible for placements from the institute. If the institute is a self-employment training institute, they help the trainees in setting up own businesses.

The quality of training depends on the various factors mentioned above such as trainers, infrastructure, assignments, etc. which are strictly regulated. Even though implementing agencies conduct frequent inspections, training partners flout rules and offer sub standard training to students. The trainers in these institutes, even though are certified in their domains, they are not up to date with the latest developments in their domain and are not recertified with ToT (Training of trainers). The quality of training is also affected by the availability and quality of domain labs available in the training centres and all the centres in the district are using relevant equipment of good quality such as state of the art computers for computer knowledge, state of the art machinery for electrician, multi skill technician courses and so on.

As far as quality of the trainings is the district are concerned, they are meeting the standards set by implementing agency in certain aspects such as infrastructure and assignments but have to improve a lot in terms of trainers, who are the most important part of these trainings. Trainers, along with imparting knowledge about the domain, should also be able to motivate students and prepare them for the job market, which is rarely happening at present.

Issues in Operation

The major issues that almost all the training centres in the district are facing is the mobilisation of youth for the courses available. Even though the courses are completely free of cost, the target population for these trainings is not aware of the schemes. Majority of the population in Chittoor lives in rural areas where awareness about skill development trainings is very limited. To enrol students into trainings, training centres/partners employ field level officers who travel all over the district to create awareness and mobilise students, but the budget they have is limited and thus, their reach is limited. In general, each batch for a course requires 30 students and sometimes training centres cannot mobilise 30 students, which leads to underutilisation of training capacity, which further leads to increase in maintenance costs for the centres.

The other minor issues in operations of training centres are delay in payments by government to training partners, which results in losses for training partners and discourages them to conduct more trainings or be associated with the scheme; finding suitable firms for the students to be placed is also a challenge because even though firms generally openings for entry level jobs, they need to be convinced of students capabilities and the value they will add to the firms. These challenges tend to hamper training centres functioning thus resulting in their inefficiencies.

Areas of Improvement

The main areas of improvement for existing skill development institutions in the district are:

- Employing dedicated field-level staff with good knowledge of rural areas to improve the mobilization of students for training centres.

- Conducting mobilization camps at the village level frequently to identify unemployed youth and motivate them to join the training centres through District Skill Committee.
- Recertifying trainers on the latest developments in their respective domains from sector skill councils or any appropriate certifying agency.
- Training trainers on how to motivate trainees, improve their confidence and teach them how to behave in a professional environment.
- Inviting domain experts to take special classes for trainees, which gives them exposure to the sector and the growth potential it offers from an expert in the field.
- Signing MoUs with relevant industries to make sure successful trainees get a job right after the course is completed.

These improvements, if implemented in the right manner can improve the quality of training centres in the district and pave the way for setting up more centres.

Suggestions

Over the course of the past year, where I have interacted with various district officials concerned with skill development activities and industry experts, all of them have had certain suggestions on how to improve the skill development ecosystem in the district. A few of the major suggestions that can be implemented are:

- Frequent meetings of the District Skill Committee to oversee and guide the skill development training in the district.
- Offering more trainings for people working in the primary sector through RSETI/DRDA/DWMA/Agriculture/Horticulture departments.
- Encouraging training partners to introduce new-age courses such as VFX, AI, Green job trainings, etc. for which there is demand everywhere in the country.
- Signing MoUs with industries to set up training centres or to offer placements to students.
- Conducting frequent RPL (Recognition of prior learning) programs to certify informal workers in an effort to bring them into the formal sector.
- Conducting frequent skill gap analysis of the district to understand the job demand and supply scenario of the district.

- Coordination and cooperation between various departments concerned with skill development trainings such as APSSDC, SEEDAP, Employment Exchange, DRDA, etc.

Conclusion

Chittoor district, having lost the majority of industries to the newly carved districts in the process of district bifurcation, is slowly working on improving the job opportunities in the district. Even though the district has a good number of training centres offering industry relevant courses, the quality of these trainings can be improved upon. The overall skill development ecosystem should also be improved to bring more unemployed youth into the workforce. The efficiency of skill development trainings can only happen if all the stakeholders involved work together through District Skill Committee.