

## PARADOX OF SKILL TRAINING

## High targets, low performance

Skill gap, from Page 1

While the campaign was able to register names of lakhs of youth as potential candidates for the programme, only a fraction of them were eventually interested in pursuing the training. Ever since, the department has had to strike off several names, trying to maintain a list of only genuine candidates.

As against the aspirational number, according to official data, in 2019-20, the government had skilled 32,289 candidates, with another 14,832 ongoing training, by the end of February 2020.

Albeit its endeavour for a complete overhaul of the 2008 policy, some of the earlier problems still persist: Not all skill centres are clued into the market needs of the region in which they operate and in many instances the candidates who find employment, are found lacking in skills needed for the job.

Reflecting on the current situation, KAS-SIA's Prithvi Raj said there was a wide gap between the training imparted in the skill development centres and the market demand. "There's no doubt that the candidates are coming with certificates. But there is a lot to be desired when it comes to their skills. Either the training was not imparted well or the candidate did not focus properly in class. Often, we find that there is no sense of ownership in such training."

According to official data, there are a total of 480 government-recognised skill training centres across Karnataka, of which 422 are dedicated for training pertaining to CMKKY and 58 for Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY).

Another prominent issue raised by those in the industry was that skill training was heavily focused on one or two sectors, failing to tap into diverse market requirements. "Initially, there was a heavy focus on the garment industry. Hence, on various counts, the programme was unable to meet the larger industry demand. We have to look at future skills such as robotics, data analytics and the like, to tap into the demand," according to a government official, who sought anonymity.

Add to it, several skill centres offered training without understanding the demography and geography of the region, experts said. According to a recent research publication 'India's Changing Cityscapes: Work, Migration and Livelihoods' collaborated by Supriya Roy Chowdhury (Institute for Social and Economic Change) and Carol Upadhyaya (National Institute of Advanced Studies), skill training had to a large extent become a numbers game, wherein training centres were required to produce the requisite quantum of graduates and placements to meet the requirements of their funders (government agencies or corporate social responsibility initiatives). "However, there is little effort on the part of sponsors, the state or the institutions themselves to determine the effectiveness of the training in producing sustainable employment..." according to the report.

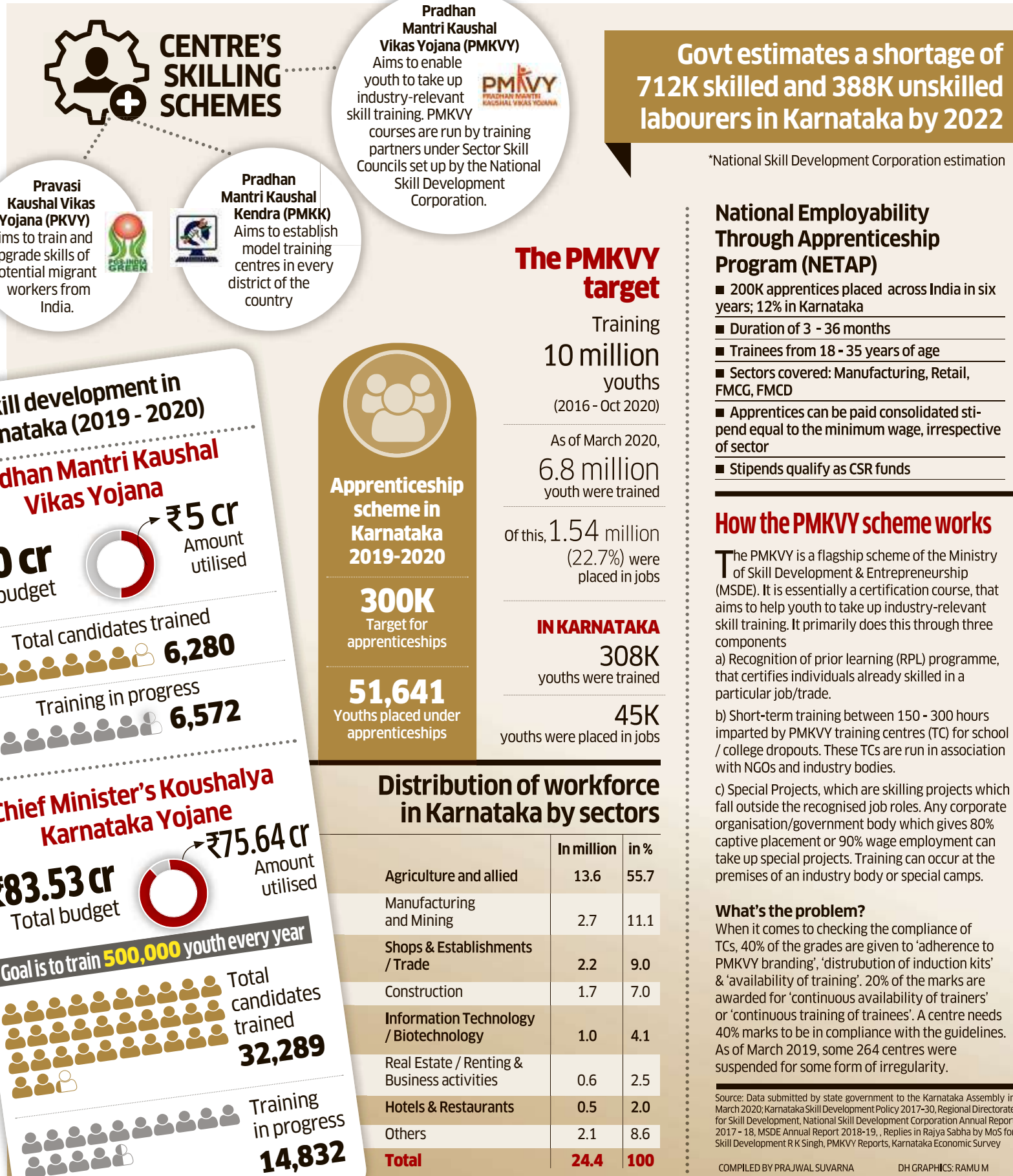
In Raichur, for example, several training centres were engaged in imparting skills like tailoring and sales management in a place where there were no garment factories in which tailors could be

## 'KSDC will provide skilled manpower as per industry needs'

Deputy Chief Minister CN Ashwath Narayan is in charge of skill development and higher education, which makes him feel confident that he can deliver results. "I specifically asked for the skill development portfolio," he tells *DH's* Bharath Joshi while acknowledging the challenges that lie ahead. Excerpts:

**Is the government planning to revamp skill development schemes in light of the Covid-19 pandemic?**  
The basic tenet of the state's skill development schemes is strong. Hence, the requirement of revamp does not arise. Having said that, it's imperative to adapt to the situation. In view of Covid-19, we're adding more elements and delivery mechanisms. We've created online.kaushalkar.com to offer online skill courses. Initially, free courses in collaboration with RV Skills, IBM, Nasscom will be offered. Going forward, courses can be paid for. We're facilitating a Skill Registry to connect skilled workforce with customers. The Karnataka Skill Development Corporation (KSDC) has implemented an online aptitude test for aspirants to identify their strengths and skill training will be provided based on their recommendations.

**Industry experts believe that India will have a lot more opportunities coming from outsourced jobs, which will require the country to**



## Skill training has become a numbers game



CAROL UPADHYAYA

The crisis of youth unemployment – especially educated unemployment – has become a major area of policy concern, one that has been reframed as that of 'skills deficit'. While employers often complain about the 'unemployability' of potential hires, countless educated youth are unable to find jobs that meet their expectations. The Skill India Mission was set up to address this crisis, by harnessing India's 'demographic dividend' and channelling the desires and energies of youth for productive employment through skill training.

However, skill training policies and programmes are riddled with gaps and contradictions.

The National Skill Policy introduced in 2009 marked a significant shift away from vocational training through government institutes, towards the privatisation and outsourcing of skill development. Today, training programmes are delivered by a plethora of private organisations (both for-profit companies and NGOs) which draw on government and corporate social responsibility (CSR) funds for their activities.

Skilling programmes are managed and funded by a range of agencies and organisations such as the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) and a series of Sector Skill Councils (SSCs).

The Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), the flagship scheme of the Ministry, serves mainly as a funding agency and is implemented through the NSDC.

The multiplicity of initiatives and agencies has created a complicated skilling 'ecosystem' imparting a wide variety of training, both in terms of content and quality. In 2016, a government-appointed committee found that the uptake of skill training as well as post-training job placement have been inadequate.

The report was critical of the promotion of short-term skilling and certification programmes in place of longer-term vocational diploma courses, suggesting that the new approach may not deliver marketable skills.

The current policy framework has also been criticised for its target-driven orientation and its focus on short-term 'top-up' courses for youth with secondary or higher educational qualifications. Moreover, skill centres are tasked with the responsibility of finding employment for their trainees and so tend to push them into contractual low-paying jobs to fulfill their targets.

These issues were explored in a field-based study of skilling and service sector employment conducted by the Institute for Social and Economic Change (ISEC) and the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS), Bengaluru, during 2017-19. The study found that skill training organisations in Bengaluru are highly motivated by the goal of alleviating poverty through training and job placement – especially by targeting youth from disadvantaged, rural backgrounds with at least a Class X education.

On their part, semi-educated rural youth are motivated to join skill training courses – which are often free or subsidised – mainly by the prospect of learning English and computer skills as well as by guaranteed job placement.

Trainees are channelled into high-volume, high-turnover jobs such as retail sales, transportation & logistics, back-office customer support and beauty & wellness, mainly in Bengaluru. Thus, skill development programmes encourage the migration of rural youth to the cities. Indeed, service sector companies actively seek employees from provincial towns and villages because they are thought to be more pliant and 'loyal'. Skill training centres appear to play a major role in facilitating this continuous flow of workers into the urban service economy.

These jobs are typically characterised by low salaries, insecurity of employment, onerous working conditions, lack of a clear career path, and hence high levels of employee turnover. We found that many trainees had returned to their home towns within a few weeks of joining work, with little to show for their training and work experience in Bengaluru. They were unable to sustain themselves in the city on the salaries they were earning, given the high costs of accommodation and other living expenses – especially since they needed to save enough to help support their families back home.

These problems stem from the Skill India policy framework itself, which has turned skill training into a numbers game.

To access funding, training centres need to meet targets of producing a certain number of graduates and placements, but they lack the capacity or motivation to provide extended support needed to ensure that these vulnerable trainees find a stable foothold in the city.

The skill training centres we studied thus contribute to the creation of an army of foot-loose urban service workers, catering to the requirements of service industries for a 'flexible', non-permanent but constantly replenishable workforce, thus raising questions about current skill development policies and programmes.

(The writer is Professor, School of Social Sciences, National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru)

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employed and no malls offering retail jobs, the researchers have observed. "This shows that a local employment market analysis, which should be a prerequisite for designing skill training programmes, had not been undertaken..." their report stated.

Such an approach posed practical difficulty, making employment sustainability a big issue, pointed out Shashidhar, who runs Bharani Foundation, a skill development centre in Mysuru, recognised by PMKVY. "For instance, if one were to give training for the garment industry in Mandya or Maddur, candidates will not get jobs locally. They will have to come to Bengaluru for jobs, which leaves them

commuting every day from their home town," he explained. Instead, he felt that the skill centres needed to focus on local needs. Taking the example of Mandya again, skills such as organic seed production, solar roof technicians, electrical hardware work and the like, would go a long way in generating employment, he said. According to him, diversifying the areas of skill training also required public awareness about potential opportunities in lesser-known areas of work.

While market relevance is one big aspect, another area where the government had to stringently monitor was the authenticity of the training imparted. Even though the government had established a stringent monitoring system, not all centres were fulfilling the training

requirement.

"To a large extent, the existing skill development scheme has turned out to be a certification programme, more than employment generation. Several educational institutions are taking undue advantage of the government schemes, without ensuring appropriate jobs for those who take up these training programmes. The government needs to overhaul the system, especially when, in a post-Covid scenario, India is expected to attract huge outsourced business from Western nations. We need to improve the capability of MSMEs, for which, we need to improve the quality of skilling," observed Business Coach and Entrepreneur Karan Kumar.

Concurring with the industry experts on the need for making skill de-

velopment schemes more diverse and demand-oriented, MLA of Krishnaraja Constituency S A Ramdas, opined that the government should look towards diploma colleges and training institutes such as Industrial Training Institute and Government Toolroom and Training Centre to take the skill training to grass-root level. Ramdas, who leads Bharath Informal Workers' Initiative, works on the issue of labour and skilling.

"The training should provide links with prospective employers. For instance, were the government to tie up with the builders' association, they can give onsite training to aspirants. The government can think of giving stipends to candidates during the training period. This will ensure that the skilling will lead to employment," he said.



CN Ashwath Narayan

2020. Karnataka will create training material in English and Kannada, provide training and accredit training centers that have certified trainers. We're also creating training pedagogy for master trainers. This will ensure standard delivery protocols across the state.

**What does the government intend to do to stringently monitor the functioning of skill development centres?**

There are already several measures in place. The training is periodically monitored through inspection by the district skill development officers. Payment is released only after inspection

and recommendation from the District Skill Mission. The department is currently telecalling the candidates for their feedback. We have a mechanism where trainees can reach out through the online portal kaushalkar.com for grievance redressal. We'll strive to uphold quality by adapting to any gaps that we notice.

**Studies show that skills that aren't relevant to the needs are being imparted.**

The term 'relevant needs' is very subjective – every organisation has a different DNA and hence, there will be a cultural gap. The department can provide skill training and general soft skills. It is the onus of the employers to fill the specific gaps. Skilling can be successful when all stakeholders can partner for equitable creation and distribution of the skill pool in the country. The very objective of skill training is to provide means of livelihood through employment or self-employment. The final payment is also linked to the same. If the skilled youth are employed, then it means that there is a requirement of that particular skill. The curriculum is provided by the industry through Sector Skill Councils and content is being developed. Hence, the content and curriculum are from the industry.

**The 2017 Skill Development Policy was developed keeping in mind the**

**shortcomings in the earlier 2008 policy. However, little seems to have changed...**

It's a known fact that there are concerns on quality and measurement (of skills). We're making use of distance education and online training for self-learning. We're also trying to avail common facilities instead of spending money. If someone needs to get trained, h/she should be connected to places where things are really happening. We can't afford to create a lab environment. I can't ask a person who wants to learn carpentry to spend thousands of rupees to get material and learn. Instead, it makes sense to take the person to where carpentry is happening. I've visited some of the world's best skill training places. Skilling costs more than engineering. In some countries, children are exposed to this hands-on culture from as early as Class 6.

**And what about post-skilling employment?**

Tackling demand-and-supply is a challenging area. It's mandatory for every company to enroll its (skill) requirements in the employment exchanges. They need to notify. But if they don't notify, there's no provision to take action against them. If companies notify, we'll get to know which sectors need manpower and what's the shortage in the number and skills. We can have an excellent, vibrant ecosystem.