

India leaders agree on need for rural skills and education improvement

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Millions have been left out of recent progress in India despite the country enjoying an annual GDP growth in excess of 9%, said Kamal Nath, Minister of Commerce and Industry of India, at the World Economic Forum 's 24th India Economic Summit, held in partnership with the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII).

“ We have to look at how the growth process affects every section of society, ” said Nath, adding: “ the real India is also 300 million people [living on] less than one dollar a day. ” Sustained growth depends on including those that live in poverty: “ We ’ ve tapped one India; we now need to tap the other India. ”

To do so, public and private sectors must partner to break through old educational models to train rural workers for the 21st century marketplace. “ It ’ s not just about education, ” said Manvi Sinha, Resident Editor at New Delhi Television (NDTV), India, “ It ’ s about ‘ skilling ’ to meet the new needs of the new Indian economy. ” K. V. Kamath, Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of ICICI Bank and President of the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), India, added: “ Nothing is happening in the school system. ”

In an effort “ to increase the pool of human capital, ” Kamath highlighted the CII Skills Development Initiative. R. Seshasayee, Managing Director, Ashok Leyland, India, called for an integrated approach: “ We need to have a secondary education system that also incorporates skill development. ”

It is important to assess the real needs of industry as well as the desires of trainees before launching any skills development programme. “ Individuals are intensely motivated when they can see the job on the other side, ” Jeffrey Joerres, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Manpower, USA. “ The one thing we must remember is that these people really want the job, ” concluded Joerres. Nath and others highlighted the CII initiative as an effective programme to study and scale.

Technology should be incorporated into skills training strategies. “ The science of learning has been done by Skinner and such psychologists, ” said Rajendra S. Pawar, Chairman, NIIT Group, India, “ Now we are finding ways to use technological innovations to deal with all aspects of learning. ” As a first step to developing appropriate technologies and programmes, the various skills needed within each industry need to be catalogued.

Ironically, the current global financial woes may present an opportunity for India. “ Of course there is concern, ” said Nath, “ but we do believe that the Indian economy has the resilience to overcome this. ” Visty Banaji, Executive Director and President, Group Corporate Affairs, Godrej Industries, India, added: “ I think the slowdown in the economy gives us a substantial opportunity to get our trade education house in order. ” Sinha concluded: “ Rural India could be the change agent itself because it is an engine of growth that is chugging along. ”

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