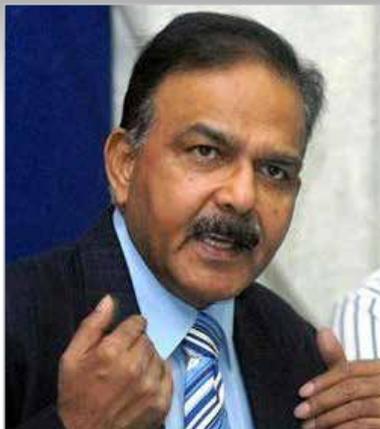


An Aspirational Destination for Skilling Domestic Workforce



AMOD K KANTH

WHEN DOMESTIC CARE WORK GOES ENTREPRENEURIAL...

discusses Amod K Kanth, Chairman, Domestic Worker Sector Skill Council (DWSSC), Ministry of Skills & Entrepreneurship

What are the challenges and objectives you had to attend when you started heading the Domestic Worker Sector Skill Council? How has it been evolving?

I will start with the ground situation in domestic work sector. Nearly 13 million workforces enter India's labour market every year. Every month we get more than a million people. Out of that, only 2-3 per cent workers are formally

trained in institutions, in various programs and another 3 per cent are informally trained to do their jobs. Till today, we have got only around 5 per cent trained workforces in the domestic work segment. If we compare this with international situations, countries like Germany, Korea and some others have their trained workforce as high as 80 to 85 per cent. Even in China, this is nearly 50 to 60 per cent. Most of the developed and developing countries have their skilled workforce as high as between 40 to 90 per cent,

whereas, we are standing at a 5 per cent mark only.

This is one of the biggest drawbacks in India's developmental process and a serious impediment in India's industrialization and economic growth. We may be far more developed in certain areas like IT, but in most of the development areas we are far behind the race. One of the reasons very prominently is skilling.

Secondly, there are several disconnects. There is huge disconnect between India's

education programs and skilling programs. There is disconnect between India's skilling programs and industrial and other employability situation. There is disconnect between India's education, skilling, community, industry, and the people at large. All these disconnects have led to a very peculiar situation in the country.

When we started the national level skilling program in 2008, the former Prime Minister, Dr Man Mohan Singh announced about the National Skill Development program for the first time. Subsequently, it was created in 2009. A target was set for 500 million work forces to be trained by 2022. However, even after 8 years, not even 50 million out of the target of 500 million have been trained.

With this backdrop, we are now looking at the skilling programs for India with a new vision. In an attempt to organize the whole skills jurisdiction, we have now a functional Ministry of Skills & Entrepreneurship, the National Skill Development Corporation and some 40 sector skill councils including the Domestic Work Sector Skill Council (DWSSC).

Sector Skill Council for the Domestic Workers is a recent step. It started with some primitive ideas and efforts few years back, to organized the domestic workers in the country to convert domestic work to a profession. Several organizations got involved in establishing a separate Sector Skill Council for Domestic Workers. The 20 million Domestic Workers in India make a very big constituent; creating a huge employment opportunity and a huge source of livelihood. Such a big sector cannot be overlooked. Thus, initiated the thoughts towards organizing the sector through a separate Sector Skill Council.

Ministry of Labour & Employment tried to create the Sector Skill Council and International Labour Organization (ILO) started taking the leadership. My involvement started at that

point of time, while representing Prayas. Prayas is a large organization with 246 centres, 9 states, and 800 employees and has done several programs for Domestic Workers. As part of activities of Prayas, we were running programs for Domestic Workers during 2008-09. Prayas has been a partner of ILO, as well as the Delhi Government, and the Ministry of Labour, for several purposes including training and uplifting the socio-developmental condition of Domestic Workers. That paved path for Prayas to the programs for Domestic Workers which were led by ILO in the beginning of 2015. Prayas, subsequently, became the lead agency and for the first time in India in 2015, an autonomous body called DWSSC was formed. Not only the training providers who have joined us in this mission,

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but the trade unions, other stakeholders, Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Women & Child Development, Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship, all came under the umbrella for creating DWSSC, ultimately for bringing in changes in the livelihood situations, in skilling programs, and other activities relating to Domestic Workers.

How does the Council respond to the needs of the Domestic Workers in giving their dues?

Sector Skill Council is like an extension of Ministry of Entrepreneurship & Skill Development, a body connected to the ministry through NSDC. The purpose of the Council coming into operation is to find out the various dimensions of the sector, at the first place. The council needs to work on the gaps between skilling and the sectors requirements, to survey the labour management situation and skilling gap and to create relevant programs with the help of training providers and different stakeholders for reducing the skill gap.

What are the skill sets that are to be recognized and how have you planned to bring in standardization? Also, what are the industries which can be engaged in?

DWSSC is the only Sector Skill Council which has no industry base. But, every household that provides employment to Domestic Workers is like an industry. From that point of view, this is a unique Sector Skill Council, having a different community base and different employment opportunities. Placement agencies in this sector have also played havoc with the system, which have turned out mostly to human traffickers, exploitations, misuse of power. Only trade unions have

been protecting the interests of the DW community so far and that is how the trade unions have become the partners of the council now. So, on one hand, the job of the council is to protect such rights, and on the other hand, the core work of the council is to create national occupational standards, qualification packages and various job roles connected to the Domestic Workers in India.

So far, we have been able to create 4 full time job roles including, house-keeping, house-keeping cum cooking, child care, elderly care. We are trying now to set up pre-natal and post natal care services. The council is all set to start programs in these 4 to 5 service areas.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Kaushal Vikash Yojna (PMKVY)-2 has been launched. DWSSC, in this attempt, has already been associated with 300 training providers across the country. Over 220 training providers got affiliated to us. Meanwhile, Government of India changed its entire policy and systems. Accordingly, SMART- a common portal for all training providers across the country is launched by Government through NSDC. All training providers are supposed to upload their details on SMART and get them registered, following which, a third party assessment is to be made by Quality Council of India (QCI) in order to get accredited. The final accreditation is to be done by the council. The accredited training providers can then take up the relevant course, however, they need to follow and maintain national standards and the national level curriculum created by the council.

They also have to undertake the training programs of the trainers. The training centre' infrastructure, capacity, equipments to be provided in a job role, everything has to be standardized. The conditions have been made a little stringent to ensure quality and success. Earlier, under PMKVY-1, there were 13000

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training providers. But now with such stringent standardization attempt, majority of them do not qualify. Under PMKVY-2, there are not even 1000 training providers who have registered, even after one month time of the announcements.

Awareness and advocacy are the tools. What is your take on this vis-à-vis DW sector?

That is where, organizing this particular Domestic Workers

Skill Summit 2017 in February is important. We are trying to identify and locate those kinds of industry, equipment or gadget that can be connected to the domestic work situations. There may be new job roles including gardening or driving, etc. to relate to house hold services. The national Domestic Workers Skill Summit 2017 is being organized to focus upon those stakeholders who have not yet been covered. The summit will provide them the platform. There are stakeholders like placement agencies, training providers, NGOs, trade unions, government departments, international agencies, and app based services for domestic help among others. All these programs like app based services are futuristic. We have a partner in London, who has created a brilliant app under which they take the services of nearly 3000 domestic workers and they cover about 30000 households. We have similar agencies in India as well.

We want this entire program to be aspirational. Because, the biggest challenge for this sector is the mindset of the employers. In a domestic set up, nobody wants these Domestic Workers to be independent. Their level of aspiration is going to curtail their activities. One needs to think about their working hours, their weekly leaves, minimum wages and insurance. For all these, nobody is prepared, since it all go against the interest of employers.

What are the reform plans at policy level, for the Domestic workforce or the labour market organisations?

So far, the trade unions have been the lead people in this sector. And nothing was organised. Secondly, we have been trying to develop a national policy. In Jharkhand, there is already a law in this regard is in force, which is the Placement Agencies and Domestic



Workers Regulation Act, 2016. Maharashtra and Chattishgarh also have similar laws. There are some DW Boards as well, which are functional in this area. Recently, ESI (Employee State Insurance) services have been extended to limited areas of Domestic Work. This service is seen in Hyderabad, Delhi, and Ranchi, however, this has a very limited presence so far. So, now there is an effort to have insurance, to have the mechanisms of protection, minimum wages for Domestic Workers and more things are in the process. We are at a threshold now, when the entire DW sector is getting a fillip towards becoming a profession. DWSSC expects to provide this leadership. However, it is a long shot for now, and is going to take time.

How to break the isolation of the community & enable them to be more accessible & come under shared networks & platforms, as conceived by the DWSSC?

Mobilising, creating awareness, outreach programs in different communities, trying to access as many stakeholders as possible, going out to Resident Welfare Associations and to other welfare

associations, reaching out to other residential areas and conglomerates, causing awareness in media, all these are required to be done in this line.

Do you still see any role for the unions?

There is a strong view that has been ruling so far is that, only the rights of Domestic Workers will be emphasized and not the duties. It is going to be counterproductive. After all, we are in the process of creating better employment. So, a balanced approach is required. For that matter only, the trade unions or the placement agencies could not have led it and the leadership role ultimately falls on a neutral body like DWSSC.

How to bring balance between skills for economic or knowledge development and skills for poverty alleviation?

Skills which bring better economy are the requirement of the industry. That is already there and cannot be overlooked. On the other side, when the individuals are skilled, and the change that comes in their lives, adds to their

productivity. It adds empowerment to their lives, to their income, to their lifestyle, and brings about a basic change in their personality and lifestyle. So, actually, it is one in the same. Only there are two ways to look at. It should be a connected situation in the end.

How do you see the work in future? Is there any plan towards having international engagements or cooperation in this line?

Sushma Swaraj, the minister for External Affairs, Government of India is very keen on strengthening this sector. This is her wish that the Indian women, Indian skilled caretakers, child care providers, cooks, etc should occupy the international space, which is presently dominated by Philipinos and others. Even adding the new skill area like pre-natal and post-natal care is a suggestion that has come from the Minister. we are certainly looking for International opportunities. In fact, we held a program, in which, we had two British partners who came here and trained our domestic workers for their placement in the UK. Prayas too has developed an international centre in Ranchi. ■