

**"What Can I And The Global
Community Do To Create Jobs For
My Generation?"**

By

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As I glance through the 'Output, Prices and Jobs' section in the latest issue of the 'Economist' magazine, I am surprised noticing India's unemployment rate mentioned as 10.8%. Having worked in India among the youth, especially in the area of opportunity creation, I intuitively know that the numbers quoted are hiding more than what they are revealing – in terms of the overall numbers of unemployed as well as the state of the unemployment. In a country like India, it is the act of defining the official poverty line as half a dollar by the Planning Commission, that does the illusionary job of taking people out of penury, rather than any real efforts. I am reminded about Mark Twain's remark "There are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies, and statistics."

Once, we accept that the state of unemployment in India is more grave than what the statistics reveal, the next step is in understanding how to solve this problem – or whether it is possible to have any solution at all. Unfortunately, at the core of India's unemployment trap, exactly like the poverty trap, is a myriad of complex issues like lack of adequate skills, legacy of an outdated educational system and corruption at the grass roots. These issues are deeply interconnected and hence solving one might not really solve the ultimate problem. At the same time, we realise that it is practically impossible to study and correct all these issues and hence the urgency to start somewhere.

The aspects that we have decided to focus on while battling the unemployment challenge are primarily two issues – legacy of an outdated educational system and opportunity deficiency in the marginal areas. Again, we have realised that in order to tackle a complex problem effectively, it is important to identify and focus efforts on the lowest

hanging fruit that can enable us produce comparatively easier breakthroughs. Hence, we have identified our target audience as youth – between 20-35 years of age – which account for almost 40% of India's population. We focus on the two issues identified, through a two pronged, yet interconnected strategy. For the first - 'dealing with the legacy of an outdated educational system', we concentrate on skill development through LeadCap Trust, where I am a founder and trustee, and for the second – 'dealing with opportunity deficiency' – we concentrate on match making between the supply and the demand for talent through Global Shapers, a new platform that I am honoured to be a part of.

LeadCap Trust, a not for profit leadership development organisation, where we strive towards youth empowerment is the way we address the first issue. Indian educational system has always relied on rote and pedagogical method of teaching, where the teacher student hierarchy is tightly defined. This has resulted in a band of students who are excellent in linear thinking and technical skills but who fail completely when it comes to critical thinking, leadership skills and dealing with ambiguity – skills highly valued by the new age professional system. Unfortunately, even private educational institutions (majority who have started with an eye on a quick buck, rather than any real vision for educating students) have failed to inculcate these essential qualities in students. Students from their part, add on to the challenge by falling back on the Indian mindset, which is oriented towards acquiring a formal university degree and not necessarily skills required for greater employability. Hence, a majority of the Indian youth are finding that (after having spent a large portion of their parent's hard earned money) they are still not

equipped with the requisite skills to succeed in the ultra competitive and resource starved Indian market place. In fact, data sources say that those educated but without professional skills constitute 69 percent of the total unemployed. Which has led to many industry leaders including NR Narayana Murthy, Founder Chairman of Infosys, to comment that ‘out of all university graduates only a meagre 13 percent are employable’. (Source: Dhar, ML, *‘Skilled Workforce a National Priority’*)

For the last few years, we have been researching on this gap between industry expectations and student competencies in order to find solutions that can bridge this deficiency. We have currently built what we call ‘LeadLab’ – a platform where students can pick up key leadership skills and professional capabilities to complement their theoretical and technical knowledge. We have built this platform as one part online and another part external learning – to make sure that it could be scaled up to reach more youth across the nation. At the same time, we have also seen that this unique model addresses an Indian student’s initial reservations about a pure online education.

All our programs are based on principles of andragogy, which rely on self-exploration and collaborative learning, as opposed to Indian pedagogical system. The platform has also been built around interactivity, where every element captures and sustains the interest of the student. All the work books and program packs revolve around stories, fables, case studies, and deep questioning sessions - all intended towards a deeper understanding of self and the ecosystem. ‘Reflection Profiling’, a neurological profiling

exercise, that we have developed along with a UK based talent benchmarking agency, focuses on identifying and enhancing an individual's unique competencies.

LeadCap's ultimate vision is to build India as a nation, where every youth has an equal opportunity to develop and nurture professional skill sets and capabilities. In order to achieve this, we rely on three strategies. First, LeadCap would eventually span out to all cross sections of the society, though currently, programs are intended towards recent graduate students. We are already in the process of program development for diploma holders and college dropouts, as well as translation of our programs in to Indian local languages to reach out to the masses. Second, for each program, we collaborate with the best in class across the world, to make sure that youth are empowered truly with the best of resources, research and certifications. For example, we are collaborating with a UK university, with Kotter International and a Finnish school and adapting their lessons, courses and certifications towards the requirements of the Indian youth. Third, we have kept the program fees low and affordable for every cross section of the society – in most cases under one percent of what they have already spent on their education. Some courses are even offered free of cost, where the student have to pay only if they need to be certified.

Pilot tests reveal that our skill building programs are well received by both students as well as the industry. In fact, a research exercise among the Human Resource heads of companies rated LeadCap certified students significantly higher than others in terms of their professional attitude, communication skills, ability to set priorities as well as at an

overall level. However, we also realise that though this has worked well with the urban audience, it might not do the same for the rural and upcountry youth, where the challenge is compounded by a deficiency in opportunities. Though 60 percent of the Indian youth lives in rural and upcountry areas, the opportunities exist elsewhere – in the cities, far away. So, there is a real time gap between supply versus demand for resources. And, if we ignore this deficiency, it would still be a job half done.

This brings us to the second issue, which we plan to address through the platform of Global Shapers. The Global Shapers' platform, as we know, is intended to be an exclusive community of exceptional youth in their 20s, primarily focused on major cities across the world. However, our plan is not to restrict this to the elite youth in cities like Mumbai, Delhi or Bangalore, but to create a bigger platform for millions of youth across states - especially from the upcountry locations. With this objective in mind, in Bangalore, LeadCap founder, and Founding curator, Sangeeth Varghese along with me are launching the 'Karnataka Renaissance' initiative – as an initiative of Global Shapers – Bangalore.

Through 'Karnataka Renaissance', we are creating a platform, with three objectives in mind. First, this would be a platform where the upcountry youth receive opportunities to interact and engage with eminent thought leaders from business, politics, entertainment and sports on a regular basis. The assumption over here is that once these minds are stretched through inspiration, they would never go back to their original form. The spark that they receive by interacting with these thought leaders, they would take back to

influence others around them. Second, we would use this platform to enable corporate houses to reach out and create opportunities for the upcountry youth. Even as we are talking to various corporations, they comment that though they are aware of the enormous talent in upcountry locations, they still do not have a formal channel to reach out. The opportunities that we have identified include internships, jobs, and scholarships. Our third objective is to create a mentoring network, where established leaders can mentor and handhold upcountry youth in fields like entrepreneurship. Our assumption is that this mentoring network would ensure that upcountry youth are not just passively taking up employment opportunities but are also actively looking at being opportunity creators, value providers and entrepreneurs themselves.

Our idea of 'Karnataka Renaissance' under Global Shapers have already been accepted well by the industry. Vijay Karnataka, the largest circulating newspaper in Karnataka has launched a high decibel campaign to identify Shapers from upcountry locations. SAP has come forward to host the launch of the event that shall invite representatives from 500 youth organisations, while corporates like SAP, Biocon, Jindal, Microsoft, Infosys are offering jobs and internships for upcountry youth. Speakers and mentors for the event include Kris Gopalakrishnan, Co Chairman of Infosys, Harish Hande, Magsaysay award winner and Kiran Bedi, India's first lady IPS officer and anti corruption campaigner.

By June 2012, we expect to create awareness in at least a million youth through various communication channels – newspaper, TV, radio and leaflets. From the opportunities front, we would create at least 3000 jobs, 1000 internships and 50 mentoring sessions for

the upcountry youth. Post the launch of the Global Shapers - Karnataka, we shall continue to work closely with the youth and corporates, through our quarterly leadership summits and opportunity mapping sessions as well as in other informal ways. Our objective is to make sure that tens of thousands of youth are empowered every year under this umbrella.

We feel that this two pronged approach – where we focus on skill development to deal with the legacy of an outdated educational system, and matchmaking between the supply and demand of talent to deal with the opportunity deficiency - helps in addressing some of the very important, yet moving parts of a complex problem – youth unemployment. The next step clearly would be to get a buy in from at least a few of the other Global Shaper Communities. We feel that this could have two distinct advantages – first, the program becomes scaleable, where it could go ahead and address the problem not just in Karnataka, or in India but in different parts of the world. Second, this gives each of the Global Shapers, all of whom are brilliant individuals in their own chosen arenas, a real agenda under the World Economic Forum platform, to come together and to contribute to the shaping of the future of our world.