

Chapter 11

An Appraisal of ODL Interventions in Terrorism Affected Kashmir Valley: Possibilities, Constraints, and Learning Experiences

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ABSTRACT

The Open and Distance Learning system has been able to make a positive impact in the conflict-ridden communities of Kashmir valley in India. This part of the India has long been under the influence of armed militancy which drastically affected the access to higher education. The Open and Distance Learning systems started operating in this area with a modest beginning made by Directorate of Correspondence Courses but had a limited impact. IGNOU which is the largest provider of ODL Programmes in India started developing its network in Kashmir valley in 1999 with its unique approach based on collaboration and sharing of resources. The target groups dominantly composed of unemployed youth, school drop outs, working population, rural folks, women etc has traditionally been deprived of Higher education. This chapter describes the approach of IGNOU and its impact in such conflict-ridden societies which is worth replicating in similar socioeconomic setups across the developing world.

BACKGROUND

Education is at the centre of the entire struggle for the Sustainable Development across the world. The conflicts and natural disasters in any society make the job of educational institutions difficult (UN, 2015) and thereby thwart the process of Sustainable Development (UNESCO 2014). The sizeable resources in

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developing countries every year go waste while handling the issues arising out of conflict and disasters. It pushes the communities further in to poverty due to loss of Livelihoods, Property and Opportunities. The Post 2015 development agenda of United Nations has emphasized to construct peaceful and inclusive societies (SDG-16) for Sustainable Development. It has also highlighted the important role of tertiary education to bring about sustainable development (SDG-4).

EDUCATIONAL SCENARIO IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR

Jammu and Kashmir(J&K) is composed of three major geo-physical regions viz the Jammu, the Valley of Kashmir & the Ladakh. As per the data published by Department of Ecology, Environment and Remote Sensing, Government of J& K, the region has 26.14% people living below poverty line where as in ladakh region this percentage is about 31.29%. The state of J&K is predominantly an agrarian state with 70% of the population deriving sources of livelihoods directly or indirectly from the agriculture. The share of agriculture and allied sectors in the Gross state Domestic Product (at 1999-2000 prices) is 20.59% for the year 2010-11.

A major segment of such population lives in poverty stricken conditions with high level of vulnerability to several natural hazards like flood, earthquakes, landslides etc. The state has unfavorable demographic situation and level of socioeconomic development. The state covers 6.76 percent area of the country inhabiting around 0.98 percent of its population as a result of which average population density is below national average. Presently the population density is 124 persons/Sq Kms. Though the valley of Kashmir is most thickly populated area of the state, it suffers from extreme backwardness primarily due to its peculiar physical features and traditional society. About 54 per cent of the population in the state is literate, as against the national literacy rate of 65.38 per cent. Despite the sincere concerns shown by the Government the J &K especially for the underprivileged sections, state continued to remain educationally backward. Furthermore the gaps between the literacy rates of male (65.75%) and female (41.82%) are alarming which shows the un-favorable socioeconomic position of females in the state.

The Vicious Trap of Declining Educational System and Conflict in the State

Armed conflicts in any society seriously block the communication of the educational institutions with its clientele. Armed conflicts change the supply of education (e.g. through occupied school buildings or migration of teachers) and the demand for education (Parlow 2011). Hence if any conflict prolongs for a long time, the educational system is expected to get badly shattered. The adverse effect on the educational systems gradually starts impinging upon the livelihoods of the people which leads to distress migration of the people. It also creates an atmosphere of uncertainty which demotivates the students from pursuing their studies. The impact can be reduced only through focused corrective measures from the side of Government. The security interventions by the Government in Kashmir valley have been able to significantly minimize the damage to school system. The conflict has also taken toll on the Higher Education of the state. The growing unemployment in the villages and crumbling systems of Higher Education have further helped the armed conflict .The unemployed young men get easily diverted to militancy. The J& K is trapped in this vicious circle. The vicious trap has to be broken through some alternative system of education which should be able to create affordable opportunities with high quality with flexible systems of delivery.

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