

Marla/Taori

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Immediate Recommendations for Turnaround of Sick Rural Colleges

(to all concerned)

It was greatly interesting for us to invest the three days of our quite tight time schedule in the workshop at GTU at Ahmedabad and then, spontaneously, at Rajkot, Jetpur, Porbandar, and in Kutch where we could see the colleges' infrastructure, meet students and faculty, and trustees, and could discuss the burning issues of the sick colleges. Most important, we took it as an opportunity of looking at local potential for turnaround, and for the overall marketing of rural areas as a challenge to enjoy life with fulfilment in natural, healthy surroundings.

GTU is a Technological University for the whole Gujarat State. In this context, the connectivity and knowledge of rural infrastructure and investment opportunities, association with rural educational institutions, linkages with elected representatives + Panchayati Raj agencies, with local and area-wise entrepreneurs, and with NRIs, would enhance accessibility and viability, and also facilitate activities in the context of environment protection where we see one of the most valuable business opportunities cum study fields in the future. The rural colleges can provide the necessary enabling environment with propellents of change and convergence, and they would also fully utilise and further develop their IT infrastructure. The latter could lead to unique suitable software products for use in rural areas, and this would be another valuable USP.

As a follow up to our draft paper for the workshop/ brainstorming at GTU which you already have in your hand, we had intensive deliberations, and we came to some basics for an action plan.

A '*Steering and Stirring Group*' (SSG, an old model of ours) was formed to develop, and recommend the necessary changes in the syllabus to make the rural colleges attractive and widely useful.

The broad contours of the planning for action has been taken down by Smt. Savita and her students. Here, we like to include the following points to clarify the results of our analyses and discussions:

1. There is urgent need to search for area-wise investment potentials and to link them up with the colleges for making an '**earn and learn**' type of initiative. This goes hand-in-hand with our model "**Dual System of Professional Education**" – a very valuable, time-tested system to produce young entrepreneurs having a very high level of practice-oriented knowledge & skills.
2. The teachers have to be trained and motivated to change their mindset & attitudes towards
 - a. practice-orientation and communication with local businesses and authorities,
 - b. give guidance for entrepreneurial outlook and lead the students to ways and means of earning while learning through consultative activities, and developing holistic village action plans,
 - c. showing pro-active, participatory attitudes to encourage students for evolving their hidden potential, curiosity and commitment for investigating the vast potential of business opportunities in rural areas.
3. A follow up programme (workshop) has to be organised some time end of November so that the immediate steps are implemented, and the following steps are put into practice. The SSG should play the pro-active role in this.

4. Rural colleges should play a more and more important role in the future, as there is the greatest potential of business opportunities, and hence, they must be given more autonomy in admission procedures to fill the vacant seats. Our own view is that when there are less takers for the seats available, the entrance examinations by the state become redundant and should be abolished altogether. In this context, we suggest to submit an appropriate proposal to the Director of Technical Education. In view of the urgency in the present critical situation, the present set-up should be changed and more autonomy be given to the rural colleges to enable them to organise and plan their specific programmes. We are of the opinion that within the framework of the present admission system certain measures for adjusting to the needs of rural colleges in their local surroundings could well be chalked out.
5. Programmes for attracting foreign students to rural colleges have to be developed, well marketed and put into practice. These efforts have to be actively supported by the authorities as there is a good potential for interested foreign students who are only keen on studying in a rural set-up.
6. Exchange programmes of students and teachers by establishing partnerships with foreign colleges/schools have to be developed. The International Institute would serve as facilitator for contacts. Especially points 5. and 6. would not only be financially supportive but would highly contribute to the attractiveness of a rural college and help in creating a truly international brand name.
7. Enhancing the attractiveness of rural colleges would bring about the turnaround, making them financially viable. In view of diversification, broadening the layout of syllabus towards practice-orientation, training the teachers in the holistic approach, and developing short-term programmes in various fields, the International Institute (IIHRVA) with its executive arm Rural Business Hub Foundation India (RBHFI) can play a decisive role in making the efforts a success.
8. The role of suitable IT for rural areas is crucial to bring about and further improvements in the rural set-up, and also in realisation of the regional plans. Hence, rural colleges have to take up the proper development of **suitable** IT (software programmes for farmer's information & marketing, etc.), a hitherto neglected field of action and thus a great prospect for making rural colleges attractive.
9. In view of the overall misery of genuine leadership, rural colleges could take up the issues of "good leadership – good governance" on the basis of (Corporate) Social Responsibility ((C)SR), establishing the necessary links with the grassroot population and the elected local bodies. Programmes would include village 'awakening', i.e. building up competency and self-confidence by conducting holistic leadership trainings.
10. Proper, transparent profit sharing with the staff and the students after fixed parameters of success would enhance motivation and the utility of such courses.
11. Series of Performer's Presentation, preferably collected as practical case studies by students themselves, would massively boost morals and motivation, and would function as catalysts to trigger off further successful performances, thus linking the college with the rural surroundings. Proper publishing of these and other activities are a must.
12. A shift from charity and grants & subsidies towards a business-like approach in all activities – knowledge & skills, concepts and trainings would bring about an overall change of mindset & attitudes, and would finally lead to deal with rural areas as fields for non-exploitative profit making and successful marketing. In this context, the efforts of the hon. VC are of very high value.

Utmost importance is to be given to the practical (project) work of identifying viable business opportunities area-wise and duration/time-wise (gradual plans). Inclusive planning is to be trained and learned on the job.

13. We also advise to study those colleges who attract the maximum students, but we do think that in the end, it is the 'urban' factor and some special marketing activities which count. A highly attractive college might not be a highly qualified one, but has a fashionable brand name, etc. Rural colleges should not so much go in for the "placement" factor, but should put their emphasis on producing "entrepreneurs", a completely different kind of marketing a college. We are of the firm opinion that such a brand name would also attract the right kind of students: those who want to be proactive.
14. If syllabus is adjusted to the need of rural colleges, consequently, the exams have to be changed and simplified. The latter not in terms of 'making it easier', but in terms of reducing bureaucracy, theoretical 'quiz'-type of exams, and including evaluation of project work (on the job) as vital part of examination.
15. As already mentioned above in a different context, establishing partnerships with foreign (here: European) universities and schools would considerably enhance attractiveness and quality, but also open up business opportunities in the future.
16. The change of approach and programmes has to be accompanied by clear, transparent parameters of success and regular monitoring by actively involving stakeholders and all role players. The aspect of voluntarism is part of the holistic approach and has to be included in all the activities: delivery and merit before appreciation!
17. In the context of 'learning on the job' (= USP), the most important task would be to develop a holistic 'village plan' by adopting a village for investigating potential, come to know the problems and advantages of the village and its people, learn about the role of the elected bodies at grassroot level, analyse + evaluate, and come to a viable Village Action Plan. Close cooperation with village business people and/or elected bodies for consultancy would be the best basis for income-generating measures for the rural college and also, for the students ('earning while learning'). The rural college should play a vital part in enhancing rural productivity as a movement: clustering villages (for example: renewable energies through biomass plants, waste to wealth, etc.). Another USP area is training and propagating good leadership + change of mindset & attitudes towards Social Responsibility.
18. The rural college has to produce entrepreneurs, not employees. Here, we refer to the SECE model (Self Employed Change Entrepreneur) which could be made part of the syllabus. Students would be trained in knowledge & skills for establishing the "Change Agency", a very future-oriented service station for a multitude of tasks for the village, its people and the elected bodies. For example, these services would include information and marketing work for agri-businesses, using suitable IT.
19. There is the need to build up a **fighting spirit on non-violent lines**. Rural colleges could contribute to evolve efficient methods to change the atmosphere of overall submissiveness into an egalitarian civil society where all citizens have equal rights and justice is rendered. To contribute in building up a younger generation which shows courage and positive attitude towards democratic values and is prepared to fight the evils of society, like corruption, negligence, non-performance and the overall mindset of greediness and exploitative attitudes. The International Institute/Rural Business Hub Foundation offers training modules for students and also, train-the-trainer modules. In this context, the rural colleges could spearhead a movement, and link up with like-minded institutions and organisations. The Wockhardt Foundation, Mumbai,

is already active in these fields, and we have established good understanding with them.

To sum up:

Our discussions with representatives of rural colleges and students, and our visits to some of the rural colleges have led to the more and more intention from our side to take up the challenge of contributing to a sustainable turnaround of non-viable institutions. As long as rural colleges are not different from urban ones, they will have to bear the disadvantages of their locality. Rural colleges have to develop and market their unique selling propositions aggressively so that it becomes clear to all that these colleges are different and attractively 'special'

The main possible USPs (to be amended through creativity of students and teachers and all stakeholders):

- We produce entrepreneurs (ref. to the SECE model)
- We generate businesses – earning while learning
- We develop suitable software for rural areas (info + marketing)
- We live where we study and work - We learn on the job
- We cooperate internationally
- We are committed to Nature – we study and work for environment protection at the spot
- We fight for an egalitarian civil society

We are confident that with concerted efforts we will be successful and, at the same time, with our uncompromising holistic approach, bring about a change of mindset and attitudes in all stakeholders and role players.

We do not adhere to the usual 'old wine in new bottles', but want to bring about sustainable change and self-reliance in rural areas. Making students into rural entrepreneurs and/or opening up horizons for practice-oriented planning and actions at all levels, would be a great achievement. Through international contacts and cooperation, we would also contribute to world peace and understanding.

We suggest that GTU establishes good contacts with FICCI Gujarat as they have already established close links with foreign companies; these could be very supportive for our model 'Dual System of Professional Education' and also, for furthering international contacts and exchange programmes. Furthermore, GTU could establish direct contacts with the local branches of German firms, like in Vadodara and Ahmedabad.

We suggest that GTU conducts an international seminar in February, 2011, on issues of practice-orientation in technological studies, USPs of rural colleges, and international cooperation in future-oriented technologies, especially in environmental fields. We would contact our German counterparts for participation.

Looking forward to fruitful cooperation, greetings and regards!

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