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BOOK REVIEW

“Human Resources Development: Experiences, Interventions, Strategies”
 --T V Rao, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1996, Pp.394, Price: Rs.525

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This comprehensive book is an outcome of the Commonwealth Secretariat's concern to facilitate sustainable development in Commonwealth countries. The Commonwealth Heads of Government, in the Harare Declaration of 1991, recognized that human resource development (HRD) is central to the promotion of sustainable development and reduction of poverty in the commonwealth countries. A working group was set up as a part of an agenda for action. This book by Dr. T.V. Rao was among the materials used by the working group for preparing its report. The book is the result of about eight months of study and analysis by Dr. T.V. Rao, while being stationed at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, England during 1992-93.

The book deals with HRD strategies at the level of nations and large decentralized states. Its focus is on the developing nations, though its inferences are based on the past experiences of developing as well as industrialized nations. It discusses HRD goals, policies and implementation strategies for the developing countries. The two distinct issues of developing human competencies for economic and technological development, and equitably distributing resources, opportunities and benefits in order to improve the quality life—both are given due attention by the book. The strategic importance and methods of investments in developing people, strategic choices that need to be made in developing people in terms of the categories of people to be targeted, and processes that could be used for effective implementation of HRD policies and programs are also addressed.

The book is divided into three parts. The first part introduces the concept of HRD and its relationship with economic development, and discusses some strategic choices to be made in achieving HRD objectives. HRD is conceptualized in an integrated way as dealing with the development of all people across all sections and sectors. Resource constraints in developing all people create choice problems for governments. Strategic HRD involves development of those sectors that are strategically important to that country at that time. On the other hand, balanced HRD is based on equity considerations, and attempts to ensure that one set of resources is not developed at the cost of another. Countries have to make their choices regarding the focus of development agenda on strategic sectors and target groups.

The second part takes a close look at four strategic sectors (health, education, science and technology, environment) and three target groups (women, poor, unemployed) for strategic HRD interventions. The health sector is important because longevity measured through life expectancy is a good indicator of the level of HRD in a country. People need to live longer, need to be healthy and should have access to food, water and shelter. Paying attention to the education sector is necessary if developing countries wish to achieve their HRD goals. Basic education through provision of schooling for all is an essential building block for long-term development of any nation. Technical and vocational education provides

skills required for industries, agriculture and services that are the main sources of economic well-being of a nation. Investments in the science and technology sector are vital for supporting other sectors like health and education through indigenous inventions and appropriate technologies in the context of growing population and resource crunch. The environment sector cannot be ignored because creating and managing a healthy environment are critical for sustained development. For each of the target groups—women, poor and unemployed, the importance of the group as also the ways of developing the group to achieve HRD goals at the country level are discussed.

The third part of the book deals with the strategic process interventions required for achieving HRD goals. Governments need to take a positive view of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), since there is a lot that NGOs can offer to a willing government. A collaborative partnership approach between the government and the NGOs will go a long way in achieving HRD goals of a nation. Considering that NGOs and several other entities would be involved, decentralization will enhance participation and generate enthusiasm for the whole program. Clarification of the rights and responsibilities of local authorities, NGOs and other forms of democratized management at the local level will help turn central control into central support. Besides using existing resources more efficiently, efforts need to be undertaken to mobilize additional resources for HRD programs with a view to expanding their scope and coverage. A coordinated and integrated approach to HRD along with professionalizing government is important for successful implementation of HRD programs.

This is a useful book for anyone who is interested in looking at the development of human resources from the national level. It provides a comprehensive and integrated account of HRD experiences from all over the world supported by case studies, relevant illustrations and useful extracts of important reports. It is essential reading for policy makers, representatives of people at all levels of government, and decision makers of NGOs. It will also be of great use to professionals and scholars in the areas of HRD, education and development studies.