

# Augmentation of Rural Youth Employability through Education: Mitigating Obstacles and Catalysing Strategic Interventions

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## ABSTRACT

This empirical investigation undertakes a nuanced examination of the multifaceted impediments confronting rural youth in their pursuit of gainful employment, leveraging a survey-based approach with simple random sampling to elucidate the salient obstacles hindering their socio-economic mobility. The findings delineate a complex interplay of knowledge and skill deficits, technological inaccessibility, transportation constraints, and economic vulnerability, which cumulatively contribute to heightened mental stress and diminished quality of life amongst rural youth. By shedding light on these exigent challenges, this study underscores the imperative for targeted interventions and strategic initiatives aimed at augmenting the employability and socio-economic prospects of rural youth, thereby harnessing their immense innovative capacities and pivotal role as agents of transformative change.

**Keywords:** Rural youth, employability, impediments, socio-economic mobility, targeted interventions.

## INTRODUCTION

"Youth cohorts constitute a paramount demographic dividend, necessitating nurturing, empathetic engagement, and strategic empowerment to catalyse their ascension to vanguard positions, thereby fostering communal prosperity and intergenerational synergy."

The youth demographic constitutes a paramount catalyst for national development, underpinning both the present and future trajectory of a nation's socio-economic ascendancy. As the vanguard of tomorrow and backbone of the country, youth cohorts necessitate strategic empowerment to optimize their burgeoning potential. India's youthful demographic profile, characterized by a preponderance of rural youth, underscores the imperative for targeted interventions. The declining hegemony of agriculture in rural economies mandates a paradigmatic shift towards diversification and entrepreneurship promotion, leveraging cutting-edge technologies to bridge the extant skill lacunae and foster a conducive entrepreneurial ecosystem. By synergizing these efforts, rural youth can be empowered to unlock their latent potential, drive community development, and facilitate India's realization of its demographic dividend.

- According to the Central Statistics Office's "Youth in India 2017" report, India has a significant youth population, with 356 million individuals in the 15-34 age group.
- Rural areas account for 65% of India's youth population (Source: Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports).

The synergistic orchestration of national development is inextricably linked to the regimented mobilization of youthful human capital, whose kinetic energy and innovative capacities serve as the fulcrum for socio-economic ascendancy. The United Nations General Assembly's proclamation of 2011 as the International Year of Youth, themed 'Dialogue and Mutual Understanding,' further accentuates the pivotal role of youth cohorts. Defined by the Commonwealth (2016) as individuals between 15 and 29 years, youth demographics are increasingly recognized as entrepreneurial drivers, leveraging cutting-edge technologies to accelerate innovation and structural changes, thereby augmenting productivity and propelling national progress. Rural youth are harnessing their demographic dividend to catalyze transformative change through diverse avenues. By embracing agricultural innovation, they are adopting cutting-edge farming techniques, such as precision agriculture and organic farming, to augment crop yields and promote sustainability. Additionally, rural youth are spearheading entrepreneurial ventures, including rural tourism, handicrafts, and local food processing, which not only generate employment opportunities but also stimulate local economies. Furthermore, they are leveraging digital technologies, such as e-commerce platforms and mobile apps, to access markets, enhance livelihoods, and foster financial inclusion. Moreover, rural youth are driving community development initiatives, focusing on education, healthcare, and environmental conservation, to improve the quality of life in their communities. Lastly, they are pioneering social entrepreneurship, developing innovative solutions to address pressing social challenges, including access to clean water, sanitation, and renewable energy, thereby underscoring their pivotal role in shaping a sustainable future.

India's youth population, comprising individuals between 15 and 29 years old, represents a significant demographic dividend. As of 2021, youth accounted for 27.2% of the country's population, projected to decline to 22.7% by 2036, with an estimated 345 million young individuals. The average age of India's population is 29 years, indicating a young demographic. Notably, around 68% of India's youth reside in rural areas, with 41.4% participating in the labour force in 2020-21, witnessing a notable increase among women. While the unemployment rate among youth decreased to 12.9% in 2020-21, the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) increased to 27.1% in 2019-20, with females having a slightly higher GER than males. Emphasis on skills training and creating opportunities for youth with higher education aims to address unemployment and underemployment challenges, leveraging India's demographic dividend for sustainable development.

### **Empowering Youth through Sustainable Agriculture**

Rural adolescents play a pivotal role in shaping the future of agricultural entrepreneurship, leveraging their demographic dividend to drive transformative change. According to recent studies, states like Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh have significant youth populations, with Tamil Nadu boasting 20.65 million and Andhra Pradesh having 19.58 million youth, as per the 2011 South Indian census data.

### **Strategic Utilization of Youth Demographic Dividend**

India's youth development index ranking of 98, with a total rating of 0.58, indicates a medium range of youth development. However, the country has made notable progress in reducing unemployment rates, with an estimated 3.6% unemployment rate in South Asia, according to International Labour Organization projections for 2010-2014.

### **Conceptualizing Youth Transitions**

Research on youth development highlights two key perspectives: youth as a stage of individual development and youth as an element of social integration processes. This dichotomy underscores the complexities of defining and supporting youth, who are often seen as the "modernity" product of our

society. By understanding these conceptual frameworks, policymakers can design targeted initiatives to harness the potential of rural youth in agricultural entrepreneurship, promoting sustainable development and economic growth.

### **Enhancing Agency and Autonomy**

To leverage the demographic dividend, it's essential to focus on skill development, entrepreneurship, and employment opportunities that cater to the needs of rural youth. By providing access to resources, training, and support, we can empower rural adolescents to drive innovation and growth in agricultural entrepreneurship, ultimately contributing to India's economic development.

### **Competencies of Thriving Rural Business Leaders**

A study investigating the skill set of successful rural entrepreneurs in central districts of Tamil Nadu revealed that entrepreneurship skills with a component loading of 0.7 and above were significant factors enhancing entrepreneurial success (Kumar et al., 2018). The findings underscored the importance of specific skill sets in determining the success of rural entrepreneurs.

### **Impact of Economic Downturns on Employment**

Research on unemployment dynamics indicated a positive correlation between unemployment and educational levels, suggesting that voluntary unemployment may be supported by this relationship (Bhaumik & Dimova, 2014). The determinants of unemployment durations were also examined, revealing that older workers and less educated workers experience longer durations of unemployment (Mincer, 1991). Additionally, new entrants with no work experience constituted a significant proportion of long-term unemployed individuals across three countries (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2019).

### **Cognitive-Behavioural Correlates**

The impact of learning disabilities on adult mental health problems, lack of education, and unemployment was also analyzed, highlighting the need for targeted interventions (Maag & Reid, 2006). Learning disabilities consist of subtypes such as reading disability, math disability, and comorbid conditions, with reading disability being a prominent risk factor for males in accessing education and employment opportunities.

### **The Pandemic's Human Cost: Unemployment, Suicides, and More**

The COVID-19 pandemic has had devastating effects on global employment, leading to increased unemployment rates and suicides worldwide (International Labour Organization, 2020). The unemployment rate rose from 4.936% to 5.644%, accompanied by a significant increase of 9570 suicides (Kawohl & Nordt, 2020).

## **INTERVENTION APPROACHES,**

To mitigate these effects, a three-step approach is recommended:

- encouraging individuals to discuss their depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation;
- providing social support; and
- offering psychological helplines .

### **Competency-Based Training**

- The implementation of rural skilling centres facilitates the acquisition of practical skills among rural youth, thereby enhancing their employability in local industries.
- The National Skill Development Mission endeavours to provide comprehensive skill training to youth across diverse sectors, fostering a skilled workforce.

- The Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) incentivizes individuals to undergo skill training and certification, augmenting their employability prospects.

### **Cutting-Edge Technology Training**

- The proliferation of Artificial Intelligence (AI) training programs enables students to develop skills requisite for navigating the digital economy.
- Renewable energy training initiatives equip students with the requisite skills to operate in the burgeoning green energy sector.
- Digital literacy programs facilitate the acquisition of essential digital skills, including online safety, digital communication, and software applications.

### **Start-up Incubation and Acceleration**

- The Start-up India initiative catalyzes entrepreneurship and innovation among youth, providing requisite resources, mentorship, and funding support.
- The Stand-Up India program fosters entrepreneurship among women and marginalized communities, offering training, mentorship, and financial support.
- Mentorship programs facilitate the exchange of knowledge and expertise between experienced professionals and aspiring entrepreneurs.

### **Holistic Education**

- Effective communication skills are developed through training programs that focus on verbal, non-verbal, and written communication.
- Problem-solving and critical thinking skills are cultivated through project-based learning and real-world applications.
- Financial literacy programs empower youth with the knowledge and skills necessary to manage finances, budget, and invest prudently.

### **TARGETED STRATEGIC INTERVENTIONS.**

- Skill India Mission (2015): This flagship program endeavours to catalyse skill acquisition and upskilling among Indian youth, particularly in rural areas, with the objective of augmenting employability and fostering socio-economic development. The mission's ambit includes training over 40 crore Indian youth in diverse industry-related vocations.
- National Skill Development Mission (2015): This initiative seeks to facilitate convergence between sectors and states to synergize skill training activities, expediting decision-making to achieve scalability, speed, and quality standards in skill development.
- Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) (2015): This scheme provides pecuniary incentives to individuals undergoing skill training and certification, thereby enhancing their employability prospects. The program has been implemented in multiple phases, with PMKVY 1.0 launched in 2015 and PMKVY 3.0 launched in 2020.
- Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY) (2014): This initiative is designed to provide high-quality skill training opportunities to rural poor youth, establishing an ecosystem that supports trained candidates in securing better futures.

### **Synergistic programs.**

- Smile Foundation's STeP Program: Smile Foundation, established in 2002, has been working towards empowering youth through various initiatives, including the STeP program, which focuses

on employability training and aims to train and up skill youth between 18-32 years.

- Rural Skilling Centres: Various organizations and government initiatives have established rural skilling centres to provide vocational training tailored to local needs and resources, empowering rural youth with practical skills relevant to their communities.
- Agriculture-related training and development: Programs focusing on sustainable practices, green crafts, and modern techniques have been implemented to enhance productivity and ensure environmental conservation.
- Digital literacy programs: Initiatives such as Digital India (launched in 2015) have been working towards equipping rural youth with essential digital skills, including online safety, digital communication, and software applications.

### **Critical Success Factors**

- Industry collaboration: Strategic partnerships with private sector and industry bodies are crucial to align skill development programs with job market demands.
- Practical training: Hands-on experience and internships are essential to bridge the gap between academia and professional life.
- Recognition of prior learning: Certifying skills and knowledge acquired through informal means, such as work experience, is vital for augmenting employability.
- Entrepreneurship development: Fostering entrepreneurial spirit and innovation among rural youth is critical for promoting socio-economic development.

### **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the augmentation of rural youth employability through education is a critical step towards fostering socio-economic development and reducing disparities. By mitigating obstacles such as limited access to quality education, lack of relevant skills, and inadequate infrastructure, and catalysing strategic interventions like skill development programs, digital literacy initiatives, and industry partnerships, we can empower rural youth to secure meaningful employment and contribute to the nation's growth. Ultimately, investing in rural youth education and employability is key to unlocking their potential, promoting inclusive development, and building a more prosperous future for the pastoral youth.

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