

EMPOWERING RURAL YOUTH: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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The current Central Government has shown to the global community that India is a land of ample opportunities and that an investment here means guaranteed returns. The government is also formulating people-centric policies and schemes not only to create more jobs but also provide the right economic and social environment to help a common man turn into entrepreneur. The Prime Minister has time and again said that his government caters to the poor and youth which is also reflected in the schemes implemented by it.

The Government has ensured financial inclusion and transparency in distribution of cash by opening millions of bank accounts under the Jan-Dhan scheme. The government has also come up with schemes like Mudra Bank and Start Up India - Stand Up India. These schemes are ensuring availability of funds for youth with no capital or collaterals so that they can become entrepreneurs and in turn provide jobs to others. Under Skill India Mission, the Government has taken up the responsibility to train youth of India in a range of skills so as to prepare them for the domestic and international job market. All these youth centric schemes are now beginning to benefit the youth of different strata of the society. However, Indian youth is hardly a homogeneous set and much more needs to be done given the polar variations within the target group.

Understanding Indian Youth

The National Youth Policy (NYP-2003) covered all youth in the age group 13–35 years, which was divided into two groups, that is, 13–19 years and 20–35 years. The current National Youth Policy (NYP-2014) has defined youth as those in the age group 15–29 years. However, youth is a more fluid category than a fixed age-group. Youth is often indicated as a person between the age where she/he leaves compulsory education, and the age at which she/he finds her/his first employment.

NYP-2014 covers 11 priority areas for youth—Education, Employment and Skill Development, Entrepreneurship, Health and Healthy Lifestyle, Sports, Promotion of Social Values, Community Engagement, Participation in Politics and Governance, Youth Engagement, Inclusion and Social Justice—which provides a strong road map for realizing the proposed goals during the next five years with an appropriate framework. NYP-2014 aims to empower Indian youth to utilize their full potential.

India has to reap the demographic dividend through its working population, which has a huge latent potential and productivity. Literacy rate among youth increased from 36 per cent in 1961 to 86.1 per cent in 2011 but there is a difference between male literacy (90 per cent) and female literacy (81.8 per cent), and that of rural youth (83.7 per cent) and urban youth (91.4 per cent) youth according to Census, 2011.

Every year, the government allots around Rs 3,000 per youth per year for development in terms of employment, appropriate education, skill development and awareness about health. State governments, institutions, other stakeholders and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) also support the development of youth, towards making them a productive workforce.

India is the youngest country of the world. It has maximum number of working population. The current government is trying to reap in the benefit





of this demographic dividend. The challenge is to make this population a human resource which is not possible without education and skill development. The task is gigantic. According to a report, 'State of the Urban Youth, India 2012: Employment, Livelihoods, Skills' by 2020, India is set to become the world's youngest country with 64 per cent of its population in the working age group. With the West, Japan and even China aging, this demographic potential offers India and its growing economy an unprecedented edge that economists believe could add a significant 2 per cent to the GDP growth rate. By 2020, developed countries are predicted to face a shortfall of over 57 million semi-skilled manpower while India is expected to have a surplus of 47 million. It will not only address domestic industry problems but also fulfil global manpower demand. Indian population in the age group of 15-34 increased from 353 million in 2001 to 430 million in 2011. Current predictions suggest a steady increase in the youth population to 464 million by 2021.

Pattern of Youth Development

While India is undergoing a demographic transition, regional disparities in education will not be evenly spread across the country. The report says the southern and western States will be the first to experience a growth dividend as they accounted for 63 per cent of all formally trained people. The largest share of youth with formal skills was found in Kerala, followed by Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Himachal Pradesh and Gujarat. Among those undergoing training, Maharashtra had the highest share, Bihar the lowest.

The unequal access to opportunity and the lack of emphasis on education remains a persistent

problem. A person in an urban area has 93 per cent greater chance of acquiring training than someone in a rural area. The wide gap between those who have access to education and skill development opportunities and those who do not, is a challenge that has to be overcome.

The difference in youth development pattern is determined by the economic condition of the household in India. Youth from the bottom 20 per cent (poorest) of households are deprived of education, employment, labour force and are not working currently compared to youth from the middle and rich households. There are more working youth among poor households than among rich households in India. Female youth are more disadvantaged compared to male youth and it is the same with the rural-urban distribution of youth.

Problems of Rural Youth and Solutions

About 69 per cent of the country lives in villages. Agriculture is the largest employer (about 48 per cent of its 490 million strong workforces), but resulting in only 13 per cent share of the GDP of the country. There are several challenges preventing India's rural poor youth from competing in the modern market, such as the lack of formal education and marketable skills. The government is making all efforts to engage, educate, employ and make rural youth entrepreneurs.

Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojna (PMMY)

Small business is big business. According to the NSSO Survey (2013), there are 5.77 crore small business units, mostly individual proprietorship. Most of these 'own account enterprises' (OAE) are owned by people belonging to Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe or Other Backward Classes. 54 per cent of these





small businesses come from rural area. They get very little credit, and that too mostly from non-formal lenders, or friends and relatives. The government started Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana to provide access to institutional finance to such micro/small business units. Under the aegis of Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana (PMMY), MUDRA has created three kinds of loans—Shishu (Rs 50,000), Kishor (Rs 50,000 to Rs 5,00,000) and Tarun, (Rs 5,00,000 to Rs 10,00,000) to signify the stage of growth/development and funding needs of the beneficiary. In Financial Year 2015-2016, numbers of PMMY loans sanctioned were Rs. 3,48,80,924 and the amount disbursed was Rs 1,32,954.73 crore.

Modi government has started Stand Up India, a programme aimed to promote entrepreneurship among scheduled castes (SCs), scheduled tribes (STs) and women. Two projects to be promoted per bank branch per category. Under the scheme, 1.25 lakh bank branches will provide loans to scheduled castes (SC), scheduled tribes (ST) and women entrepreneurs. The scheme is aimed at promoting entrepreneurship among 250,000 beneficiaries and is being seen as a push for financial inclusion. PM Modi said in his Independence Day speech, “Each of the 125,000 bank branches should give loans to Dalits, women and tribals, so that the country could, in no time, have at least 125,000 start-ups by women and Dalits.”

With Government of India’s highly ambitious ‘Digital India campaign’, India’s top industrialists have pledged to invest a sum of Rs 4.5 lakh crore with an aim to upgrade the overall digital infrastructure of the country. The big promise gives hopes to many,

that India too can become a high speed internet territory; citizens will be empowered through wireless mobile networks at public spaces. It is also believed that connectivity can bring the desired change, such as bridging the gap between rural and urban India, boosting e-commerce and skilled youth. Developing digital infrastructure will not only help in technological advancement here but bring a large so untapped population on the same page as the rest of the world. The telecommunication connectivity with rural India will not only boost e-commerce or literacy, it will certainly enhance the dialogue between the citizens and government. Activities like banking, providing subsidies, selling crops and other agro-products would become easy and efficient for the rural people.

The government is going all out to ensure a better life for all sections of the society but there are still many groups and spaces outside the development net. Rural, uneducated youth from marginalized community is one such group and more horrible picture emerges when we take the case of rural, uneducated, Dalit girls. More focused programmes should be started for these sections of the society which are not small in numbers. Government should create an environment in villages where rural farmers and craftsmen and others can directly sell their end-products in the open markets. Government can up with Digital Rural Marketing Platforms—linking farmers growing vegetables, pulses, rice; self-help groups collecting honey and making papad, village carpenters, artisans and weavers, and international market places. Something along the lines of China’s Taobao villages, where farmers have been turned into entrepreneurs and rural incomes have been thereby increased manifold. We also need to empower adolescent drop-outs and local communities in disadvantaged areas, and to incentivize all schools and colleges in the country to ensure the young in their catchment area complete their education. When the most marginalized, uneducated rural youth will become part of development net then only the idea of *Antyodaya* will become a reality.

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