

The entrepreneurial ecosystem in rural areas of India has significantly improved. With more than 50,000 start-ups, India has the third-largest start up ecosystem in the world. There are about 450 agri start-ups. Hailing the contribution of the youth to these start-ups in January end, Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi acknowledged "India's youth has taken the nation to the top- three in the world in terms of creating start-ups."

**I**ndia's demographic dividend has often found a mention in Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's speeches in India and abroad. Youth constitute the majority share in India's population. This explains why the Prime Minister makes it a point to draw the attention of world leaders to power of India's youth.

"India considers its youth a demographic dividend as well as a development driver." said Shri Narendra Modi while inaugurating the 25th National Youth Festival in Puducherry via video conferencing on January 12, the birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda.

"The Indian youth is a force to be reckoned within the unicorn ecosystem all over the world.

Today, India has a strong ecosystem of more than 50,000 start-ups. Of these, more than 10,000 start-ups came up amidst the challenge of the pandemic," the Prime Minister noted with pride.

According to the report Youth in India 2017 (released by the Central Statistics Office), India is one of the youngest countries in the world. This puts our vast and diverse country in an enviable position. While most developing countries are facing the challenge of ageing population, India's demographic situation is very favourable.

The National Youth Policy (NYP) 2014 defined youth as those in the 15–29 age group but the 2017 Youth in India report defines the age group of 15–34 years as the youth.



To tap this demographic dividend to optimum use, the government has to ensure that the youth have appropriate education and skills. It was on July 15, 2015 that the Prime Minister launched the Skill India Mission to empower the youth of the country with skill sets and make them more employable. Skill India offers courses across 40 sectors that are aligned to the standards recognised by the industry and the government under the National Skill Qualification Framework. More than one crore youth join the Skill India mission every year.

The Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Kendra (PMKK) is an initiative of the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship. Such state-of-the-art training centres have been set up in almost every district of the country for imparting skill development training. The objective of setting up the PMKKs is to help a large number of Indian youth take up industry-relevant skill training that would help them in securing a better livelihood. Launching through virtual mode, the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) 3.0 in January 2021 in nearly 600 districts making 300+ skill courses available to the youth, the then Minister of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship, Mr Mahendra Nath Pandey said, "PMKVY 3.0 will take skilling to the remotest of villages and towns in India; States and Districts will have an increased responsibility".

The PMKVY aims to create skilled and certified workforce that could contribute not only to India's growth but help it in becoming the global skills capital. India skill Report, 2018 highlighted that there is a clear, structural shift from agriculture to non-farm sector, particularly construction, trade and transport. According to the report, rapid advances in automation technologies are affecting India's information technology and business process outsourcing sectors. These sectors have remained net job creators.

What is really encouraging is that the entrepreneurial ecosystem in rural areas of India has significantly improved. With more than 50,000 start-ups, India has the third-largest start up

ecosystem in the world. There are about 450 agri-start-ups. Hailing the contribution of the youth to these start-ups in January end, Prime Minister Modi acknowledged that "India's youth has taken the nation to the top- three in the world in terms of creating startups."

All initiatives under the Start Up India are inclusive and are implemented across States, cities, towns and rural areas. The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship has taken several initiatives to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on skill development training. These include special programmes for training reverse migrants under PMKVY (Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana). This component has covered 116 districts of Assam, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh identified under Garib Kalyan Rozgar Abhiyan (GKRA) of Ministry of Rural Development. Till November 21 last year, 1.24 lakh migrants have been trained / oriented under this programme.

The Ministry of Rural Development is presently implementing three welfare schemes for employment generation. These schemes provide employment to people in rural areas including the youth belonging to scheduled castes/scheduled tribes and economically weaker sections.

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) is a demand driven wage employment programme. It provides enhancement of livelihood security to the households in rural areas of the country by providing at least one hundred days of guaranteed wage employment in every financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work.

The Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY) is a placement linked skill development programme for rural youth under the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM). It was launched on September 25, 2014 on the occasion of 98<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya. It aims to target youth, under the age group of 15–35 years. The motto of this scheme is to "Transform rural poor youth

into an economically independent and globally relevant workforce”.

Another initiative of the Ministry of Rural Development under the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) is skill development through Rural Self Employment and Training Institutes (RSETIs). The Ministry has decided to set up one such institute in each district of the country. A candidate opting for RSETI can take bank credit and start his/her own micro-enterprise or seek regular jobs. The RSETIs enable poor youth in rural India diversify household income.

While MGNREGS provides direct employment, DDU-GKY and RSETI schemes promote employability through either wage or self-employment leading to economic and social development of youth in rural areas of the country.

In a written reply in Rajya Sabha on February 9 this year, Union Minister of State for Rural Development, Mr Faggan Singh Kulaste said that 588 RSETIs are functioning across the country. These institutes are extending skill and entrepreneurship development training programmes to rural unemployed youth to facilitate them to employ themselves by commencing self-employment units/activities. This Ministry is reimbursing cost of training imparted by the RSETIs to the rural youth through the State Rural Livelihoods Missions (SRLMs).

RSETI has worked well as three-way partnership of the Ministry of Rural Development, state government and banks. As many as 39.9 lakh candidates have been trained under RSETIs in 64 courses. Of these, 28.11 lakh candidates were self-employed till January 2022.

The programme is currently being implemented in 28 States and 7 UTs and the RSETIs are sponsored by 23 leading banks. According to the Ministry of Rural Development, these banks are required to open at least one RSETI in their lead district to provide training to rural youth to take up self-employment/ entrepreneurship ventures. RSETI programme runs with an

approach of short-term training and long-term handholding of entrepreneurs. Rural poor people between the age group of 18-45 years are eligible to join the training.

Under the RSETI scheme, 10 training courses are exclusively for women candidates. It is therefore not surprising that women form 66 percent of the total trained candidates under the RSETI programme. About 26.28 lakh women candidates have been trained and about 18.7 lakh have been successfully settled under the RSETI so far.

On the eve of International Women's Day on 8<sup>th</sup> March, new batches of women-centric courses were started by RSETIs (Rural Self Employment Training Institutes). The Ministry of Rural Development said that it launched fresh batches of women-centric courses as part of the iconic Week campaign under Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav. The event titled – Avsar Ki Azaadi–launched focused batches for women candidates. The batches introduced enrolment in trades like making incense sticks, making and selling soft toys, Papad, pickle and masala powder, beauty parlour management and costume jewellery.

RSETI programme runs with an approach of short-term training and long-term handholding of entrepreneurs. The RSETIs have become established as pioneers in capturing the aspirations of the rural poor youth and turning them into profitable entrepreneurs by training them in the domain and entrepreneurial skills.

Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY) seeks to place rural youth in wage employment across various sectors of the economy. DDU-GKY guidelines provide for earmarking 50 percent of the funds for those belonging to the Schedule Castes and Schedule Tribes and 15 percent for minorities. The scheme mandates that one-third of those trained must be women. Another positive aspect of this scheme is that there is an age relaxation for women. Women up to the age of 45 can avail of training under this scheme.

As part of the Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav, the Department of Rural Development (DoRD)

organised more than 174 'women centric' mobilisation camps under DDU-GKY across the country on March 7, 2022. The event titled- Avsar Ki Azadi- was organised through various State Rural Livelihood Missions (SRLMs), State Skills Missions (SSM) and Project Implementation Agencies (PIAs) to make it a grand success. Over 4,281 women candidates were successfully mobilised through various such camps organised across the country for enrolling in courses like assistant beauty therapist, self-employed tailoring and sample tailoring among others.

DDU-GKY has helped youth from poor rural families in accessing free of cost skilling programme. The programme is being implemented in 27 states and three Union Territories. More than 871 PIAs are training rural poor youth in close to 611 job roles through more than 2,381 training centres. Cumulatively, 11.44 lakh youth have been trained and 7.15 lakh youth have been placed till January 31, 2022. The programme has delivered satisfactory outcomes in north-eastern states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya,

Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura.

In December 2021, the Ministry of Rural Development organised 285 job fairs across the country under DDU-GKY as part of Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav. Industry leaders from across 30 major sectors participated in these fairs spread over seven days. Facilitated by various State Rural Livelihood Missions (SRLM) and PIAs, these job fairs drew huge crowds and provided rural youth many good job opportunities. Some of the participating companies were Amazon India, Swiggy, Med Plus, Axis Bank, Kia Motors, Innovsource, Flipkart, Nana Bharat Fertilizers, Reliance Trends, Westside, Spencers, Leela Hotel, JW Marriott, Bengaluru and Teamlease Services.

The participating organisations belonged to 30 major sectors/trades including retail, construction, pharmaceutical, manufacturing, e-commerce, microfinance, manpower management, IT-ITEs, automobile, etc.

On March 10 this year, the Union Rural Development Secretary, Mr Nagendra Nath



Sinha chaired a webinar promoting the 'Captive Employer' initiative under the DDU-GKY. More than 16 Sector Skill Councils and 180 stakeholders participated in the webinar. 'Captive Employer', is a first of its kind initiative aimed at addressing the vision of a dynamic and demand-based skilling ecosystem catering to the requirements of industry partners assuring sustainable placements for rural poor youth. The initiative assures post-training placement of candidates for a minimum of six months with a minimum CTC (Cost to Company) of Rs. 10,000/-.

The model will allow the industry to source trainees as per their requirement with active support from States/UTs and will also allow employers to select rural youth and employ them in one of their establishments/subsidiaries.

A Request for Expression of Interest (REoI) was floated on February 1, 2022, to empanel such 'Captive Employers' and the first Pre-proposal meeting was chaired on February 21 by Joint Secretary (Rural Skills), Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD). Over 125 prospective employers attended the pre-proposal meeting.

The sky is the limit when it comes to schemes to empower the rural youth. The Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare has operationalised skill training (min 200 hrs.) to impart training to rural youth and farmers. This was done following the Gazette Notification issued by Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship in July, 2015. These courses are conducted through National Training Institutes, State Level Training Institutes, Krishi Vigyan Kendras and State Agricultural Universities. The skill trainings are imparted on the Qualification Packs developed by Agriculture Skill Council of India (ASCI) in agriculture and allied areas in compliance with the National Skill Qualification Framework. The major areas of skill trainings include mushroom production, bee-keeping, micro-irrigation, maintenance and repair of farm equipment, nursery management, vermicompost production, animal husbandry, dairying, poultry, fishery among others.

According to the Ministry of Agriculture and

Farmers' Welfare, the 'Skill Training of Rural Youth' (STRY) of 'Sub Mission on Agriculture Extension' (SMAE) is being implemented since 2015-16. Short term skill training of seven days (15 trainees per batch) is imparted to rural youth and farmers on specific vocational areas in agriculture and allied areas through public and private/non government training institutes including Krishi Vigyan Kendras and State Agricultural Universities.

Recognising the competitive nature of the job market and expectations of employers, the government launched DigiSaksham - a digital skills programme, on September 30, 2021. Launched by Minister for Labour and Employment, Shri Bhupender Yadav, the skills programme is aimed at enhancing the employability of youth by imparting digital skills required in an increasingly technology driven era. This joint initiative with Microsoft India is an extension of the government's ongoing programmes to support the youth from rural and semi-urban areas. The DigiSaksham initiative will equip more than 3,00,000 youth in technical skills in the first year and will enable jobseekers access Microsoft learning resources such as programming languages, data analytics, software development fundamentals and advanced digital productivity on the National Career Service (NCS) Portal. The initiative gives priority to job-seekers from semi-urban areas who belong to disadvantaged communities and those who have been displaced or lost jobs due to COVID-19.

Lastly, the Government of India is running several schemes to increase participation of the rural youth in sports. The Khelo India Scheme implemented by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports promotes sports among entire population including rural youth. The scheme has a dedicated vertical for promotion of rural and indigenous/tribal games by providing financial assistance to National Sports Federations/ Non Government Organizations (NGOs), etc for promotion of sports in the country.

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