



Engaging Rural Youth

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This article is based on “Engaging Rural Youth Gainfully” which was published in Economic and Political Weekly on 14/03/2020. It talks about the steps to be taken to reap the benefits of **demographic dividend** emanating from rural youth In India.

According to the report "Youth in India 2017" (released by the Central Statistics Office), India is one of the youngest countries in the world. Moreover, the proportion of rural youth population forms the majority share in India's youth population.

Although agriculture and allied activities constitute the bulk of the rural economy, its dominance has been dwindling over the years. Engaging rural youth in productive agricultural activities will help India to reap the benefits of the demographic dividend.

Note:

In the conventional sense, the youth population is understood as those persons belonging to the age group of adolescence to middle age.

- The United Nations (UN) referred to them as those in the age group of 15 to 24 years.
- The National Youth Policy (NYP) 2014 defined youth as those in the age group of 15–29 years.
- However, the report Youth in India 2017, defined the age group of 15–34 years as the youth.

Developing Opportunities for Rural Youth

In order to leverage this demographic dividend, there is a need to have a systematic approach to creating a suitable environment to develop opportunities for gainful employment of the rural youth. The approach includes three important steps:

- **Development of Modern Technologies:**
 - Although agriculture is not seen as a remunerative occupation, through advances in innovation, capacity-building, partnership and participatory approaches, better market linkages and, most importantly, by developing a synergy with other sectors of the economy, many employment and entrepreneurial opportunities can be created.
 - Besides, there exists a huge opportunity in rural areas for the growth of off-farm sector activities (For example, the dairy sector).
- **Skilling of Rural Youth:**
 - According to NSSO data, the percentage of rural youth, who did not receive vocational training of any sort stood at 93.7% in 2017–18.
 - This skill shortage not only reduces the employability of youth but is also detrimental to technology adoption.
 - Furthermore, a lot of the rural youth lack “soft skills,” such as the ability to experiment with new ideas, spot business opportunities, sales and marketing skills, and so on, which could make them more productive and employable.
- **Creating an Ecosystem for Entrepreneurship:**
 - The skills acquired by the youth need to be linked to their engagement in some livelihood option. This would require a responsive entrepreneurial ecosystem that identifies their talent and absorbs them in economic activity.
 - Today, the entrepreneurial ecosystem in rural areas of India is better than before. India is the third country having the largest number of start-ups. There are about 450 agri-start-ups.

Steps to be taken

Promoting Technologies: That have a huge potential for job creation.

- Emerging fields like agri-tech, agri-based e-commerce, information technology (IT)-linked agri-extension, seed technology, biotechnology, farm monitoring, Agri/rural fin-tech.
 - Horticultural, dairy production and food processing (related to these sectors) offer much more opportunities for employment generation in rural areas.
- The idea of **harvesting solar energy as the third crop** on the farmer’s field is also gaining ground. This can help in increasing employability and profits for them.
- Efforts are also needed in finding innovation/technology-based solutions to some of the basic problems relating to agriculture, namely:
 - Development of smart agricultural machinery.
 - Developing apparatus to encourage precision agriculture.
 - Finding solutions to the overuse of water.

- There is a need to facilitate the **integration of agricultural research, industrial research and biotechnological research** so that many new products can be developed from the by-products/agri-wastes.

Bridging the Skill Deficit:

- The quality of training at **industrial training institutes** (ITIs)/polytechnics needs to be strengthened by redesigning the curriculum and upgrading them through appropriate budgetary allocations under the **National Skill Development Fund**.
- It is equally important to strengthen the institute–industry interface.
 - In a way, the **Apprentices Act of 1961** helps to improve the nexus between the institute and industry as it facilitates apprenticeship training to students in different trades.
- Additionally, rural youth should be trained to acquire different soft skills.
- Skill development initiatives need to be compatible with programmes and policies directed towards making a **Digital India**.
- The thrust on the skill development of rural youth should be capability-based, and the focus should go beyond agricultural occupations and traditional courses, such as in the areas like data analysis, paramedical fields, and so on.

Establishing Rural Enterprises:

- An important aspect of enterprise creation is funding support, which is critical to ensure the success of any enterprise, especially for a start-up.
- While many avenues (MUDRA loans) have been created in the recent past to make credit available to these firms, there is a need to diversify by making seed funding available to angel investors. In this context, provision can be made to encourage deployment of the **corporate social responsibility** (CSR) funds as seed funds for these ventures.
- The possibility to make the **Krishi Vigyan Kendras** (KVKs) or Common Services Centers(CSC) a hub of all the technology solutions developed by different missions, should be explored.
- **Agriculture graduates** from the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) system or state agricultural universities may be engaged in agri-related rural entrepreneurship.

Conclusion

India has a high proportion of youth in its population, especially that of rural youth. Harnessing their potential to contribute to the country's growth would require the convergence of rural-centric policies like Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana, National Rural Livelihood Mission, National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, etc.

Drishti Mains Question

Harnessing demographic dividend contributes to the country's growth would require rural-centric policies. Discuss.