



State of Rural Youth Employment

2024





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List of Abbreviations

CHCs	Custom Hiring centres
DDU -GKY	Deen Dayal Upadhyay - Grameen Kaushal Yojana
DIU	Development Intelligence Unit
FPO	Farmer Producer Group
GDI	Global Development Incubator
GDP	Gross Domestic Products
GOYN	Global Opportunity Youth Network
LFPR	Labour Force Participation Rate
MSDE	Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship
NGO	Non-Government Organization
NSDC	National Skill Development Corporation
OY	Opportunity Youth
PMKVY	Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana
PMMY	Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana
PWD	People With Disabilities
ROI	Return on Investment
RSETI	Rural Self Employment Training Institute
TRI	Transform Rural India Foundation

Executive Summary

Context and Overview:

Youth employment is a global challenge. Of the 1.8 billion youth worldwide, a third are out of school, unemployed or working in informal jobs. 90 percent live in developing economies, and three in four are women. In the face of growing unemployment, youth are grappling with the changing nature of work, automation, digitization, etc., alongside population shifts, health crises, climate change, conflict, urbanisation, etc.

India has ~378 million young people. Two out of three live in rural areas, and are largely disconnected from India's story of economic growth, with women and youth disproportionately affected. Rural India makes up 70 percent of the country's population, but only contributes about 46 percent towards the country's GDP, with ~80 percent employed in agriculture and allied activities.

India's rural youth have the potential to be the drivers of our economy. But how do we unlock this potential? The first step is to listen to young people - and this report captures the voices of rural youth from across the country, their aspirations and challenges, and desired services and areas of support - segmented by gender, age, and employment status, with the objective to yield actionable insights for stakeholders within the rural youth employment ecosystem.

For the purpose of this research, 5169 rural 'Opportunity Youth' from 21 states across India were interviewed. Respondents were between 18-35 years of age, designed to include the women who drop out of the workforce in their twenties, and are ready to reenter the workforce in their early thirties. Opportunity Youth are youth who are active and inactive, unemployed, underemployed, and out of school / education / skilling. In typical rural districts we often have over 70 percent of total youth - fitting this category.

Key Report Insights:

1. Workforce Participation of the Sample is in Congruence with the Data from the Directorate General of Labour, Ministry of Labour and Employment:

Just over half of the male respondents aged 18-25 years were currently working. In contrast, only a fourth of female respondents in the same age group said they were currently engaged in paid work. Among older male youth aged between 26-35 years, nearly 85 percent said they were engaged in paid work, while nearly 10 percent said they had dropped out of the workforce. By contrast, among female youth in the same age group only 40 percent said they were currently working, a fourth reported having dropped out of the workforce, and a third reported never having worked for pay. These numbers are in congruence with the data from the Directorate General of Labour, Ministry of Labour and Employment.

Nearly half of the research respondents reported their primary source of household income to be from sales of agricultural produce. Income from daily wage labour and retail / wholesale trade were a distant second.

2. Most Youth Are Looking For More Aspirational Work:

A significant majority (70 - 85 percent) of those currently engaged in the workforce in some capacity said they were looking for a change in work with a clear majority across gender and age group expressing interest in running a small manufacturing, retail, or trading business. Salaried jobs across the public and private sectors were the clear second preference, with teaching, clerical work, and working in a factory being top job preferences across gender and age group.

- A small percentage of both men and women expressed interest in vocational trade based self-employment - among those who did, driving and electrical work were popular choices among men, while tailoring and beauty were popular choices among women. This indicates the rising demand for these vocations across rural India, but also that youth may not be aware of the various types of potentially more profitable vocational trade options and hence default to the more common ones mentioned above. Secondly, vocational work is not aspirational in India. There is a need to reinstate dignity, fair practices and pride in working with hands across the country in order to unlock local, and profitable work for youth.
- Older and younger women respondents have distinctly different aspirations. While nearly 30 percent of women respondents between the ages of 18-25 aspired towards government employment, this number dropped

sharply to ~6 percent among women aged 26-35. On the other hand, while only ~11 percent women between the ages of 18-25 expressed interest in running a small manufacturing/retail trading business, this number more than doubled among women aged 26-35. This could be indicative of women preferring self-employment due to increasing social and domestic duties as they grow older, manifesting as an increasing preference for self-employment with flexible working hours, the ability to work from home, etc. Alternatively, this could also be indicative of a shift in how younger women are viewing vocational work and self-employment more favourably than women aged between 26-35 years, who still hold the more traditional preferences to government employment.

- Among those not working, an overwhelming majority (~95 percent) of those who have dropped out of the workforce said that they were actively seeking work. However, a significant proportion of youth aged 18-25 (21 percent male, 24.5 percent female) who have never worked before expressed no aspiration to participate in the workforce. This insight warrants deeper research and solutioning - possibly around awareness and aspiration building, improved access to services including education and skilling, and critically - improved household, community, and workforce level practices and policies towards inclusion.

3. Lack of Financial and Familial Support, and Lack of Rural Opportunities are Key Barriers Faced by Youth Wanting to Enter and Stay in the Workforce:

Most youth across gender, age groups, and current employment status expressed four key challenges to entering and staying in the workforce. The most critical challenge emerged as access to adequate financial support. Additionally, nearly one in three male youth also expressed challenges around limited availability of opportunities in rural areas, and one in four expressed challenges around lack of moral support from immediate family members. Apart from financial support challenges, ~40 percent female youth expressed challenges around lack of awareness around various livelihoods opportunities, and lack of moral support from immediate family members. Expectedly, expression of challenges around moral support from immediate family members was significantly higher among women youth than their male counterparts.

4. Youth Expressed the Need for Targeted Support, Including Support from Family, Access to Mentorship and Guidance, Access to Finance etc. Rather Than Only Vocational Training:

For all respondents across age groups and gender, communicating career goals to family members emerged as a key and first measure to overcome employment related barriers. Other key support mechanisms included guidance from family members, advice and support from local civil society organisations, engaging with local role models for career guidance, and using social media / the internet to connect with career role models.

- Among youth seeking salaried employment, emerging trends are increasingly suggesting aspiration towards general and transferable skills across job types.
- Among those wanting to start a small business or manufacturing unit, only around 10 percent said they needed a full training course. On the other hand, ~ 90 percent men, and ~50 percent women said they needed support to access seed capital. Other areas of support highlighted by youth included access to working capital, support with market linkages, ideation support, and linkage to government schemes.
- Those wanting to enter a vocational occupation expressed the need for four key areas of support. An overwhelming 98.5 percent said they wanted support to access finance, ~83 percent expressed the need for support towards skill upgradation, 75 percent said they needed support towards technology upgradation, and 35 percent said they needed support towards upgrading machinery. Female respondents expressed the need for the same four areas of support, albeit in much lower numbers as compared to their male counterparts indicating gaps in awareness or ability to identify and articulate what they needed.
- Awareness about and access to government programs: Respondents displayed higher awareness of vocational training than entrepreneurship related training, specifically two key programs - Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) and the Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY). The research also revealed that over double the proportion of female youth had undertaken training courses than their male counterparts. The research further revealed that the larger share of these trainings were undertaken through private sector and NGO training programs.

5. Most Youth Prefer to Stay In or Around Their Village, Even at a Lower Income:

Over 60 percent male respondents, and over 70 percent female respondents said they preferred to find work in or close to their village, even when income was 20-30 percent lower. Actual income aspiration varied greatly across gender, age group, and current employment status and ranged between INR 13,000 - INR 33,000 per month.

6. Entrepreneurship is a Key Pathway Due to Few Formal Jobs at a District, but Youth Need Intensive Support and Services to Succeed:

Since formal opportunities in rural areas are not sufficient to absorb local youth, entrepreneurship and self-employment are key pathways for local labour absorption. However, young people cited the lack of entrepreneurial skills and mindset, the lack of access to seed capital, and a lack of understanding on how to start their entrepreneurship / self-employment journey for their reservations towards this pathway.

7. Agriculture is Not Aspirational in its Current State, but has the Potential To Become A Viable Option For Youth:

Agriculture is another key labour absorption pathway in rural areas. However, a majority of respondents did not consider agriculture aspirational in its current state, and close to 70 percent of respondents attributed this to low productivity and insufficient profits. Critically, youth were able to articulate areas of support to stay in agriculture - these included training, technical support to increase productivity, support for crop diversification, and access to high quality and affordable agri-inputs.

Based on the above, a clear insight is that young people prefer to stay within or close to their villages even with a lower income. At the same time, agriculture and self employment / entrepreneurship - key sources of rural labour absorption - are not - in their current state - aspirational employment pathways for rural youth. Thus, there is a clear need to address this gap to create sustainable rural labour absorption at scale.

Recommendations and Way Forward:

As seen above, youth contexts, aspirations, and challenges are multi-faceted and complex, and it is not sufficient to solve for any single aspect. The Global Opportunity Youth Network's¹ place based approach embraces this complexity and solves for 'place'. In the rural India context, place translates to 'district' and GOYN India works on the principle of 'district as a unit of change'.

Since a majority of youth want to stay in or close to their village, the idea is to bring the economy to the people², along with creating opportunities for aspirational migration. The idea is to plan for labour absorption at a district level, up to a saturation point at which investment starts decreasing and impact is self-propelling.

This approach has been tested in two rural districts - Ramgarh, Jharkhand and Barwani, Madhya Pradesh with early impact already benefiting 50,000+ youth across these districts. As the next step, the approach has been taken to fifteen new districts, while we continue to deepen work in the first two districts. The vision is to take this approach to a hundred rural districts by 2030.

Conclusion:

While this report provides a macro view of the state of rural youth in India, a deep, district level mapping is critical in order to effectively address local challenges and harness local opportunities. These deep, district level reports have already been developed for seventeen districts across Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Karnataka as part of the work of the Global Opportunity Youth Network's (GOYN's) place-based approach and are critical drivers of all program design and implementation at these districts.

As seen above, in order to move the needle on creating fair and sustainable work at the district, it is not sufficient to develop only youth facing solutions. It is also essential to build and strengthen practices and policies across the youth employment ecosystem. This report examines the state of rural youth. The second and third parts of this series to be released over the period of the next twelve months will examine the state of the youth employment ecosystem, and practices and policies across stakeholder groups.

¹ goyn.org

² Taking the Economy to the People - A Place Based Approach to Connect Young India to Work - Annu Mehta, Alice Gugelev



01

Introduction

Introduction

About the Report

India's rural youth have the potential to be drivers of our economy. But how do we include them in India's growth story? There is no single, silver bullet solution. Skilling youth is critical, but it is just one piece of the puzzle. Young people need access to a full stack of solutions and services tailored to their requirements and context, many of which require ecosystem level shifts in policy and practices, as well as increased collaboration across stakeholder groups for improved service delivery.

The first step to successful entry and retention of rural youth in India's workforce is understanding what young people want, what services they need to achieve their aspirations, and mapping access to existing services. In this context, this report aims to provide a high level view of aspirations and challenges of rural youth, as well as available services, access, and desired supports - segmented across gender, age, and current employment status of rural youth.

Importantly, the report has been designed to enable specific and actionable insights across various stakeholders in the rural youth employment ecosystem. This report is the first part of a series of three reports to be released over the next twelve months and examines the state of rural youth. The second and third parts of this series will examine the state of the youth employment ecosystem, and practices and policies across stakeholder groups, from an action oriented lens.

While this report provides a macro view of the state of rural youth in India, the state of youth changes by district, and often even by block. In order to create a place-based intervention, district level mapping is critical. These deep, district level reports have already been developed for seventeen districts across Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Karnataka as part of the work of the Global Opportunity Youth Network's (GOYN's) place-based approach and are critical drivers of all program design and implementation at these districts.

Context: A Global, National, and Rural India View of Youth and Employment:

Youth employment is a global challenge: The global youth population is ~1.8 billion and growing. About a third of this population ~ 600 million youth - are out of school, unemployed, or working in informal jobs across the world. 90 percent of these youth live in developing economies, concentrated in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. ~ 70 percent of those with access to work are informally employed. Three in four unemployed are female³. With increasing automation and digitisation, youth are increasingly grappling with the changing nature of work, and also with larger societal impacts caused by population shifts, health crises, climate change, conflict, rapid urbanisation, etc.

On the youth employment ecosystem side - there is no single "silver bullet" solution. The business case and ROI for youth employment is not well defined. Existing efforts reach a tiny fraction of youth in need, and young people are not partners in solution development. The field is fragmented - there is limited connection to labour demand, and limited awareness, coordination and financial support to address the size of the challenge.

India's youth dividend is largely disconnected from our story of economic growth: India is the world's fifth largest economy and poised to be the third largest by 2030. India also has the world's largest working age population, and an average age of 29. The demographic bulge is forecasted to continue till 2050⁴. However, employment growth has not kept pace with GDP growth due to global realities mentioned above such as population shifts, automation, and digitisation. and more local contexts such as regulatory practices favouring investment in capital rather than labour, devaluation of vocational trades, focus on skilling rather than workforce entry and retention, etc. Women and youth are disproportionately feeling the brunt of this challenge.

3 International Labour Organisation InfoSeries: *The gender gap in employment: What's holding women back?*; Feb 2022

4 UNFPA

Rural youth have aspirations but are struggling to find local and productive work: Rural India makes up 70 percent of the country but contributes only ~46 percent towards the country's GDP. Rural India is also home to two-thirds of India's ~378 million youth, with agriculture and allied activities employing ~ 80 percent of these youth⁵. However, with low productivity and decreasing returns, overall low value-added economic activity in rural areas, and seasonal distress migration, hidden/under employment is a critical challenge in the country.

Youth Voice Represented in this Report

5169 rural 'Opportunity Youth' from across India were interviewed for the purpose of this report. Respondents were between 18-35 years of age, designed to also include women who drop out of the workforce in their twenties, and are ready to re-enter the workforce in their early thirties once their children are older.

Opportunity Youth are youth unemployed, underemployed, and out of school / education / skilling. Opportunity Youth is a phrase that reflects the idea that youth are a force for positive contribution, an asset-based lens that supports the idea that youth present an opportunity to economies, societies, and themselves. It is critical to define how many youth fit into these categories and ensure that hidden un/underemployment and inactive women not participating in the labour force are included in India's growth story. In typical rural districts we see high numbers of youth - often over 70 percent of total youth - fitting this category, compared to only 30-40 percent of urban youth who fit this description.

5 Niti Aayog, Central Statistics Office; Ministry of Health and Family Welfare



02

**Research Approach And
Methodology**

Research Approach And Methodology

The research initially covered 6367 individuals aged between 18 and 35 years in rural India and was conducted telephonically. The telephone numbers were selected from a very large, pan India pool of telephone numbers available with Sambodhi Panels, whose platform was used to conduct the research interviews.

Callers posted across states were provided with a list of rural call numbers generated randomly and they conducted cold calls to first confirm the age of the respondent (18-35 was the first level qualification criteria). The second qualification criteria confirmed with qualified candidates was:

- currently working and looking for a change, or
- not currently working but were looking for work, or
- never worked before but actively looking for an opportunity to engage in the paid workforce

Eligible respondents who were not able to give time at the first contact were called thrice before replacement. The sample distribution across states was roughly in proportion to their rural population (but smaller states had to be given a higher sample than their proportion contribution to the rural population to ensure minimum sample size). A total of 5169 men and women who met the age criteria as well as the workforce engagement criteria were ultimately selected to be part of the research sample.

The sample was also well distributed geographically, across 21 states:

Table 1: Distribution of survey sample by states

State	Number of Rural Youth Interviewed
Andhra Pradesh	247
Assam	248
Bihar	342
Chhattisgarh	223
Gujarat	225
Haryana	128
Himachal Pradesh	159
Jharkhand	324
Karnataka	248
Madhya Pradesh	263
Maharashtra	350
Mizoram	90
Nagaland	87
Odisha	316
Punjab	111

State	Number of Rural Youth Interviewed
Rajasthan	284
Tamil Nadu	393
Telangana	264
Tripura	80
Uttar Pradesh	478
West Bengal	309
Total	5169

Respondent Profile

Of the total sample of 5169 individuals, 2585 were male and 2584 were female. It may be stated here that there was a strict gender quota (1:1) assigned to the sample and the current distribution essentially represents the same.

Further, 26.6 percent were aged between 18-25 years and the remaining 73.4 percent were aged between 26-35 years.

Table 2: Age distribution of achieved primary research sample by gender (in percent)

Male		Female	
18-25 yrs.	26-35 yrs.	18-25 yrs.	26-35 yrs.
26.7	73.3	26.5	73.5

Base: 2585 male and 2584 female



03

**Key Research
Findings**

Key Research Findings

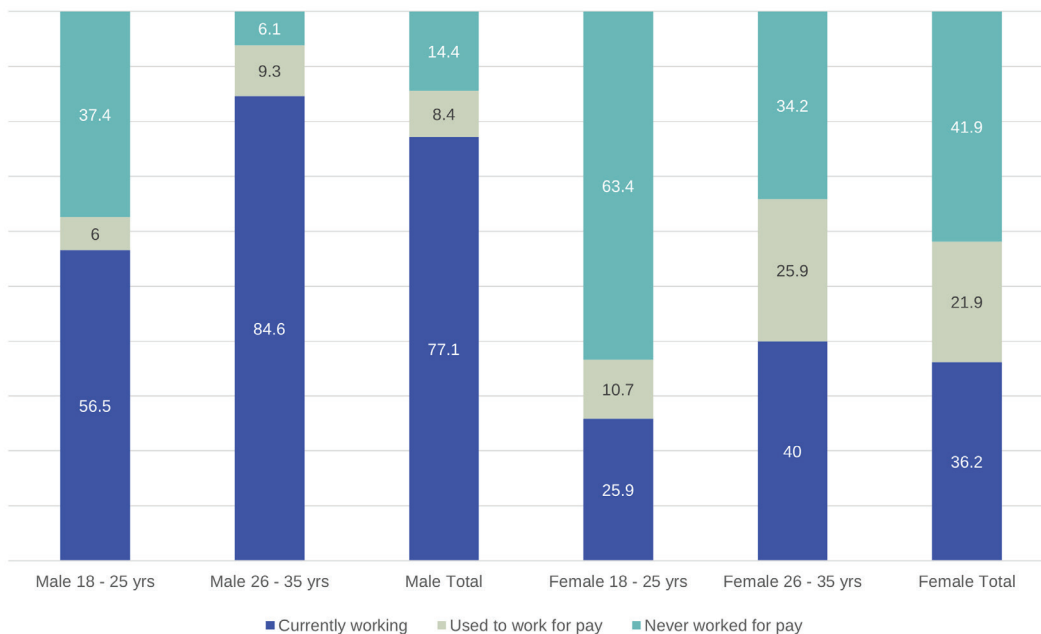
A Snapshot: State of Rural Youth Employment

Workforce Participation of Primary Research Respondents

Just over half of the male respondents aged 18-25 years were currently working. In contrast, only a fourth of female respondents in the same age group said they were currently engaged in paid work.

Among older male youth aged between 26-35 years, nearly 85 percent said they were engaged in paid work, and nearly 10 percent said they used to work but were currently unemployed. By contrast, among female youth in the same age group only 40 percent said they were currently working, a fourth reported having dropped out of the workforce, and a third reported never having worked for pay.

Figure 1: Work status of rural youth (in percent)



Base: 2585 male; 2584 female

Here the sample shows that most of the youth who were currently working were male; conversely most who had never worked were female.

According to the Directorate General of Labour, Ministry of Labour and Employment⁶ 32.8 percent females aged 15 years & above in India are participating in the labour force, as compared to 77.2 percent males. The female Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) in the age group 15-59 years is 35.6 percent, as compared to 81.8 percent male. The data from the primary research indicates similar numbers.

Occupation and Principal Source of Income of Chief Wage Earners Within Sampled Households

Nearly half of the research respondents reported their primary source of household income to be from sales of agricultural produce. Income from daily wage labour and retail / wholesale trade were a distant second.

⁶ Female Labour Utilisation in India, Employment Statistics in Focus, April 2023

Table 3: Primary source of income of Chief Wage Earner within sampled households

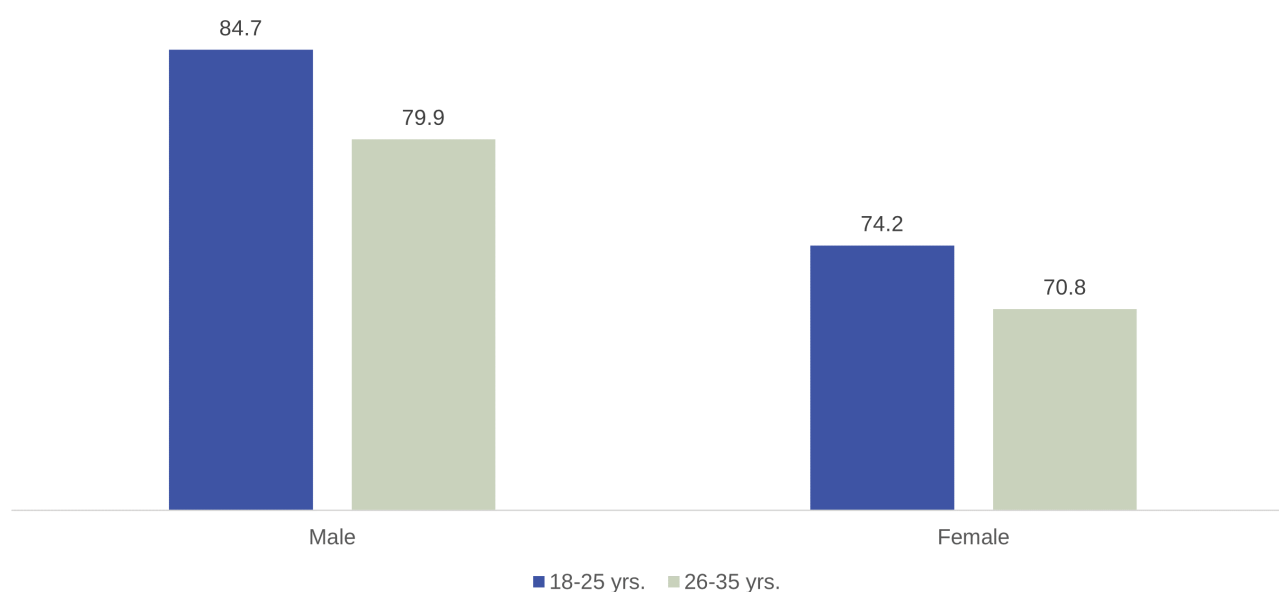
Source of income of CWE	Percentage
Sales income from farm produce	48.3
Sales income from other primary sector activities	4.0
Sales income from retail/wholesale trade	10.5
Sales income from manufacturing and sales of artisanal products	1.7
Earnings from self-employment in a vocational trade or job work against fixed orders	8.0
Salaried income from part time/contractual employment	6.7
Salaried income from regularised employment	5.2
Earnings through wage labour	14.1
Earnings from consultation fees and commissions	0.7
Unearned income including rents, donations, and remittances	0.1
Other source of income	0.7
Base	5169

Work Preferences and Aspirations of Rural Youth

Desire for Better / More Aspirational Work

A significant majority (70 percent - 85 percent) of those currently engaged in the workforce in some capacity said they were looking for a change in work. Aspirations for change drop slightly among older youth across both genders.

Figure 2: Proportion of youth in the workforce looking for a change in occupation (in percent)



Base:

Male(18-25)-461; Male(26-35)-2006,
Female(18-25)-239; Male(26-35)-1071

Among those working but looking for a change, a clear majority across gender and age group expressed interest in running a small manufacturing, retail, or trading business. The exception here was younger women, whose first preference was to obtain a salaried, government job. Salaried jobs across the public and private sectors were the clear second preference across other segments too (all male youth, and older female youth).

Preferences for specific job types reduced among older male youth who were more agnostic in the type of job they were open to. Among women youth, the preference for government jobs remained across both age groups, however, older women youth as seen above, expressed an increasing preference for running a small manufacturing, retail, or trading business.

For women seeking salaried jobs, the clear preference was teaching jobs, followed by clerical work such as accounting, being engaged at the front desk (customer facing work) and to a lesser extent, jobs in sales and marketing. The preference for factory floor work engagement or being a nurse in a healthcare facility were second rung options. For women wishing to start a small manufacturing business/retail trading business, there was a clear preference towards production and sales of dress materials/clothing/footwear or opening a general store or any kind of retail outlet. Opening a beauty parlour was a second rung choice.

For men seeking salaried jobs, being employed as a teacher, an accountant/clerk and working on a factory floor were the three most sought after engagements. Second rung preferences included technical work (maintenance of machines, running of machines), and working in sales/marketing. For men wishing to open a general store or retail outlet/small business, the preference was for opening a shop that sells dress materials/clothing/footwear, or a small food stall/eatery or hotel.

A small percentage of both men and women expressed interest in vocational trade based self-employment. However, among those who expressed this preference, being a driver or electrician were popular among men respondents, and tailoring (64.6 percent) and beauty (23 percent) were popular among women respondents.

To a certain extent this indicates the rising demand for these vocations across rural India, and the increasing prevalence of gig work. However, a key insight here is that all youth may not be aware of the various types of potentially more profitable vocational trade options and hence default to the more common ones mentioned above. Secondly, vocational work is not aspirational in India. There is a need to reinstate dignity, fair practices and pride in working with hands across the country in order to unlock local, and profitable work for youth.

Young women across age groups and current occupations maintained aspirations to transition to salaried jobs. For young men however, occupational aspirations varied across the nature of current work.

Young people across both genders currently engaged in salaried occupations, overwhelmingly prefer to stay employed as salaried persons. On the other hand, a significant proportion of those (55 percent men and 40 percent women) currently owning businesses also wanted to transition to a salaried job.

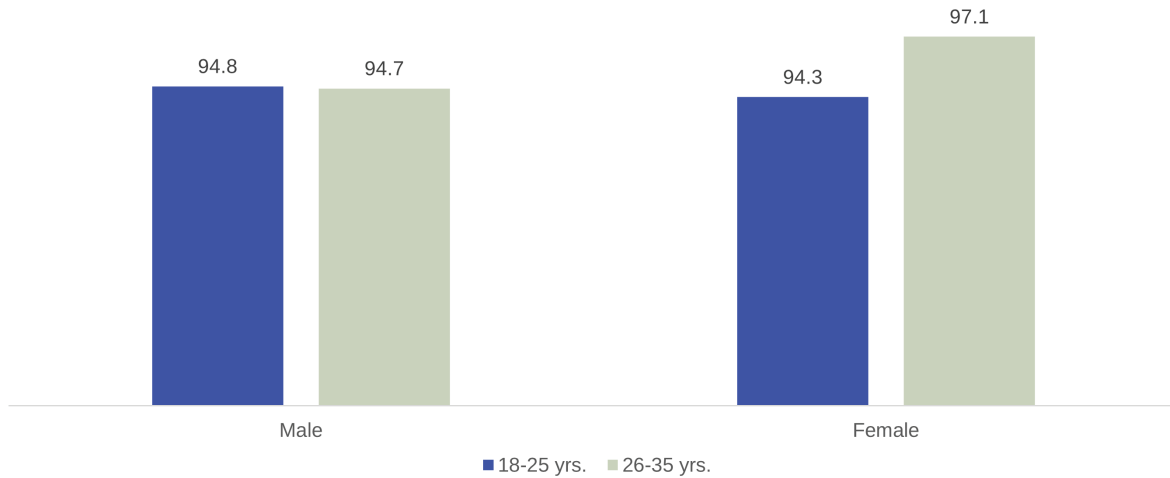
While current business owners showed interest in shifting into salaried jobs, a majority of men currently engaged in agriculture or a vocational trade prefer to start their own business.

Comparatively, among women respondents engaged in agriculture or vocational trade, while over 30 percent respondents wanted to start their own business, there was still a higher preference for a salaried job. Among respondents currently engaged as daily wage or piecemeal workers, over 40 percent are interested in starting their own business.

Desire to Enter or Re-enter the Paid Workforce

An overwhelming majority (94 percent - 97 percent) of those who had dropped out of the workforce and were currently unemployed said that they were actively seeking work

Figure 3: Proportion of youth who have dropped out of the workforce and are actively seeking work (in percent)



Base:

Male(18-25)-44; Male(26-35)-187,

Female(18-25)-78; Male(26-35)-506

Among those who have dropped out of the paid workforce, but actively seeking work, well over 70 percent were preferred salaried employment with no particular preference for government or private sector work. Very few expressed interest in entrepreneurship or running a business.

Table 4: Occupation preferences of those looking to re-enter the paid workforce (in percent)

Occupation preference	Male			Female		
	18 - 25 yrs.	26 - 35 yrs.	Total	18 - 25 yrs.	26 - 35 yrs.	Total
Government salaried job	30.9	18.5	20.8	28.0	10.5	12.7
Private sector salaried job	18.2	22.3	21.5	16.0	34.0	31.7
Any salaried job without any preference for government or private	32.7	30.5	30.9	26.0	33.7	32.7
Run a small manufacturing/Retail trading business	10.9	18.0	16.7	16.0	12.5	13.0
Be self-employed plying a vocational trade	3.6	6.0	5.6	10.0	7.5	7.8
Join the family business	1.8	2.2	2.1	0.0	1.5	1.3
Others	0.0	1.3	1.0	4.0	0.3	0.8
Base	42	177	218	73	492	565

Similarly, among those who have never worked before but were currently seeking paid work, all respondents across age groups and gender overwhelmingly preferred a salaried job. However, a distinct difference across genders was that ~25 percent women respondents also expressed interest in self-employment in a vocational trade, and ~20 percent wanted to start their own business or retail shop. Both these preferences were considerably lower among male candidates.

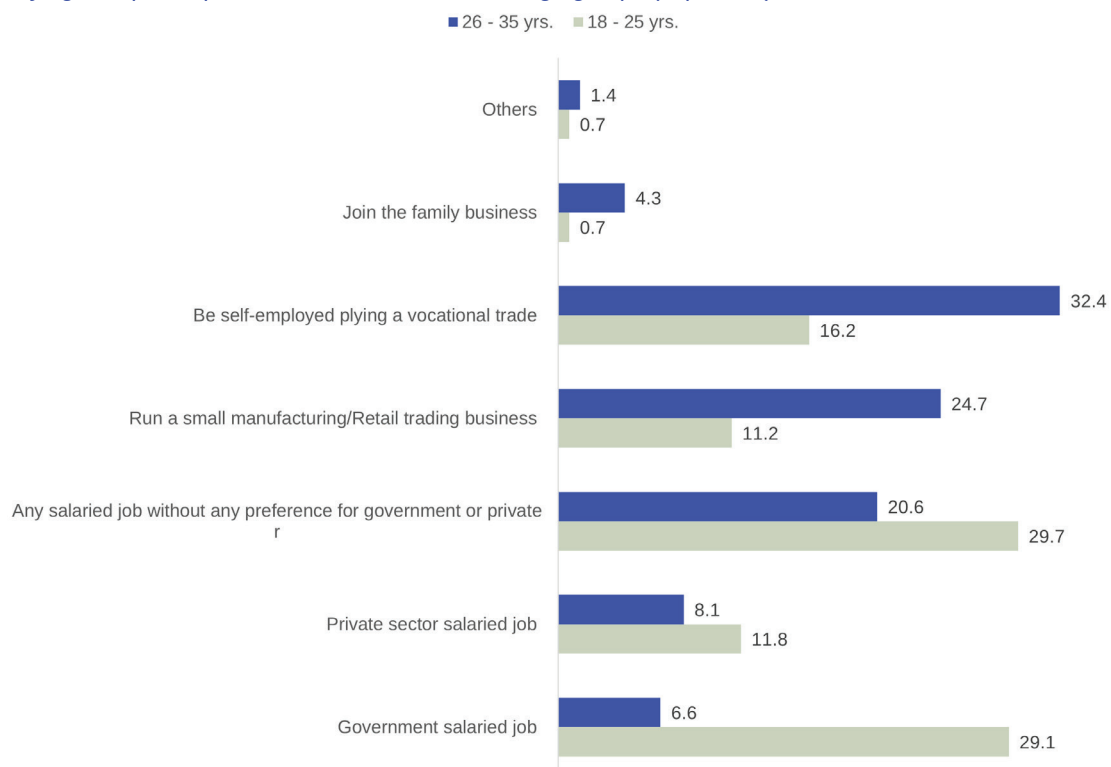
Table 5: Occupation preferences of those who have never worked for pay but are seeking a job (in percent)

	Male	Female
Government salaried job	29.5	15.6
Private sector salaried job	18.1	9.6
Any salaried job without any preference for government or private	28.5	24.3
Run a small manufacturing/Retail trading business	16.9	19.2
Be self-employed plying a vocational trade	1.8	25.9
Join the family business	2.4	2.9
Others	1.2	1.1
Base	373	1083

Another interesting insight was the distinctly different aspirations among older and younger women respondents. While nearly 30 percent of women respondents between the ages of 18-25 aspired towards government employment, this number dropped sharply to ~6 percent among women aged 26-35. On the other hand, while only ~11 percent women between the ages of 18-25 expressed interest in running a small manufacturing/retail trading business, this number increased to ~24 percent among women aged 26-35. There was a similar trend across aspiration towards vocational trades - while only ~16 percent women between the ages of 18-25 expressed interest in running a small manufacturing/retail trading business, this number increased to ~32 percent among women aged 26-35.

This could be indicative of women preferring self-employment due to increasing social and domestic duties as they grow older, manifesting as an increasing preference for self-employment with flexible working hours, the ability to work from home, etc. Alternatively, this could also be indicative of a shift in how younger women are viewing vocational work, and self-employment more favourably than women aged between 26-35 years, who still hold the more traditional preferences to government employment.

Figure 4: Varying occupation preferences of women across age groups (in percent)



Base: 18-25 yrs. female 434; 26-25 yrs. female 649

No Clear Expression of Desire to Join the Paid Workforce

An interesting insight is that a significant proportion of youth aged 18-25 (21 percent male, 24.5 percent female) who have never worked before, express no aspiration to participate in the workforce.

Figure 5: Youth aged 18-25 who have never worked before, and who express no aspiration to participate in the workforce (in percent)



This insight warrants deeper research and solutioning - possibly around awareness and aspiration building, improved access to services including education and skilling, and critically - improved household, community, and workforce level practices and policies towards inclusion.

On the other hand, a much higher proportion of older youth aged 26-35 who have never worked before (85 percent male, 88 percent female) are much keener for opportunities of work.

Figure 6: Older youth aged 26-35 who have never worked before, but wish to participate in the workforce (in percent)





04

**Workforce Participation
Challenges Faced by
Youth Across Gender,
Current Employment
Status, and Type of Work**

Workforce Participation Challenges Faced by Youth Across Gender, Current Employment Status, and Type of Work

Challenges Expressed by Those Wishing to Enter or Re-enter the Workforce

For young men and women alike, the most critical challenge emerged as access to adequate financial support. Additionally, nearly one in three male youth also expressed challenges around limited availability of opportunities in rural areas, and one in four expressed challenges around lack of moral support from immediate family members. Apart from financial support challenges, ~40 percent female youth expressed challenges around lack of awareness around various livelihoods opportunities, and lack of moral support from immediate family members.

Expectedly, expression of challenges around moral support from immediate family members was significantly higher among women youth than their male counterparts

Table 6: Top three challenges cited by those currently working but looking for a change in occupation

Male	Percentage	Female	Percentage
Lack of financial support from immediate family members	63.9	Lack of financial support from immediate family members	72.6
Limited availability of opportunities in rural areas.	27.6	Lack of awareness about opportunities	40.1
Lack of moral support from immediate family members	24.7	Lack of moral support from immediate family members	37.5
Base	1993		936

Challenges expressed by those wishing to enter or re-enter the workforce

Those currently not working but wanting to enter or re-enter the workforce expressed the same top three challenges, but in varying order of prevalence across prior work status and gender. While most young men cited lack of financial support from immediate family members, the most pressing challenge experienced by women was prevalent cultural norms and traditions. 40-50 percent of respondents across both genders irrespective of prior workforce participation stated a lack of awareness around available opportunities as a barrier to re-entry into the workforce.

Table 7: Top three challenges cited by those wishing to enter or re-enter the workforce

	For those seeking re-entry into the workforce	For those seeking first-time entry into the workforce		For those seeking re-entry into the workforce	For those seeking first-time entry into the workforce
Male	Percentage	Percentage	Female	Percentage	Percentage
Lack of financial support from immediate family members	70	62.4	Cultural norms and traditions	60.5	48.1

	For those seeking re-entry into the workforce	For those seeking first-time entry into the workforce		For those seeking re-entry into the workforce	For those seeking first-time entry into the workforce
Male	Percentage	Percentage	Female	Percentage	Percentage
Lack of awareness about opportunities	52.8	43.5	Lack of awareness about opportunities	50.7	41.3
Cultural norms and traditions	28.9	33.9	Lack of financial support from immediate family members	50.1	30.8
Base	218	373		565	1083



05

**Addressing Challenges
and Barriers: Support
and Services Youth are
Seeking to Enter and Stay
in the Workforce**

Addressing Challenges and Barriers: Support and Services Youth are Seeking to Enter and Stay in the Workforce

Measures to Overcome Employment Related Barriers

As seen in the section above, all young people interviewed were able to articulate challenges and barriers to entry and retention in the workforce. Many were also able to articulate their thinking around how these challenges could be addressed, though male youth were able to lay out far more options than their female counterparts.

For all respondents across age groups and gender, communicating career goals to family members emerged as a key and first measure to overcome the employment related barriers highlighted in the section above.

Other key support mechanisms highlighted by youth respondents included seeking guidance from family members, sourcing advice and support from local civil society organisations, engaging with local role models for career guidance, and using social media / the internet to connect with career role models.

Table 8: Measures to overcome employment related barriers, as articulated by youth respondents (in percent)

	Male	Female
Seek support and guidance from family members	42.2	22.5
Communicate career goals with family members	89.2	45.1
Seek support and guidance outside family from NGO/organisation working in local community	36.0	22.4
Engage with role model from locality for career guidance	26.2	11.5
Use social media & internet to connect with career role models and gaining knowledge about education and career options	17.8	8.3
Others	5.8	2.3
Base	2,585	2,584

Apart from general support measures, young people were also able to articulate specific types of support they needed based on the type of employment they were aspiring to.

Key Services Required by Those Wishing to Enter Salaried Employment

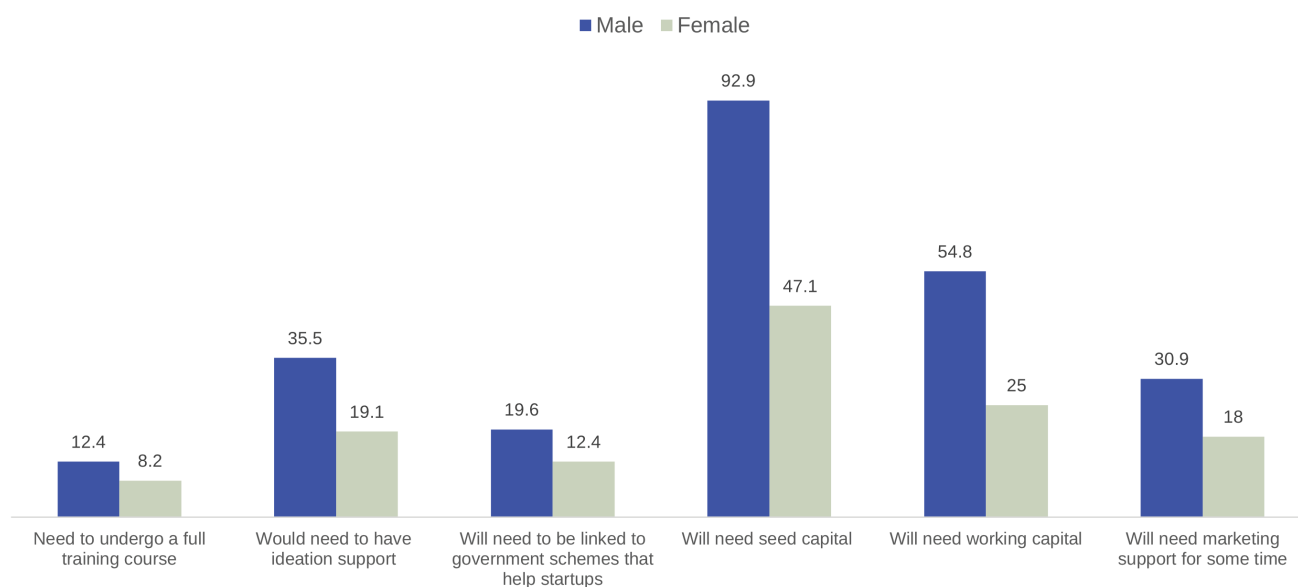
Apart from domain training, emerging trends are increasingly suggesting that youth are aspiring towards general and transferable skills across job types. This includes basic IT skills, presentation, etiquette and basic business conversational skills, and other soft skills which help improve critical thinking, enhance cognitive flexibility, and enhance overall workplace acumen. This type of training leads to improved customer facing skills, job satisfaction and retention rates, and results in overall improved employability.

Expression of Support Needed by Those Wanting to Start a Small Business or Manufacturing Unit

Among those aspiring to start a small business or manufacturing unit, very few (8 percent women, and 12 percent men) said they needed a full training course. On the other hand, ~ 90 percent men, and ~50 percent women said they needed support to access seed capital. 55 percent men and 25 percent women also said they needed access to working capital. While these numbers are high, it is key to note that the percentage of young men seeking access to finance is close to double that of young women seeking the same support. There could be several underlying reasons for the disparity in this number including awareness of financing options, nature of business and requirement of capital, ready access to capital from Self-Help Groups, etc. Alternatively, if we assume that support required transcends gender, the data overall suggests that men were able to articulate their requirements much more than their female counterparts.

It is critical to determine these reasons at a hyper-local level in order to effectively design programs and interventions for specific groups of young people.

Figure 7: Nature of support requested by young men and women wishing to start a small business / manufacturing unit (in percent)



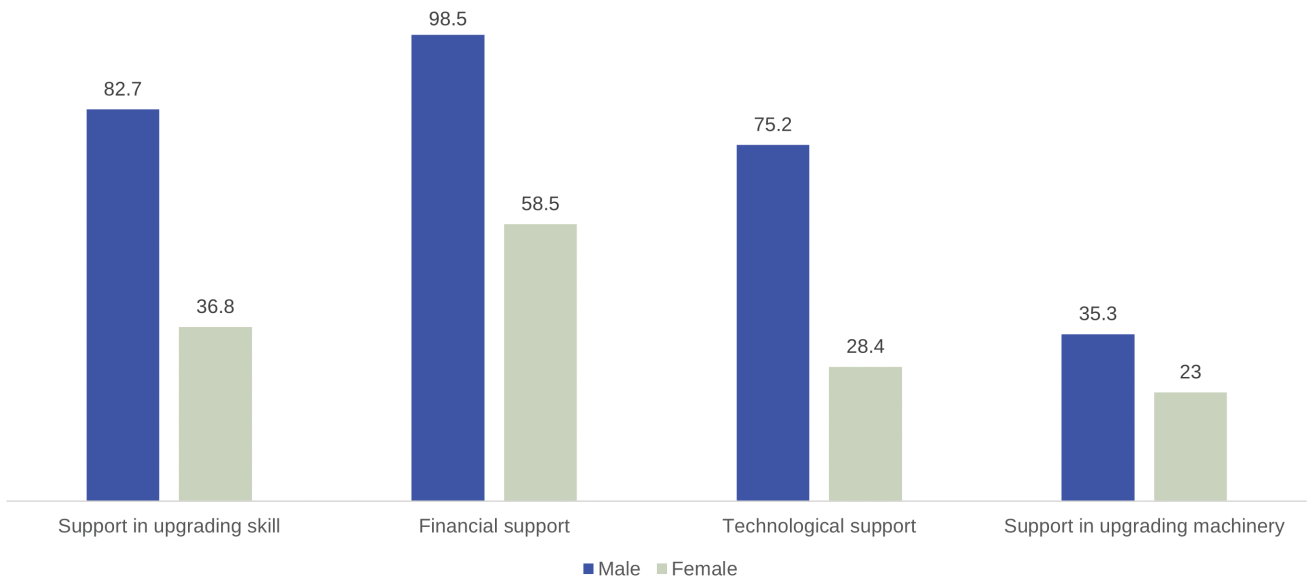
Base: Male = 1007; female = 571

Expression of Support Needed by Those Wanting to Enter a Vocational Occupation / Trade

Men respondents wanting to enter a vocational occupation articulated the need for four specific areas of support. An overwhelming 98.5 percent said they wanted support to access finance, ~83 percent expressed the need for support towards skill upgradation, 75 percent said they needed support towards technology upgradation, and 35 percent said they needed support towards upgrading machinery.

For the women, even though all four of the above areas were important, the proportion articulating their need for support was much lower than their male counterparts. The only area of support that women articulated in significant numbers (~60 percent) was access to finance.

Figure 8: Nature of support requested by young men and women wishing to enter a vocational occupation / trade (in percent)



Base: Male = 133; female = 465



06

**Awareness and Access
to Available Skill
Development Programs**

Awareness and Access to Available Skill Development Programs

Awareness about Government Programs across Various Youth Segments

On the whole, both male and female youth displayed higher awareness of vocational training than entrepreneurship related training. Specifically, women respondents aged 26-35 years currently working in a vocational trade / occupation displayed the highest awareness about available skill development programs offered by state and central governments. On the other hand, awareness about various programs was lowest among women who have never participated in the workforce

Table 9: Awareness about government programs across various youth segments (in percent)

		Male		Female	
		18 - 25 yrs.	26 - 35 yrs.	18 - 25 yrs.	26 - 35 yrs.
Currently working	Own business/small manufacturing	18.5	21.6	30.8	23.4
	Vocational trade	30.3	38.5	52.2	70.1
Used to work but not anymore	Own business/small manufacturing	20.0	34.4	8.3	33.3
	Vocational trade	0	47.1	40.0	40.0
Never worked	Own business/small manufacturing	27.8	34.5	9.1	10.1
	Vocational trade	33.3	50.0	16.7	4.2

Respondents were aware of two key programs - Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) - the flagship scheme of the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) implemented by National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC); and the Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY) - which facilitates micro credit/ loans up to INR Rs. 10 Lakhs (INR 1 million) to income generating micro enterprises engaged in the non-farm sector across manufacturing, trading, service and agri-allied sectors.

Table 10: Recall of government schemes names across various youth segments

	Youth wanting to start a small business/ manufacturing unit (in percent)		Youth wanting to pursue vocation based self-employment (in percent)	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Startup India Initiative	7.4	6.1	21.1	6.3
Standup India Initiative	7.0	10.2	24.6	7.8
Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY)	67.2	69.4	68.4	89.1
Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY)	68.8	81.6	63.2	82.8
Rural Self Employment Training Institute's (RSETI) Programmes	1.2	0	0	0
Deen Dayal Upadhyay -Grameen Kaushal Yojana (DDU-GKY)	7.4	0	0	0
Others (specify)	1.2	2.0	3.5	0
Base	192	71	42	94

Training Programs Accessed Across Youth Segments

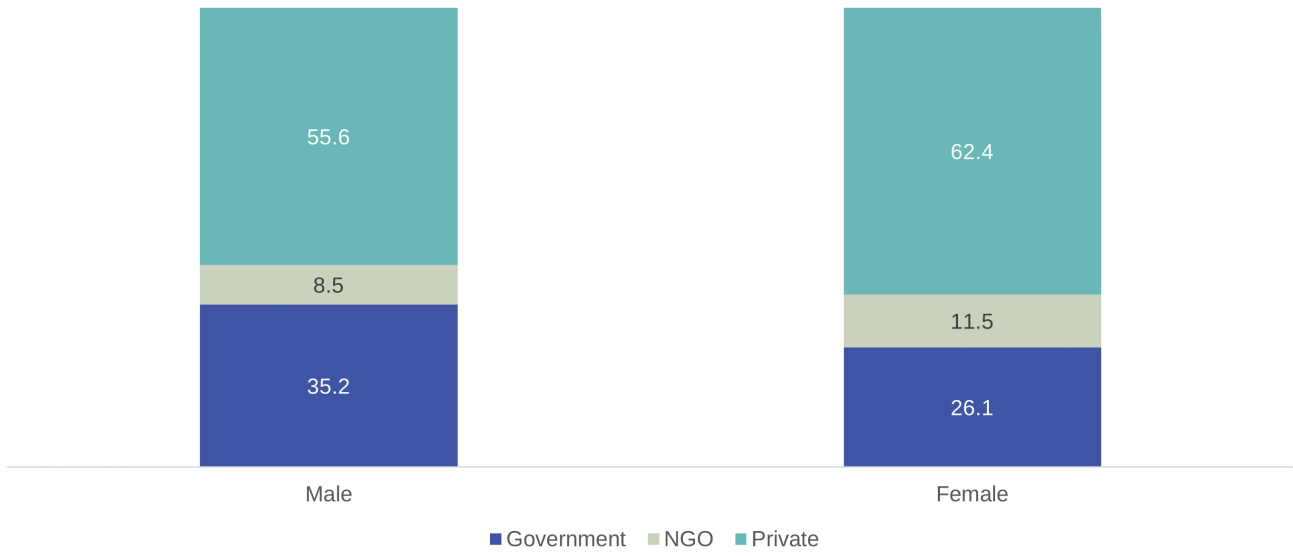
As evidenced by the data above, awareness around various skilling and employment programs is relatively low across youth segments. Actual instances of respondents having undergone formal training as part of a program or scheme were much lower - well below 10 percent in most cases.

Table 11: Respondents having undergone formal training across government, private sector, and non-profit programs (in percent)

	Male			Female		
	18 - 25 yrs.	26 - 35 yrs.	Base	18 - 25 yrs.	26 - 35 yrs.	Base
Currently working youth	4.9	2.9	1,987	5.8	6.0	936
Youth who have worked but are currently not working	9.1	5.6	224	14.0	5.1	565
Youth who have never worked for pay or wages	6.4	2.0	374	14.5	9.1	1,083

The research revealed that over double the proportion of female youth had undertaken training courses than their male counterparts. The research further revealed that the larger share of these trainings was undertaken through private sector and NGO training programs.

Figure 9: Trainings undertaken across various training provider types (in percent)



Base = 101 males and 214 females



07

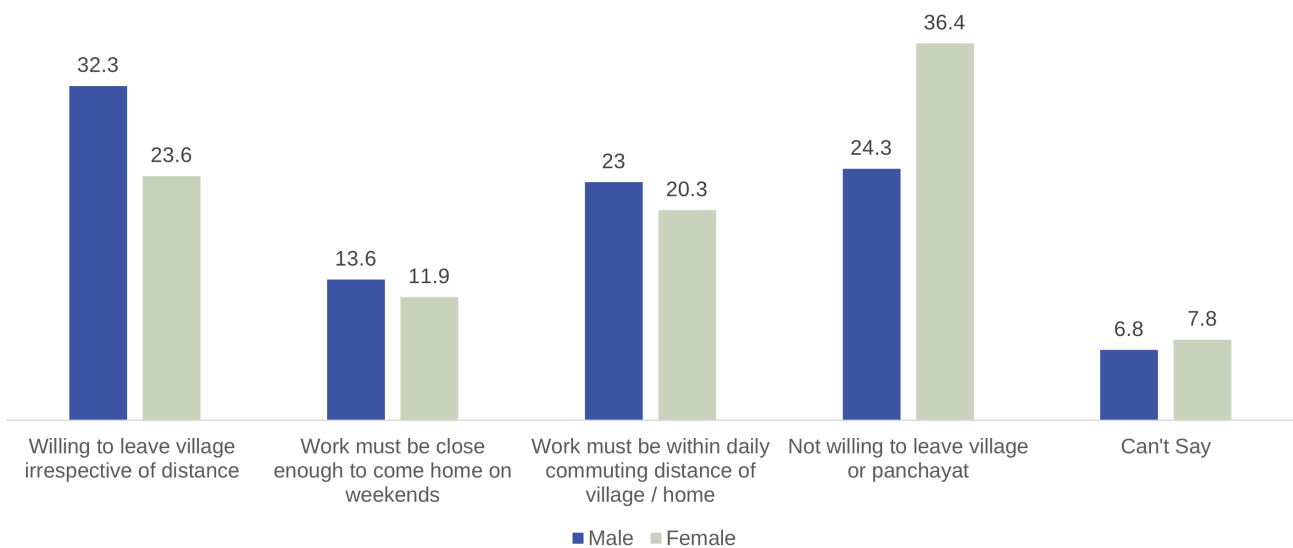
**Migration, Agriculture,
And Entrepreneurship**

Migration, Agriculture, And Entrepreneurship

Youth Views on Migrating for Work

Overall, over 60 percent male respondents and over 70 percent female respondents said they preferred to find work in or close to their village even when income was 20-30 percent lower. Only ~32 percent male and ~24 percent female respondents were willing to leave their village and migrate for employment, irrespective of distance.

Figure 10: Preferred work locations and travel distances across youth gender (in percent)



Base = Males-2585; Females-2584

Income Expectations Across Youth Segmented by Gender, Age, Current Employment Status, and Wish to Migrate

Expectedly, those willing to migrate to urban areas had expectations of a higher income (salary/earnings from business) than those who preferred to stay back in their villages or work within commutable distance from their homes. Male youth had slightly higher income expectations than their female counterparts.

Interestingly, those who were entering the workforce for the first time had the highest income expectations across both rural as well as urban work.

Those currently working but looking for a change had the lowest income expectations, perhaps indicating that their present income from their current occupation was at or below subsistence level.

Table 12: Income expectations across youth segmented by gender, age, current employment status, and wish to migrate (median, in INR per month)

Gender	Male				Female			
	18 - 25 yrs.		26 - 35 yrs.		18 - 25 yrs.		26 - 35 yrs.	
Age Group	18 - 25 yrs.		26 - 35 yrs.		18 - 25 yrs.		26 - 35 yrs.	
Preferred Location of Work / And Employment Status	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Currently working	23000	29000	22000	29000	22000	29000	19000	29000
Used to work for pay or wages but not anymore	18000	24000	16000	27000	13000	19000	13000	29000
Never worked for pay or wages	25000	33000	24000	33000	25000	31000	21000	28000

Base: Males = 2585; Females = 2584

Based on the above, a clear insight is that young people prefer to stay within or close to their villages even with a lower income.

At the same time, agriculture and self-employment / entrepreneurship - key sources of rural labour absorption - are not - in their current state - aspirational employment pathways for rural youth.

Rural Youth and Entrepreneurship/Self-employment

The research explored reasons for young people's preference for a salaried job, and reluctance towards entrepreneurship / self-employment. For male respondents, the top three reasons in order of prevalence include:

1. Lack of skills or the mindset to be an entrepreneur
2. Lack of access to seed capital
3. Lack of understanding about how to start their entrepreneurship / self-employment journey

For women respondents, the top three reasons in order of prevalence include:

1. Lack of skills or the mindset to be an entrepreneur
2. Lack of understanding about how to start their entrepreneurship / self-employment journey
3. Lack of access to seed capital

In addition to the above, a common challenge expressed by youth was the lack of family history in starting and running a business.

Table 13: Reasons for youth hesitation towards entrepreneurship / self-employment (in percent)

	Male (percent)	Female (percent)
Don't have the skills or mindset to be an entrepreneur	22.0	27.1
Don't know how to get started	18.5	22.3
No one in the family has ever run a business, so there is no family knowledge	16.9	16.6

	Male (percent)	Female (percent)
Since there is no family background, support from family is unlikely	11.5	9.8
Business requires considerable starting capital, which they don't have	21.8	18.5
Banks will not loan them money because of lack of collateral	1.8	0.9
Due to rising prices, demand for everything is low these days, and most businesses are suffering	4.9	2.3
Business is risky and they are not in a position to tie up their savings on anything risky	4.4	2.5
Have tried to run a business before but had failed	2.2	0.9
Do not have any idea what business is likely to succeed locally	1.8	1.6
After Covid 19, lots of businesses have closed and they don't want to take the risk	0.4	0.2
Others	0.6	0.1
Base	2,585	2,584

The worries and concerns of young people towards entrepreneurship are not unfounded. The reality is that there are many challenges in developing a flourishing rural enterprise. The biggest one is lack of safe finance, forcing youth towards informal and exploitative credit. Technical know-how, business management skills, and lack of infrastructure including roads, water, market, electricity, public transport connectivity, storage, and communications channels are other factors. An information divide means that rural youth find it hard to keep up with evolving market trends, and government policy around market and industry. Another challenge is the lack of skilled workers since most with any competitive advantage still prefer to migrate to urban areas for work. Lastly, prevalent social and cultural practices and biases work against all youth, but especially women, who need a lot of support to rediscover their agency and foster an entrepreneurial spirit.

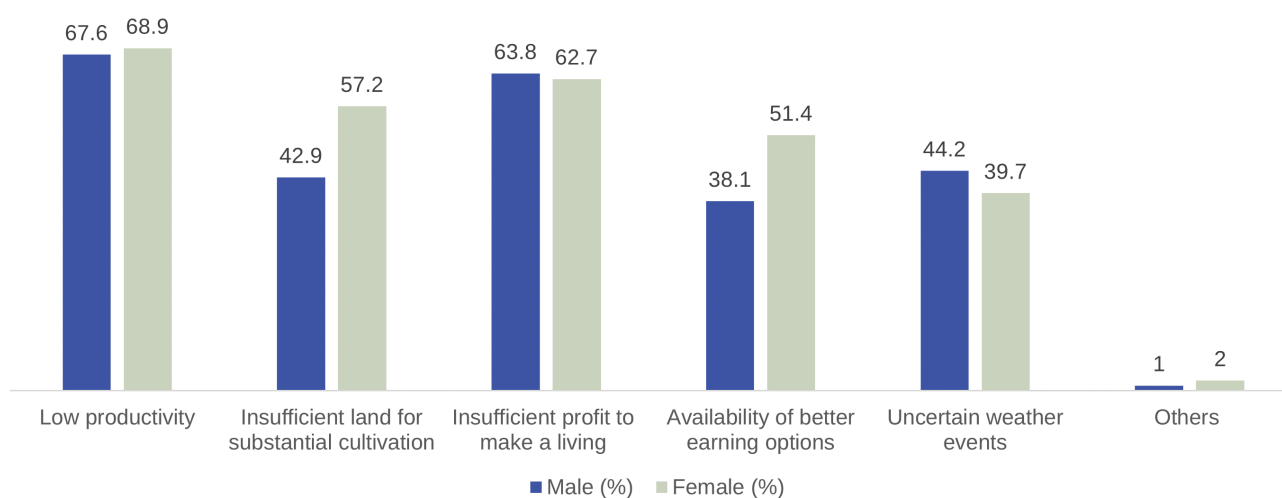
On the other hand, despite these challenges and barriers, the lack of salaried work in the rural areas means that youth are forced into migration or self-employment out of necessity but without the requisite support. Hence, there is a critical need for tailored, and end-end entrepreneurship support for rural youth - from mindset shifts of youth, family and community, to building technical and business management skills, to access to mentorship, safe finance, and market linkages from local to global and niche to mainstream, and finally support to create resilience through the development of income, savings, and assets.

Rural Youth and Agriculture

The research data reveals that out of the 3777 respondents who were currently working, 1171 were farmers who were dissatisfied with farming. Further, among those who were presently not part of the paid workforce, only 18 said they wanted to enter farming.

Over 2 out of 3 respondents who were currently engaged in farming but wanted to opt out attributed low productivity and insufficient profits to make ends meet as key determining factors. Shrinking holding size per farmer, and uncertain weather events causing crop loss were other key factors.

Figure 11: Key challenges faced by youth currently working as farmers



Base: Male = 794; Female = 378

The above data tallies with secondary information available on why most youth do not find agriculture aspirational. Agriculture is physically intensive work with diminishing returns. Additionally, there are challenges in accessing resources such as additional land, capital, and extension services. Factors such as limited access to market, high cost of inputs, and low returns on investment are other key deterrents. Most rural youth come from legacies of smallholder farmers with lifelong debt. Much research, including that done by DIU reveals that a minuscule proportion of parents who are farmers want their next generation to become farmers, and prefer that they seek opportunities in other sectors.

However, the fact remains that the main asset many households own is their land. And farming continues to be a huge source of labour absorption across rural communities. Hence, there is a critical need to address the above challenges in order to make farming aspirational for young people.

The research reveals similar insights. Young people were able to clearly articulate the support they needed to remain in the sector. Key areas of support expressed included access to extension services to help enhance productivity, support to undertake crop diversification, overall skilling support, and access to agriculture inputs, including hiring of equipment through custom hiring centres (CHCs).

Table 14: Nature of support needed to continue in farming, as expressed by youth

	Male (percent)	Female (percent)
Skilling support	46.0	59.1
Technical support for enhancing production	70.0	80.9
Technical support for crop diversification	50.9	62.3
Agri input support	50.7	37.7
Access to machine/tools	22.3	10.9

	Male (percent)	Female (percent)
Access to govt entitlements (Kisan Credit Card, Kisan Samman Nidhi, NRM asset from MGNREGA, etc.)	20.7	14.0
Marketing support	12.6	12.1
Other kind of support	4.1	3.1
Base	794	378

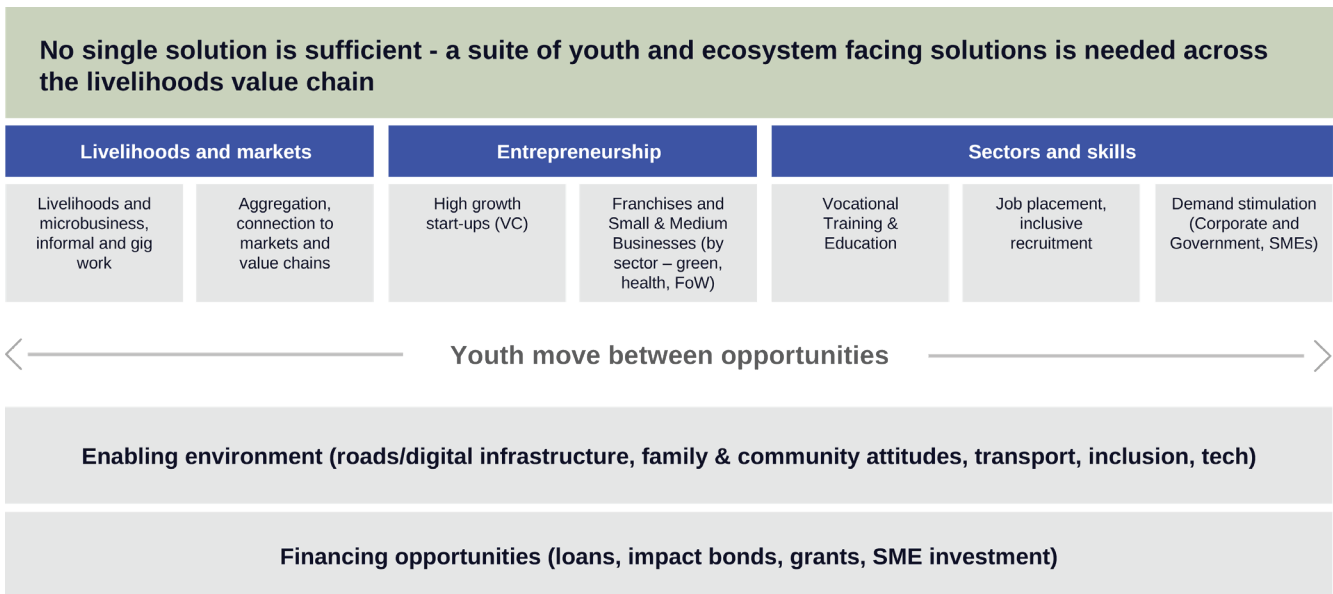


08

**Recommendations and
Way Forward**

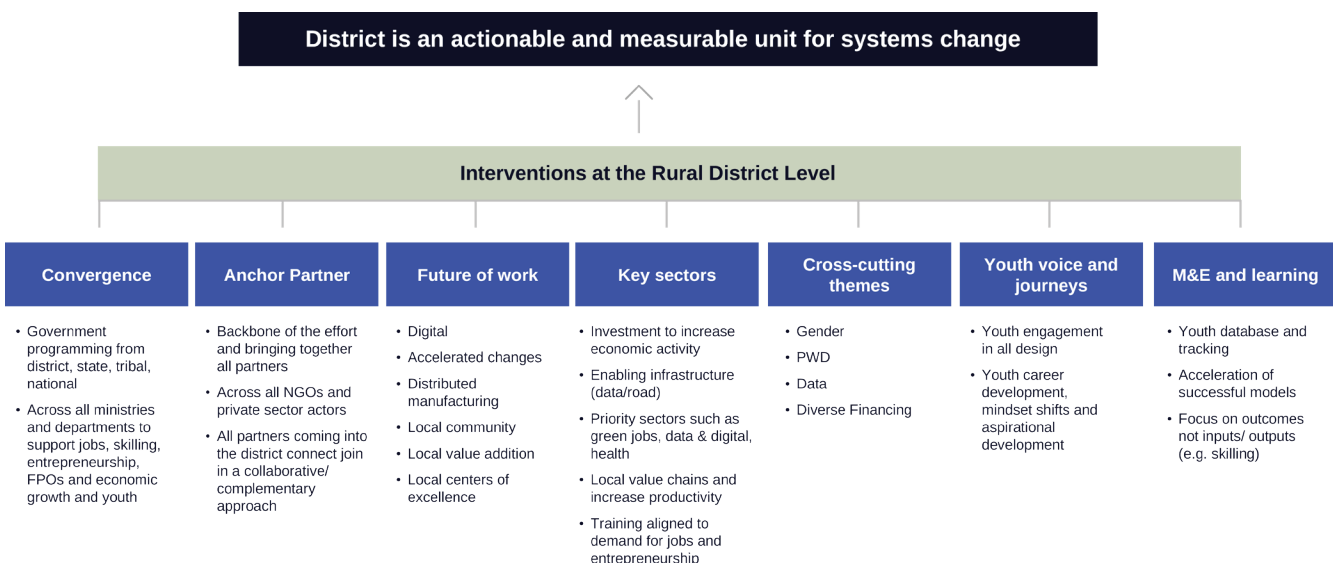
Recommendations and Way Forward

As described above, rural India is home to two-thirds of India's ~378 million youth, but currently contributes only ~40 percent towards the country's GDP. While agriculture and allied activities employ ~ 80 percent of these youth, most prefer the stability of salaried employment. However, a majority also want to stay in or close to their village. Hence, the idea is to bring the economy to the people⁷, along with creating opportunities for aspirational migration. Another clear reinforcement is that no single solution is sufficient to address the size of the challenge / opportunity. A suite of solutions is needed to effectively absorb and retain rural youth in fair and sustainable work.



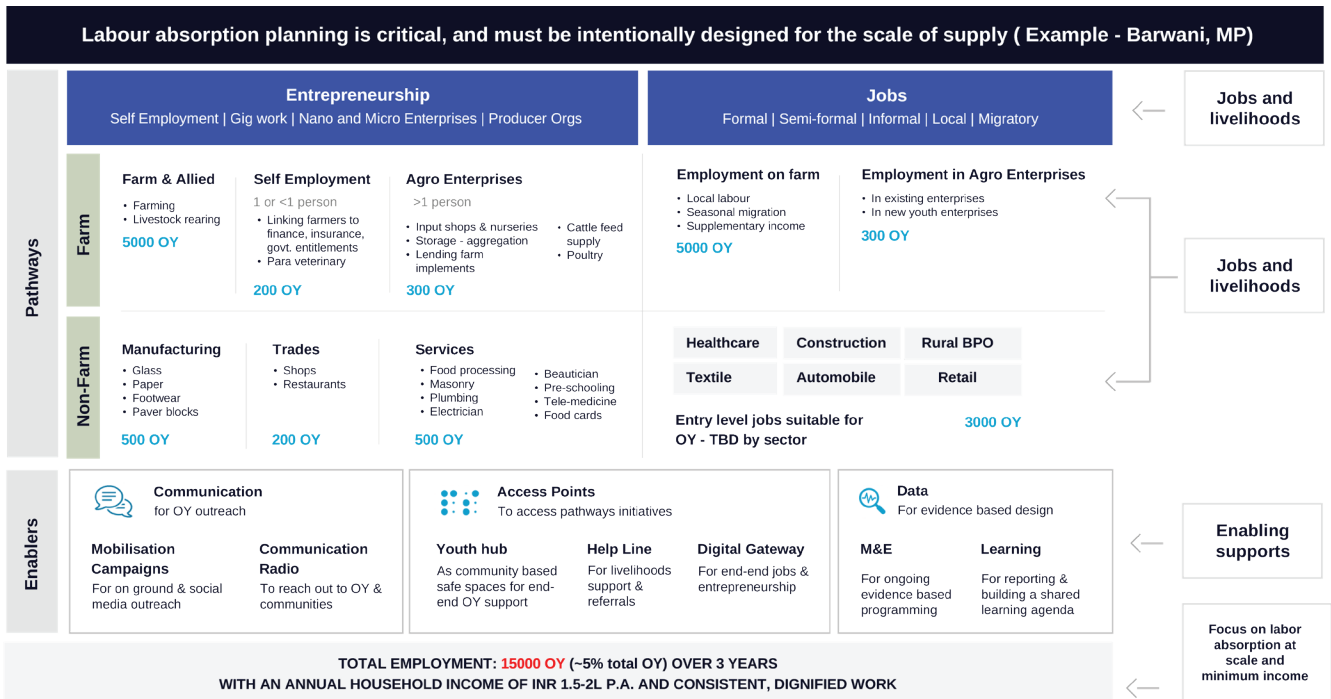
Also as seen above, youth contexts, challenges and aspirations are multi-faceted and complex, and it is not sufficient to solve for any single aspect. The Global Opportunity Youth Network's place based approach takes into account, and embraces this complexity and solves for 'place'. In the rural India context, place translates to 'district' and GOYN India works on the principle of 'district as a unit of change'.

At a district, a GOYN Anchor Partner convenes multi-stakeholder collaboratives to align work across government, administration, private sector, community based organisations, skilling and academia, financing organisations, markets, employers, etc.



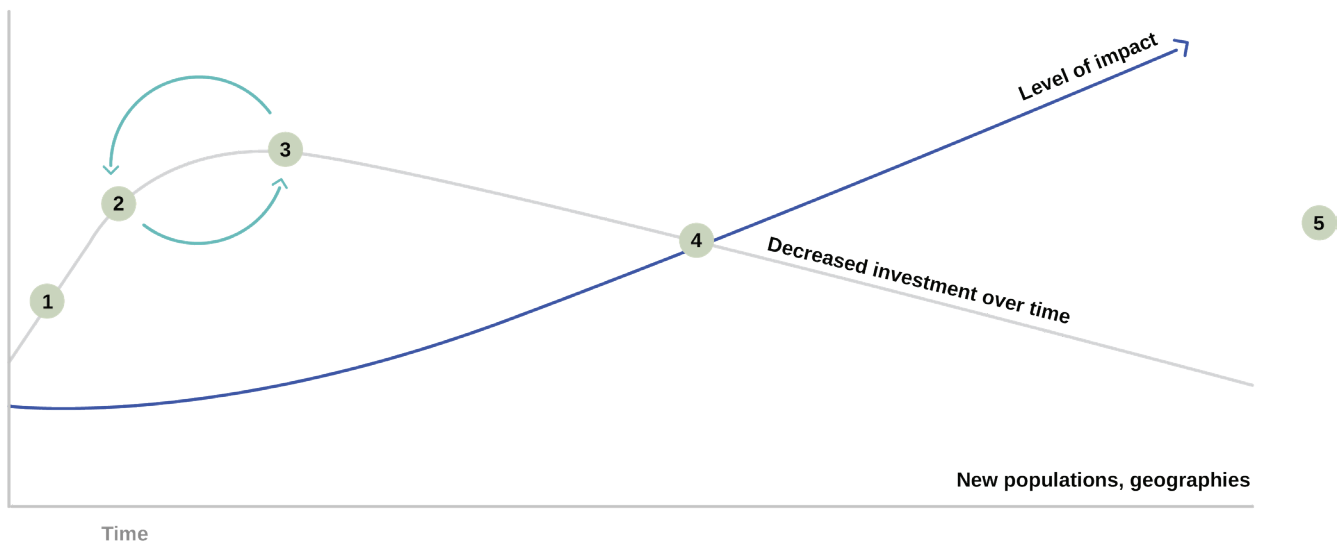
⁷ Taking the Economy to the People - A Place Based Approach to Connect Young India to Work - Annu Mehta, Alice Gugelev

The idea is to plan for labour absorption at a district level, up to a saturation point at which investment starts decreasing and impact is self-propelling.



Source: GOYN & TRI

Multiple intervention points until a tipping point is reached and services and supports reach all youth in a district



1

Ecosystem mapping and set up local structure

2

Implement key scalable pathways

3

Improve programs and adjust/iterate

4

Reach tipping point, local sustainability

5

Impact grows and external investment decreases

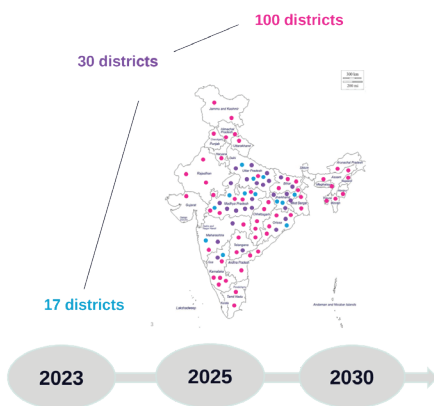
This approach has been tested in two rural districts - Ramgarh, Jharkhand and Barwani, Madhya Pradesh with early impact already benefiting 50,000+ youth across these districts.

As the next step, the approach has been taken to fifteen new districts, while we continue to deepen work in the first two districts. The vision is to take this approach to a hundred rural districts by 2030.

GOYN's place-based approach has been prototyped and is scaling across rural India, to connect rural youth to economic opportunity at scale

After successful prototyping in 2 districts, the GOYN approach is gaining momentum with key stakeholders and set to be replicated in 15 new districts in partnership with the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India

Scaling Across Aspirational and Other Districts Pan India



GOYN Bharat Communities

State	Districts	Anchor Partner
Jharkhand	Ramgarh*, Ranchi, Palamu, Simdega	Transform Rural India Foundation
Madhya Pradesh	Barwani*, Jabua, Dindori, Dewas, Mandla	
Uttar Pradesh	Bahraich, Basti, Lakimpur Kheri, Amroha, Banda	
Chhattisgarh	Rajnandgaon	
Karnataka	Raichur, Gulbarga	Head Held High Foundation

*prototype districts



09

Conclusion

This research was designed to highlight challenges and aspirations of rural youth but also critically highlight youth voice on the services and support youth need to enter and stay in the workforce. While this report provides a macro view of the state of rural youth in India, a deep, district level mapping is critical in order to effectively address local challenges and harness local opportunities. These deep, district level reports have already been developed for seventeen districts across Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Karnataka (districts highlighted in the section above) as part of the work of the Global Opportunity Youth Network's (GOYN's) place-based approach and are critical drivers of all program design and implementation at these districts.

Skilling, upskilling, and re-skilling young people to remain employable as the nature of work evolves rapidly is of the essence. Developing climate resilience across rural work is another key area of focus. As seen above, in order to move the needle on creating fair and sustainable work at the district, it is not sufficient to develop only youth facing solutions. It is also essential to build and strengthen practices and policies across the youth employment ecosystem.

This report examines the state of rural youth. The second and third parts of this series to be released over the period of the next twelve months will examine the state of the youth employment ecosystem, and practices and policies across stakeholder groups.

From the Authors

This report is a collaborative effort between the Global Development Incubator (GDI), Global Opportunity Youth Network (GOYN), Development Intelligence Unit (DIU), and Transform Rural India Foundation (TRI).

The principal author of this report is Ms. Annu Mehta, who is part of the Global Development Incubator and leads the work of GOYN in India. Co-created by the Aspen Forum for Community Solutions and GDI, GOYN is a place-based, collaborative approach to connect young people to dignified work across India, and several countries across Africa and Latin America. In addition to leading GOYN's work in India, Annu also helps build capacity of the global network in areas such as collaborative building for localised development, entrepreneurship, designing for scale.

Among its extensive work across aspirational districts in India, TRI is anchoring GOYN's work in rural India. The vision of TRI is a rural India where everyone has an equal opportunity to thrive. By putting communities first and deploying innovations in public and private systems, they seek to build flourishing localities. TRI is also the only NGO to be formally part of all leading rural/poverty national programmes and Missions in India.

DIU, which is a joint venture between TRI and Sambodhi Research and Communications, designed and executed the survey which forms the backbone of this report. DIU supports stakeholders to navigate the increasingly opaque, complex, and uncertain world of data to analyse social and economic developments, forecast trends, and better understand development programs and practices. The DIU platform is a clearinghouse of rural information presented in a user-friendly format, addressing the needs of diverse stakeholders in public, private and civil society. It brings rural India into focus and furthers the field of rural analytics for understanding, positioning, and informing stakeholders and decision makers and help rural India gain a voice.

TRI and GOYN sponsored this survey and report, and provided contextual inputs into the research design.



State of Rural Youth Employment

2024

