

India@100  
National Conference  
Youth Employability and Entrepreneurship  
New Delhi, 7th February, 2023

## BACKGROUND

According to projections, India will overtake China as the world's most populous country by April, 2023. However, a more significant milestone is that India will have the largest population of working age (15-64) than any other country in the world. With an average age of 29, the demographic bulge is forecasted to continue till 2050, with the largest growth in the coming decade. This has created a demographic dividend which provides an unprecedented opportunity for economic development. India with 378 million youth between the age of 15-29 years has the largest youth population in the world. Youth in India are particularly vulnerable to marginalization in the labour market because of various reasons – lack of skills and work experience, access career guidance and information asymmetry. COVID-19 pandemic hit the youth segment much more severely and the youth employment situation hasn't improved much since 2020. Unemployment among 20-24 years olds is at a staggering 43.36%—the nation's highest ever in 45 years. Accounting for more than 2/3rd of the youth population, India's rural youth have a unique opportunity to influence India's economy and the society as the country surges to become a USD 5 trillion economy by 2025. The Government of India's draft National Youth Policy (NYP) 2022 has set ten-year vision for youth development to 'unlock the potential of youth to advance India' and emphasizes the priority areas of employment & entrepreneurship for youth. NYP in sync with National Education Policy, 2020 seeks to impart career opportunities and life skills to all young people, ensuring youth have access to sustainable livelihood opportunities that encourages them to stay within and revive the rural economy, generate employment via micro-region-specific strategies, foster entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship, and support the informal and emerging gig economy.

The Conference brought together over 50 people from various organisations to collaborate on driving youth entrepreneurship and employability in rural India. The objective was to find ways to create economic opportunities for rural youth at scale, and the group discussed challenges, opportunities, and strategies for achieving this goal. The conference was successful, and the participants shared diverse perspectives and critical thinking throughout the day. The perspectives and dialogue throughout the day were diverse, and rich with enthusiasm, curiosity and critical thinking. The group committed to working together in complementary ways and the perspectives and dialogue throughout the day were diverse and enthusiastic.

## KEYNOTE CONVERSATION

India's youth population is one of the largest in the world, and meeting over 50% of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in India is crucial for achieving global targets. The population in India is huge, with an estimated 1.366 billion people in 2021, making it the world's second-most populous country. To put that into perspective, the entire population of the United States is around 331 million people. India is therefore a critical player in achieving global development goals.

The session starts with the inaugural address of Mr. Shombi Sharp, UN Resident Coordinator in India, who talks about the triple planetary crisis and the need to link India's one million new labor force with required skill sets and jobs. He emphasises on the sustainable development goals, green economy and digital transformation, and appreciates India's government efforts in this regard.



The need to provide young people with the necessary skills for the economy is essential to support growth. Skilling, job creation, and gender equality are some of the key aspects of this effort. For instance, the government has launched several initiatives such as the Skill India program and the Start-up India scheme, aimed at enhancing the skills of young people and promoting entrepreneurship. These initiatives aim to equip young people with the necessary skills to succeed in the job market. Despite being one of the fastest-growing economies in the world, India's job creation has not kept pace with its economic growth. According to the International Labour Organization, India's unemployment rate increased to 7.8% in 2020, with millions of young people still struggling to find employment. The government has to address this issue by creating more jobs to meet the growing demand for employment.

Mr. Praveen S Pardeshi, Member, Capacity Building Commission, Government of India, adds his perspective on the cost of formality of structure and support system to enable a positive environment for employability in India. He talks about the importance of skilling, the problem of jobless growth, and the need to formalize gender equality and increase the skills and ability to operate. India's labor force is a significant competitive advantage for the country. However, the cost of formality is 20 times higher than in other countries, which affects wage employment. In India, the informal sector accounts for 90% of the workforce, which means that most workers are not covered by labor laws or social security. India needs to take steps to formalize its labor market to ensure that workers have access to labor protections and social security benefits.

To support women's economic participation, social norms and discriminatory practices against women in the labor force must be addressed. Women's participation in the workforce in India is relatively low, at around 20%. Policies and laws such as the age of marriage, monogamy laws, and spacing between children can significantly impact women's participation in the workforce. India needs to address these issues to ensure that women can participate fully in the country's economic growth. Overall, India's large population presents both opportunities and challenges. The world is watching to see how India will harness its demographic dividend to support economic growth for those usually excluded. India needs to create jobs, address gender disparities, and formalize its labor market to fully harness its potential for growth. The discussion concluded with both speakers providing solutions to the challenge of unemployment, including increasing the participation of women in economic activities and reinforcing micro, small, and medium enterprises.



### [Session I: Future of Work | India @ 100 | Opportunities for Youth](#)

In the "Future of Work" session, participants discussed the need to prepare young people for rapidly changing industries, while balancing this with current opportunities and gaps. Ms. Kanika Verma from Work4Progress and SAMUDYAM presented on creating a groundswell of demand-supply match, expanding sub-scale successes/pilots to respond to the rapidly growing cohort of working-age rural youth and she illustrated on how to achieve this, as it is important to understand the aspirations of young people and support them in identifying sectors that cannot be replaced by technology. Soft skills such as problem-solving, and communication are also essential for adaptation to the type of employment young people want and need. She emphasized the importance of inclusivity, particularly for women and those in the informal sector, and the need for collaboration between young people, community partners, and national policy. To facilitate the future of work, youth champions must amplify youth voices and play a strategic role in building an ecosystem that ensures young people can connect and thrive, creating sustainable and resilient solutions. The diversification of rural economies is creating new demand for products and services, as seen in examples like Custom Printing in small town of Niwari and e-rickshaws driven by women in Mirzapur for safe mobility. The emergence of first-generation entrepreneurs and intergenerational changes are triggering behavioural shifts, including the adoption of digital tools. However, the pace of change has accelerated, and the future of work is difficult to predict, particularly in the informal economy that makes up 90% of the Indian workforce. The complexity of the situation, combined with the existing unemployment spectrum, makes it challenging for young people to find their place in the future of work. To address this, innovation in processes is necessary to stimulate change at the district level, while ensuring inclusiveness in access to solutions and promoting information exchange among the actors in the ecosystem. It is crucial to listen to the needs of all stakeholders in the process.



Prof. M S Sriram from IIM Bangalore, emphasized that while enough technology is already available, the financial infrastructure needs to change, looking at the future of entrepreneurship. He believes that the primary goal should be to identify and work on sectors that cannot be replaced by technology and put efforts there. Sriram also pointed out that credit and transaction capture is now easier, but the challenge is to capture this for informal players. In designing solutions, Sriram believes that the overall well-being of people should be considered, and P2P lending is not a great way ahead since it disseminates the risk to the retail investor disproportionately. Kanika Verma spoke about the need to talk more about India's inclusive growth story, and that the biggest contribution an entrepreneur can make is the idea.

Parveen Pardeshi, Member, Capacity Building Commission, Government of India noted the importance of a support system at the ground level to incubate ideas and make them more feasible. Mr. Pardeshi also stated that the biggest hurdle for rural entrepreneurs is the lack of assets, and the need to leverage comparative advantages of geographic areas to create local job opportunities.

Jamie McAullife, Global Opportunity Youth Network, pointed out that unemployment and poverty are complex issues that cannot be solved by one solution, and that many young people lack people around them to motivate them and tell them that "you can do this." Mr. McAullife suggested that we should focus on creating labor-intensive jobs in sectors that can create value today, and work backward towards creating support mechanisms for those ideas.

The panel discussed different aspects of entrepreneurship and job creation in India, particularly for young people and rural entrepreneurs. The first set of speakers emphasized the importance of supporting young people with their aspirations and ideas, even a small support can go a long way. They also noted the main challenges for rural entrepreneurs, such as the limited access to technology, and the need to develop foundational, leadership skills, and soft skills. The speakers stressed that youth want exposure to successful entrepreneurs, and support systems around them are needed to address challenges.



## Session II: State of Employability and Entrepreneurship | Expanding Economic Opportunities

The second session of the conference focused on how to expand economic opportunities for India's youth by creating an enabling environment so they feel empowered. Annu Mehta from Global Opportunity Youth Network, presented on the Design for Universalisation of Economic Opportunity for rural youth. The discussion stressed on mapping hyperlocal opportunities and providing single window access for end-to-end support, with a focus on best-practice sharing and convergence to address the gaps in the program lifecycle. To drive local economies, it is needed to increase youth access to opportunities at a district level, with a focus on absorbing young people in local jobs. The goal is to make the district self-sufficient by providing high-touch support initially and eventually empowering the district to take off on its own. This can be achieved by conducting hyperlocal opportunity mapping to understand what opportunities exist and what we can support youth in accessing.

Skilling, reskilling, and upskilling are critical, and we can bucket these into four categories based on local consumption, industrial needs, global and new skills, and skills for the international market. Mentorship is also important for youth to have a support system to help navigate the economic opportunities available to them. Women face specific challenges when trying to enter the workforce, including social stereotypes that drive a mismatch between the skills they acquire and the jobs available. Mobility and job retention policies are also critical for women, who often drop out of the workforce after marriage or having children. Women's needs in the workforce can be summarized into mindset, resources, and agency.



Sunita, a youth from Ramgarh, highlights the importance of career counselling and guidance for youth, recognizing that young people often lack information and understanding about different career paths and how to navigate them. However, she also notes that parents and guardians may also lack knowledge in this area, which can further compound the issue. In order to address this, Sunita suggested that guidance should not only be provided to youth but also to parents and guardians, helping to create a more informed and supportive environment for young people as they make important decisions about their futures.

Mr. Atul Tiwari, Secretary, Ministry of Skills Development and Enterprises; discusses the national budget for 2022-23, which is focused on livelihood and youth. He suggested that skilling is a key parameter that can help support youth in all sectors, emphasizing the importance of skilling, reskilling, and upskilling. Mr. Tiwari also emphasised on the importance of district skilling committees and target govt institutions with permanent infrastructures which can be utilised for decentralising trainings in remote areas. Additionally, he spoke about the importance of scaling the impact of Skill India digital platform, which could help to create new opportunities for youth in various sectors.



Anisha Sharma, Ashoka University, discussed about the social stereotypes and their impact on employment opportunities for women. She highlighted that some skilling programs are narrowly defined in sectors such as beauty and tailoring, and calls for a transition to sectors with more career growth such as healthcare and hospitality. Ms. Sharma also mentioned that the importance of job placement in local areas, and supporting individuals to migrate to high-growth industries in cities. Finally, she stressed upon the need for stronger policies to support the retention of jobs for women, including flexible hours, childcare, and safety measures.

Alkesh Wadhvani, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, pointed out that the engine of growth is shifting from rural to urban areas, and emphasized the importance of migration for creating employment opportunities. He suggested that farm and non-farm jobs are no longer able to provide the same level of employment, and highlighted the benefits of migration, particularly from rural to urban areas and from informal to formal employment. By recognizing these shifts, Mr. Wadhvani also suggested that we can begin to develop more effective strategies for supporting economic growth and job creation.

The discussion emphasized the need to segment young people based on their diverse experiences, aspirations, and skills, and contextualize the support provided to them accordingly. The speakers emphasized the importance of creating an enabling environment that empowers young people and expands economic opportunities for them. The conference also touched upon the need to redefine the way outcomes for economic opportunities are measured, focusing on income and savings rather than just the number of trained individuals. In measuring outcomes, the discussion focussed on how many youths have income and savings, rather than how many have been trained. By identifying economic opportunities and providing targeted support to different sub-segments of young people, we can create an enabling environment that empowers them to build savings, income, and assets that will drive local economies and contribute to India's inclusive growth story.

### Session III: Youth Aspirations and Voices | Entrepreneurship and Youth

Dhuwarakha Sriram, Chief of YuWaah at UNICEF, emphasized the need to promote entrepreneurship equally with job creation to strengthen the rural economy. She acknowledged that entrepreneurship is a journey and requires support in various areas such as skilling, mentorship, and career guidance. To address these challenges, she suggests that partnerships can collectively work together to support the entrepreneurial journey.



During the session, 3 parallel round table discussions were held on Models for Rural, Urban & Green Entrepreneurship. The sub-group discussion was anchored by Madan Padaki, Global Alliance for Mass Entrepreneurship and Prashant Sinha, Executive Director, PwC. Participants emphasized that entrepreneurship should be given equal importance to traditional job opportunities for strengthening the economy in both rural and urban areas.



They recognized that support systems and mentorship are essential for the journey of



entrepreneurship and suggested creating such an



ecosystem through teacher training and school curriculums for early agency for youth. The participants also stressed the importance of making funding more accessible, creating psychosocial spaces for youth, and introducing tech-savvy farming ideas. Additionally, they suggested establishing local incubation and accelerator organizations to provide support for entrepreneurship at the grassroots level. By tailoring these ideas to the specific needs of rural and urban environments, participants aimed to identify and address existing gaps in the entrepreneurship landscape, and emphasized the need for collective partnerships to be part of this journey.



#### [Session IV: Whole of Economy and Place-based Approach | Convergent Implementation Framework](#)

The final session of the conference focused on place-based approaches to supporting youth employability and entrepreneurship, with a particular emphasis on rural areas. It was presented by Aliva Das, Sr Manager, Transforming Rural India Foundation. It was agreed that the three pillars of community, market, and government must work together to address the challenges of rural entrepreneurship, and that national or state policies alone are not enough. To ensure success, it is essential to use the district level as the unit of change, foster collaboration, and engage with state governments to understand their district strategies. This requires detailed ecosystem mapping to identify potential sectors, as well as ensuring that young people are aware of schemes and subsidies offered by the government, and connecting with them to track their journeys and outcomes over time. Finally, it was emphasized that we must validate young entrepreneurs and make resources available at a more hyperlocal/rural level to ensure that India's economic growth is more evenly distributed between urban and rural areas.





The speakers at the conference shared their perspectives on the challenges and solutions related to rural entrepreneurship. Mr. Bhutia, Joint Secretary, NRLM highlighted the importance of skilling programs as a means to provide exposure, and not just for placements. He noted that both DDUJKY and RSETI programs are being upgraded to their 2.0 version to make them more user-friendly.

Swati, a young entrepreneur expressed the difficulty of finding the right information, while Alice Gugelev, Global Development Incubator focused on the need for stakeholder convergence at the district level, a place-based approach, and data-driven decision making. She encouraged shifting the dialogue to focus on income, retention, and assets, and emphasized the importance of seeing the journeys of young people holistically, and not as a homogeneous group.

Siva Subramanian Ramann, MD, SIDBI underscored the importance of hunger for growth, education, and the availability of resources. He noted that multiple players in the ecosystem are needed to support enterprises.

Ms. Lakshmi Venkatesan from Bharatiya Yuva Shakti Trust, pointed out that unemployment is the biggest problem facing the country, and that public-private partnerships are the way forward. She highlighted that the average size of MUDRA loan is only Rs 27,000, which is not enough for entrepreneurship or job creation beyond subsistence level work.

The conference concluded with a moment of introspection where all participants were asked to reflect



on their key takeaways from the event, and to commit to concrete actions to advance youth entrepreneurship and employability. There was a strong call to increase collaboration among attendees to support one another in reaching their goals. Through a full day of learning, collaborating, and reflecting, the key message of the event became clear: solutions to youth entrepreneurship and employability can only be achieved

through partnership and co-creation with young people. As advocates for the younger generation, it is not enough to just prepare them for the world, but we also need to prepare the world for them. The young and dynamic individuals of India are the future of the nation, and it is our collective responsibility to create a supportive ecosystem that fosters their growth and success

### PLENARY SESSION: WAY FORWARD AND CALL TO ACTION

The overall message from conference was the need for creating a mass-scale and place-based economic opportunities for youth in the country, especially rural youth. This will require an integrated and convergent action among several government programs around employability and entrepreneurship and bringing in best practices from global solutions. Further it also emerged from the workshop that a mass-scale economic opportunity program for rural youth can be best attended using district as a unit of change. Integrated efforts at the district level will result in place-based saturation and targeted action to address gaps in labour supply, creation of local demand, and improve quality and quantity of employment.

Elements of this approach has been tested in partnership with Global Opportunity Youth Network (GOYN), Work4Progress (SAMUDYAM) and YuWaah within the scope of existing government programmes of Rural Development and other programmes of Government of India. The event concluded with commitment for replicating the whole of government, place-based, collaborative model in 15 districts across the states of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh. The convergent engagement around youth employability and entrepreneurship in these 15 districts will serve as demonstration sites for learning and adoption in the 110+ Aspirational Districts across the country.

## ANNEX: CONFERENCE AGENDA

India@100  
National Conference  
Youth Employability and Entrepreneurship  
Immersive Participative Result Oriented deliberations  
**National Agenda**

**Catalysing groundswell of Employability, Entrepreneurship and Jobs for the Rural Youth**

Time	Session
09:30 AM	TEA & REGISTRATIONS
10:00 AM	<b>Welcome:</b> National Conference Structure and Outcomes <i>India @100: demographic opportunity and whole of country approach</i>
10:05 AM	<b>Keynote Conversation: Mr. Praveen S Pardeshi, Member, Capacity Building Commission, Gol and Mr. Shombi Sharp, UN Resident Coordinator in India</b> <i>Policy and Programme Framework of Emerging India – Society and Economy. Opportunities for Rural Youth to have dignified and sufficient work. Need for de-silofication in our approaches and imperative for integrated solutions</i>
10:30 AM	<b>Future of Work   India @ 100</b> <b>Opportunities for Youth</b> <b>Introduction to the Workshop Session</b>
10:40 AM	<b>Lead Presentation:</b> Kanika Verma, Work4Progress and SAMUDYAM <b>Discussants:</b> Praveen S Pardeshi, Member, Capacity Building Commission, Gol, Jamie McAuliffe (GOYN/Aspen Institute), M S Sriram (IIM Bangalore)
11:10 AM	<b>Participant Deliberations: <i>Pathways for Youth Employment Challenge</i></b> <i>Creating a groundswell of demand-supply match, expanding sub-scale successes/pilots to respond to the rapidly growing cohort of working-age rural youth</i>
11:45 AM	Tea/Coffee Break
12:00 PM	<b>State of Employability and Entrepreneurship</b> <b>Expanding Economic Opportunities</b> <b>Lead Presentation:</b> Annu Mehta, Global Opportunity Youth Network
12:10 PM	



12:30 PM	<p><b>Discussants:</b> Atul Tiwari (Secretary, Ministry of Skills Development and Enterprises); Alkesh Wadhvani (Bill &amp; Melinda Gates Foundation), Anisha Sharma (Ashoka University)</p> <p><b>Participant Deliberations: <i>Design for Universalisation of Economic Opportunity for rural youth</i></b>  <i>Framework for creation, access of economic opportunity for workforce in informal and formal sectors</i></p>
13:00 PM 13:15 PM	<p><b>Youth Aspirations and Voices</b>  <b>Entrepreneurship and youth</b></p> <p><b>Lead Presentation:</b> Dhuwarakha Sriram, Chief, YuWaah at UNICEF</p> <p><b>Sub-Group Discussions:</b>  3 parallel round table discussions on Models for Rural, Urban &amp; Green Entrepreneurship</p>
14:00 PM	Lunch
14:45 PM	<p><b>Action Levers: Summary Deliberations</b>  Prashant Sinha, Executive Director, PwC  Madan Padaki, GAME</p>
15:00 PM 15:15 PM 15:45 PM	<p><b>Whole of Economy and Place-based Approach</b>  <b>Convergent Implementation Framework</b></p> <p><b>Lead Presentation:</b> Aliva Das, Transform Rural India Foundation</p> <p><b>Discussants:</b> Siva Subramanian Ramann (SIDBI), K Z Bhutia (MoRD), Alice Gugelev (Global Development Incubator), Lakshmi Venkatesan (BYST)</p> <p><b>Plenary Discussions</b>  <i>Models for place based systemic engagement for rural youth</i>  <i>Convergent Implementation Framework - Reaching Saturation</i></p>
16:15 PM	<p><b>Conference Synthesis:</b>  Neeraj Ahuja (Transform Rural India Foundation)</p> <p><b>Call for Action and Next Steps</b>  Neeraj Ahuja &amp; Anirban Ghose (Transform Rural India Foundation)</p>
17:00 PM	Tea/Coffee and Refreshments