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Education and transition to work among youth in Andhra Pradesh

The extent to which India will be able to successfully harness its demographic dividend depends significantly on the situation of its youth, notably on the levels of education and market-oriented skills they attain. In many states, youth have indeed made progress on these fronts. Youths in Andhra Pradesh, for example, have made progress in terms of educational attainments. Most have been to school and attained a median of 8–10 years of schooling. Yet it is not clear that youth—and particularly young women—in Andhra Pradesh are prepared for the challenges they will face in a globalised world. For example, to what extent are gender gaps in educational attainment narrowing, and are opportunities available to youth that enable them to complete secondary education, increasingly a pre-requisite to participation in the labour market in the context of globalisation? Likewise, are opportunities available that enable youth to overcome skill mismatches through vocational skills training? Are youths in Andhra Pradesh succeeding in finding productive employment and becoming integrated into the labour market? Are they transitioning into work roles at appropriate ages and with adequate skills? And are opportunities available for young women to make the most of their productive potential?

Looking at the current educational and employment situation of youth in Andhra Pradesh, this policy brief argues that significant investments in terms of appropriate policies and programmes are required to enable the state to achieve the Millennium Development Goals of universal primary education and elimination of gender disparity in primary and secondary education, harness its demographic dividend and enable its youth to participate in and benefit from global development.

The study
Data are drawn from the Youth in India: Situation and Needs study, a sub-nationally representative study undertaken for the first time in India of key transitions experienced by young people in six states of India, including Andhra Pradesh. The study included a representative survey of youth in both rural and urban settings. Respondents included unmarried women and men and married women aged 15–24 and, in view of the paucity of married men in these ages, married men aged 15–29.

In Andhra Pradesh, the survey was conducted in 2007–08. A total of 8,330 married and unmarried young men and women were interviewed in the survey. These included 1,405 married young men, 2,077 unmarried young men, 2,330 married young women and 2,518 unmarried young women. This brief is based on data obtained from 2,479 young men and 4,848 young women aged 15–24.

School enrolment was far from universal for young women
Findings from the Youth Study indicate that while over 90% of young men had been to school, schooling was far from universal among young women in Andhra Pradesh; indeed, one in five young women (21%) had never been to school. Married young women and those in rural areas were, moreover, far more disadvantaged than the unmarried and those in urban areas. One-third of married young women (31%) had never been to school, compared to just 7% of unmarried young women. Likewise, one-quarter of young women in rural areas compared to one-tenth of those from urban settings had never been to school. There are, however, some encouraging signs of change—while 27% of those aged 20–24 had never been to school, this percentage fell to 15% among the younger cohort aged 15–19. While these are impressive trends, the fact is that even among the younger cohort (aged 15–19), too many young women had never been to school.

Wide gender differences remain in the achievement of educational milestones
Although such milestones as Classes 4, 7 and 10 were not universally achieved by either young men or young women, the female disadvantage in educational attainment was pronounced. Three in four young women (75%) had completed Class 4 and just three in five (58%) had completed Class 7. In contrast, 88% and 74% of young men had completed Classes 4 and 7, respectively. Rural youth, particularly rural young women, were far more disadvantaged than their urban counterparts in terms of completion of Classes 4 and 7. Among rural young women, fewer than three-quarters (70%) had completed Class 4 and just half (51%) had completed Class 7, compared to 87% and 75%, respectively, among young women in urban areas.

Percentage of youth who had never been to school, according to age, marital status and place of residence

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Fewer youth had completed a high school education: Just 52% of young men and 36% of young women had completed 10 or more years of education. Of note is the striking difference in the proportion of young people who had completed 10 or more years of education by economic status of young people's households, as measured by wealth quintiles. Differences by economic status were much wider than either gender differences or differences by rural-urban residence. For example, among young men, only 33% of those from households in the poorest (first) quintile had completed 10 or more years of schooling, compared to 72% of those from households in the wealthiest (fifth) quintile. Among young women, just 14% of those in the poorest quintile, compared to 66% of those in the wealthiest quintile, had completed 10 or more years of education.

Percentage of youth who had completed secondary school, according to household economic status

Leading obstacles that inhibit youth from completing secondary school
A number of factors inhibited secondary school completion. Leading among these were economic reasons, attitudes and perceptions of youth and their parents, and school-related barriers. For example, 55% of young men and 32% of young women, respectively, who had discontinued school after completing Class 7 and before completing Class 10 reported that they had left school for economic reasons (work on the family farm or business, wage earning work and family poverty, i.e., the family could not afford to keep the respondent in school). School-related reasons, particularly academic failure and distance to school (among young women) also accounted for discontinuation among large percentages of young men and women (34% and 42%, respectively). Unfavourable attitudes and perceptions of youth and their parents regarding education (notably that youth were not interested in schooling) were also a key factor to school completion, reported by 35% and 40% of young men and women, respectively. In addition, domestic responsibilities were cited by one-quarter of youth for discontinuing schooling before completing high school.

Pressure to marry early added to young women's disadvantage. Many young women but hardly any young men reported that marriage had interrupted their schooling. Indeed, 12% of all young women and almost one in five (18%) married young women who had discontinued their education before completing Class 10 reported doing so in order to marry.

Of those who had discontinued schooling after completing class 7 and before completing class 10, percentage of youth who cited different reasons for discontinuation

Few had acquired vocational skills
A number of vocational training programmes are available to youth through government, non-government and private organisations. However, findings indicate that fewer than one-third (30–31%) of young men and women had ever attended a vocational training programme. Considerably larger proportions of urban than rural youth had received vocational training (42–45% versus 24–27%).

Moreover, findings show that the kind of training received varied by the sex of the respondent. Leading training programmes undertaken by young men included computer skill building (43%), and to a lesser extent, auto mechanics or electrical work (19%), driving (17%) and plumbing or masonry (11%). Key training received by young women was quite different. Most young women who had received vocational training had typically acquired traditional skills, including tailoring (56%) and handicrafts, painting, embroidery or cooking (37%); fewer—25%—reported training in computer skills.

Findings also show that large proportions of youth—48% of young men and 63% of young women—were interested in acquiring vocational skills. While young men's preferences were focused on computer training, English language, typing or shorthand skills, auto mechanics or electrical work, and driving, the majority of young women, particularly those in rural areas, continued to opt for relatively traditional vocational skills, indicating a considerable disconnect between young women's preferences and market needs.
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POLICY BRIEF

To measure unemployment rates among respondents, the Youth Study assessed (a) whether youth had worked in the 12 months preceding the interview and if so, the number of months worked; and (b) whether youth were seeking work and if so, the number of months during which they had been searching for work.

Transition to work roles was not easy or successful for many
Work profiles suggest that three-quarters (73%) of young men (67% of the unmarried and 98% of the married) and almost half (47%) of young women (44% and 51%, respectively) had been engaged in paid or unpaid work at some point in the 12 months preceding the interview. Findings, however, highlight that the transition to work roles is fraught with challenges.

Sizeable numbers transitioned to work roles at young ages
Despite the global recognition that entry into the labour market at young ages competes with young people's schooling opportunities and experiences directly or indirectly, and compromises their productive potential and health, and despite significant policy and programme attention to the prevention of early entry into the labour market in India, findings indicate that sizeable proportions of youth had transitioned to work roles at young ages. Almost two-thirds of young men and women (37–39%) reported that they had initiated either paid or unpaid work as children or young adolescents, that is, before age 15. Rural youth were far more likely than their urban counterparts to so report. Indeed, rural young women were three times as likely as urban young women to have transitioned to work roles at young ages.

Considerable proportions of educated young people were unemployed
Although unemployment rates were relatively low among young people (7%) in the state, better educated youth were more likely than others to report unemployment, possibly because of the disconnect between youth skills and market needs. Among young men, for example, unemployment rate increased from 1% among those with no or 1–7 years of formal education to 23% among those who had completed Class 12. Among young women, the rate increased from 1–2% among those with no or 1–7 years of formal education to 20% among those who had completed 8–11 years of schooling and 46% among those who had completed Class 12. In sum, these findings suggest that the paucity of opportunities limits the ability of better qualified youth—women in particular—to obtain employment.

Opportunities were also limited for young women in urban areas. Indeed, unemployment rates were far higher among young women in urban areas (23%) than both their rural counterparts (7%), and young men in urban and rural areas (6–7%).

Many young women were neither in school nor working
Findings suggest that large proportions of young men and women were either in school or working at the time of the interview and a few were both working and studying. However, findings also show that the labour potential of young women was considerably

Unemployment rate among youth, according to selected characteristics

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1 National Research Council and Institute of Medicine. 2005. Ibid.
3 To measure unemployment rates among respondents, the Youth Study assessed (a) whether youth had worked in the 12 months preceding the interview and if so, the number of months worked; and (b) whether youth were seeking work and if so, the number of months during which they had been searching for work.
under-utilised. For example, almost two-fifths of young women (37%) were neither in school nor working, compared to just 5% of young men.

Programme recommendations
Policy and programme commitment to enhancing education and meeting employment needs is clear. Several central and state government policies and programmes, for example the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, the Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan, and the state’s Vision 2020 document are intended to encourage school enrolment and retention. Likewise, the proposed National Policy on Skill Development (2009) aims to empower individuals, especially youth and women, through improved skills, knowledge and qualifications to gain access to employment in an increasingly competitive global market.

Notwithstanding these policy commitments, findings indicate that several challenges remain in ensuring universal access to secondary education, in absorbing an increasingly youthful labour force and thereby harnessing Andhra Pradesh’s demographic dividend. A number of policies and programmes are needed to overcome these challenges.

Address obstacles to school completion
Although many young people in Andhra Pradesh spend their adolescence pursuing their education, concerted efforts are needed to address barriers to high school completion.

Multiple activities are needed to achieve improvement in educational attainment. Efforts must be made, for example, to address the economic pressures that may lead parents to withdraw their children from school in favour of work. Conditional grants and targeted subsidies that encourage schooling, and particularly school completion among disadvantaged groups, particularly girls, also need to be considered. At the same time, activities are needed that are directed at parents and youth that promote positive attitudes towards education and school completion, raise aspirations for a high school education and encourage greater parental involvement in their children’s education.

Activities must also address school-level barriers, notably, poor infrastructure and quality of education, and distance to school, a notable barrier for young women. Moreover, given the large proportions of youth reporting that schooling had been interrupted because they were required for work on the family farm or business, efforts are needed to adjust school timings, or to establish evening schools. Such efforts will enable children to accommodate their work commitments without sacrificing their education.

There is a need to incorporate livelihood skills building models within the school setting and provide opportunities for those in school to gain market-driven job skills that will expand the aspirations of youth regarding their education and careers. Moreover, investments in improving the quality of the schooling experience are needed that focus on providing better training of teachers and ensuring greater accountability among teachers.

Strengthen efforts to prevent child labour
Findings that almost two in five young men and women had initiated work in childhood or in early adolescence (before age 15) reiterate the need to provide conditional grants and targeted subsidies to disadvantaged groups, which would encourage parents to opt for schooling over work for their children. At the same time, it is important to vigorously enforce existing laws that prohibit child labour.

Provide a second chance to obtain a basic education to young women left behind
Findings suggesting that married young women and rural young women remain considerably disadvantaged in terms of school enrolment and completion call for interventions that would give these sub-groups a second chance to obtain a basic education.

Enable youth to acquire vocational skills
Findings have suggested that while vocational training programmes do exist, gaining access to these programmes is a significant obstacle for both young men and women; among those who obtained training, moreover, young women were particularly unlikely to obtain training in skills linked with market demands. Formal mechanisms must be developed, therefore, that enable youth to access available training opportunities. At the same time, opportunities must be provided to youth that steer them towards acquiring skills for which there is an established demand, and that link eligible youth to market opportunities. These efforts need to include the promotion of self-employment and entrepreneurship through various livelihood schemes, for example, providing soft loans to youth to enable them to set up their own business enterprises.

Ensure that existing programmes aimed at job creation reach youth
While several programmes aimed at job creation are currently underway, findings show that considerable proportions of educated youth were unemployed at the time of the interview and the labour potential of young women remained largely under-utilised. Clearly, available programmes have failed to reach youth, notably young women, and are not equipped to encompass the needs of the educated. Efforts are needed to ensure that existing programmes aimed at job creations do indeed reach different groups of youth and that they target, in particular, young women.