

# Harnessing Youth Potential through Skill Development and Entrepreneurship in Arunachal Pradesh

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## Abstract

"आत्मनो मोक्षार्थं जगद्धिताय च" — "For one's own salvation and the welfare of the world." Swami Vivekananda frequently cites this old Rig Vedic shloka, which captures a timeless ideal: self-improvement in line with social advancement. This philosophy becomes especially pertinent as we follow Arunachal Pradesh's developmental path. Our state is at a unique turning point, with a demographic dividend that is heavily skewed towards youth. It is full of potential but is hampered by structural issues, particularly in the areas of employment and skill development. This chapter examines the need and strategy for empowering young people in Arunachal Pradesh via entrepreneurship and skill development, two important pillars of long-term socioeconomic change.

**Keywords:** Youth empowerment, skill development, entrepreneurship, Arunachal Pradesh, demographic dividend

## Introduction

The ancient Rig Vedic shloka, "*Ātmano mokṣārtham jagaddhitāya ca*"—"For one's own salvation and the welfare of the world"—encapsulates the synergy between personal growth and societal progress (Vivekananda, 1897). This philosophy is particularly relevant for Arunachal Pradesh, a state poised to harness its demographic dividend, with over 60% of its population under 35 years (Government of India, 2011). Despite its vibrant youth and rich cultural heritage, the state grapples with structural challenges, including high unemployment, limited skill development infrastructure, and a nascent entrepreneurial ecosystem. This paper examines the imperative of empowering Arunachal's youth through skill development and entrepreneurship, proposing a multifaceted strategy to transform the state into a hub of innovation and economic opportunity.

The motivation for this study stems from a personal encounter with an elderly artisan whose wife crafted a hand-embroidered coat, revealing the untapped potential of Arunachal's cultural industries. This anecdote underscores a broader reality: while the state abounds in talent and resources, systemic barriers hinder its integration into modern economic frameworks. By addressing these barriers, Arunachal Pradesh can unlock its youth potential and contribute to India's vision of *Aatmanirbhar Bharat* (self-reliant India).

## **The Youth Employment Paradox**

### **Demographic Dividend and Unemployment**

Arunachal Pradesh's youthful demographic is a double-edged sword. While it offers immense potential for economic growth, youth unemployment remains a pressing concern. According to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), the unemployment rate among youth in India's northeastern states exceeds the national average (Government of India, 2023). In Arunachal, cultural aspirations exacerbate this issue, with many young individuals, including those trained in technical fields like computer science, prioritizing government jobs over private-sector or entrepreneurial opportunities. However, public-sector employment accounts for only 3% of India's workforce (Government of India, 2021), creating a significant mismatch between aspirations and opportunities.

### **Skill-Career Mismatch**

A critical barrier to youth employment is the misalignment between educational outcomes and industry needs. Many graduates lack practical, industry-relevant skills, rendering them unprepared for roles in technology, manufacturing, or hospitality. For instance, a computer science graduate may understand theoretical concepts but lack hands-on experience in coding or software development (Author's observation, 2025). This skill-career mismatch is compounded by cultural preferences for stable government jobs, deterring youth from exploring entrepreneurial ventures or private-sector careers.

## **The Skill Gap Crisis**

### **Lack of Industry-Relevant Skills**

The absence of practical training in Arunachal's educational institutions contributes to the skill gap. Employers prioritize candidates with real-world experience, akin to preferring a driver who has navigated roads over one with only theoretical knowledge of engines (Author's analogy, 2025). To address this, educational reforms must emphasize experiential learning through internships, industry partnerships, and project-based curricula.

### **The Digital Divide**

Despite India's strides in artificial intelligence and digital innovation, many Arunachali youth lack basic digital literacy. This digital divide limits access to remote work, freelance opportunities, and tech entrepreneurship. Initiatives such as coding bootcamps, AI training centers, and digital marketing workshops are essential to bridge this gap and integrate Arunachal's youth into the global digital economy (World Bank, 2022).

## Reimagining Education and Vocational Training

To unlock youth potential, Arunachal's education system must prioritize skill-based learning. Vocational education, often undervalued compared to academic streams, should be mainstreamed into the curriculum. Key recommendations include:

- **Strengthening Polytechnics and Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs):** Enhance infrastructure and align courses with local industry demands, such as tourism and handicrafts.
- **Industry Partnerships:** Facilitate placements through collaborations with private-sector employers.
- **Hands-On Training:** Introduce practical modules in mechanics, design, and technical fields to cater to youth preferences (Author's observation, 2025).

By reorienting education toward employability, Arunachal can equip its youth with the tools to succeed in diverse career paths.

## Fostering an Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

### Cultivating an Entrepreneurial Mindset

Arunachal's youth must transition from job seekers to job creators, necessitating a cultural shift toward entrepreneurship. Current educational models focus on academic knowledge rather than problem-solving or innovation. To foster an entrepreneurial mindset, schools and colleges should:

- Establish start-up incubation centres to nurture early-stage ventures.
- Provide access to funding through schemes like MUDRA and Stand-Up India (Government of India, 2016).
- Offer mentorship programs to guide aspiring entrepreneurs and prepare them for setbacks.

### Leveraging Local Strengths

Arunachal's unique assets—tourism, handicrafts, and agriculture—offer fertile ground for entrepreneurship. Sector-specific skill training can scale these strengths into national and global markets:

- **Tourism:** Train youth in hospitality, adventure sports, and tour guiding to enhance tourist experiences and create jobs.
- **Handicrafts and Handlooms:** Equip artisans with modern design, marketing, and e-commerce skills to access platforms like Amazon and Etsy.
- **Agriculture:** Promote organic farming and agri-entrepreneurship through training in sustainable practices and export channels (FAO, 2020).

## Empowering Women as Change Agents

Women, comprising nearly 48% of Arunachal's population, are underrepresented in the workforce and entrepreneurial ventures (Government of India, 2011). Targeted interventions can unlock their potential:

- **Financial Support:** Provide interest-free loans for women-led startups.
- **Skill Development:** Offer training in technology, food processing, crafts, and tailoring.
- **Mentorship Networks:** Create support systems to guide women entrepreneurs.

An inclusive workforce will amplify Arunachal's economic growth and social cohesion.

## A Roadmap for Sustainable Youth Empowerment

To harness Arunachal's youth potential, a comprehensive strategy is imperative:

1. **Sector-Specific Skill Training:** Tailor programs to tourism, handlooms, and agriculture.
2. **Digital Literacy Initiatives:** Expand access to coding, AI, and digital marketing training.
3. **Educational Reforms:** Prioritize practical learning and vocational education.
4. **Startup Ecosystem Development:** Establish incubation centers and facilitate funding.
5. **Gender-Inclusive Policies:** Promote women's participation in entrepreneurship and employment.

## Conclusion

Arunachal Pradesh stands at a pivotal moment to transform its demographic dividend into a socioeconomic asset. By investing in skill development and entrepreneurship, the state can empower its youth to drive innovation and economic growth. The Rig Vedic ethos of self-improvement for societal welfare, coupled with the mantra "*Shramam eva jayate*"—"Success belongs to those who work for it"—serves as a guiding principle. With vision, investment, and collective action, Arunachal can evolve from a state of job seekers to a beacon of job creators, illuminating the path for India's northeastern frontier.

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