

Ninth Edition of

Leadership Dialogues

Innovate. Collaborate. Strengthen.
Towards a Safer Future for Our Children.

THEME: Education and Employability

**Frequently Asked and
Most Important Questions**

India often speaks with pride about its demographic dividend and the promise of a young population. Under frameworks such as National Education Policy 2020, Skill India Mission, and Mission Vatsalya, what have been the key learnings so far in building adolescents' and youth capacities, especially for those from vulnerable backgrounds? Based on these learnings, what policy investments, reforms, or innovations are being prioritized to strengthen transitions from school to skilling, higher education, and employment?

Question addressed to Mr. Sanjay Kabir

While India proudly speaks of its demographic dividend, the real concern is whether this growing youth population is truly employable. Without adequate skills, guidance, and structured support, the demographic dividend risks turning into a demographic liability.

Historically, policy attention has leaned heavily toward expanding higher education, including premier institutions. This has enabled a segment of graduates to secure positions in multinational corporations and compete globally. However, this represents only one part of the picture.

At the same time, a significant proportion of young people continue to struggle with basic and functional literacy. The widening gap between highly skilled graduates and youth lacking foundational competencies raises serious concerns about long-term equity and employability outcomes.

It was emphasized that the way forward requires a balanced approach:

1. Sustaining excellence in higher education, while
2. Strengthening foundational learning,
3. Investing in practical, market-relevant skills, and
4. Providing structured transition support, particularly for youth from vulnerable backgrounds.

Without addressing these systemic gaps, the promise of the demographic dividend may remain unrealized.

From your experience working at scale within government frameworks such as Samagra Shiksha, Skill India or Mission Vatsalya, what are the most important learnings from the past on what enables or blocks vulnerable children and youth from sustaining education and transitioning smoothly into skills and work?

Question addressed to Dr. Subhomoy Adhikari

Dr. Shobomoy Bhaduri highlighted the magnitude of the challenge, noting that about 24.2% of youth aged 15–24 in India are not in education, employment, or training, with the figure rising to nearly 35% among young women—reflecting persistent structural and gender barriers.

He explained that dropouts and weak transitions result from multiple, overlapping factors:

1. Poor infrastructure (e.g., lack of functional toilets)
2. Transport and safety concerns, especially for girls
3. Exam-centric teaching with limited real-world relevance
4. Inadequate career guidance and counselling
5. Socio-cultural norms and early responsibilities

At the policy level, reforms are underway. The National Education Policy 2020 has integrated vocational and experiential learning into mainstream schooling. Greater convergence, including through Mission Vatsalya and skilling initiatives, is strengthening coordinated support systems.

He concluded that access alone is insufficient—focus must shift to retention, relevance, and readiness, supported by gender-sensitive design, life skills integration, and sustained mentoring to ensure smooth transitions into meaningful employment.

Resource:

- https://udayancare.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Full-report_-Beyond-18.pdf

Can you share your journey through education, skilling or work and the key challenges you faced during transitions, such as documentation, access to schemes, financial pressures or lack of guidance? Were there any supports or innovations that made a positive difference for you?

Question addressed to Ms. Nidhi Kumari

Nidhi Kumari shared her journey from Nathupur village in Patna, Bihar, where access to opportunities was limited but her aspiration to learn remained strong. She began her education with Nari Gunjan in Danapur and completed her schooling locally, navigating rural constraints with determination.

A key turning point came when she enrolled in the Primary Math Educator training programme with Aavishkaar. The programme strengthened her academic foundation and introduced structured teaching practices. She later joined Aavishkaar's two-year fellowship, where she discovered her passion for education and began envisioning a long-term career in the field.

However, her transition journey was marked by multiple challenges:

1. Persistent financial constraints creating uncertainty about continuing education
2. Difficulties with documentation and navigating government processes
3. Limited access to career counselling and subject guidance
4. Lack of structured support for job readiness (communication, confidence, workplace expectations)
5. Absence of consistent mentorship during critical decision points

Timely institutional support proved transformative. Mentorship, exposure visits, fellowship opportunities, academic guidance, and financial assistance helped her build clarity and confidence across transitions.

Now pursuing her M.Ed at Azim Premji University, Nidhi reflects that aspiration exists in every village. What makes the difference is access—to information, mentorship, financial support, and structured guidance. Her journey illustrates how sustained support across educational transitions can empower young women from remote communities to achieve their goals and become role models for others.

Despite multiple schemes across education, skilling and social protection, many vulnerable adolescents still fall through the cracks during transitions. What emerging approaches or system innovations are being used to strengthen convergence across departments and frontline systems, and what has the government learnt about what works best to ensure continuity of support?

Question addressed to Mr. Sanjay Kabir

Mr. Sanjay Kabir emphasized that education must serve three essential purposes:

1. Human development – building dignity, agency, and foundational capabilities.
2. Recognition of skills – validating competencies and aligning them with market needs.
3. Social values – preparing youth to participate responsibly in society.

However, vulnerable and marginalized youth are often excluded from achieving these outcomes. He pointed to a structural challenge in India—the fragmentation of skill development across ministries (Education, Labour, Skill Development), which has historically led to silos, duplication, and weak transition support.

The key learning has been the need for an integrated life-cycle approach. Skill development must be embedded within education and linked to livelihood ecosystems. Programmes such as **Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY)** and initiatives like the **PM Internship Scheme** aim to bridge this gap, though challenges of scale and industry alignment remain. He also noted that placement alone is not success. Dropouts often occur due to unrealistic salary expectations, poor working conditions, or lack of post-placement support. This has shifted focus toward:

1. Pre-training counselling
2. Soft skills preparation
3. Post-placement mentoring and tracking

At the grassroots level, convergence through institutions like JEEViKA and digital tracking systems is strengthening continuity of support. He concluded that sustainable transitions require institutional alignment, community handholding, and realistic market linkages—creating a seamless pathway from education to skills to meaningful employment, especially for the most vulnerable youth.

What innovations, implementation models or emerging practices have you found most effective in supporting school retention, career guidance and employability at scale? What changes in government systems, partnerships or financing would help institutionalise and sustain these approaches?

Question addressed to Dr. Subhomoy Adhikari

Mr. Bhaduri emphasized that India's diversity demands locally adapted solutions. States must diagnose the specific causes of absenteeism—whether infrastructure gaps, migration, social norms, or disengaging pedagogy—before designing interventions. Experiential approaches such as music and theatre have improved retention in some contexts, but scaling them requires strong teacher preparation.

He stressed that education must expand beyond academics to prepare youth for the future of work, including:

1. Communication, teamwork, and problem-solving
2. Digital literacy and AI awareness
3. Green skills and entrepreneurial mindset

A major gap lies in post-secondary transitions. Adolescents need:

1. Structured career guidance
2. Mentorship and exposure visits
3. Clear pathways to higher education or skilling

He cited an example from Meghalaya, where community-integrated skill learning encourages students to learn a skill from their family or local occupation—bridging formal education with real-life competencies.

He concluded that scaling such models requires government–CSO partnerships, teacher capacity-building, flexible innovation funding, and accountability focused on long-term outcomes.

Looking back, what lessons from your experience should inform future programmes or policies? What kind of support, guidance or system change would make it easier for young people like you to continue education, build skills and grow in stable employment?

Question addressed to Ms. Nidhi Kumari

After Class 10, Nidhi had little clarity about academic streams, vocational pathways, or long-term career options—an uncertainty common among rural adolescents. Joining Sanjhe Sapne marked a turning point. Through exposure sessions, mentoring, and peer discussions, she gained awareness of realistic pathways aligned with her interests.

Her training with Aavishkaar deepened this clarity, helping her understand future-oriented careers and evolving job markets. These platforms showed her that informed choices are possible with the right guidance. She highlighted life skills as a critical enabler:

1. Problem-solving and teamwork
2. Communication and confidence-building
3. Exposure visits and peer learning

It was through such exposure that she learned about pursuing a Master's at Azim Premji University and accessing scholarships. Entering the workforce, she realized technical knowledge alone was insufficient. Professional communication, workplace etiquette, and responsibility management were equally essential—skills rarely taught in school.

Reflecting on her younger sister's similar confusion, she noted this as a systemic gap. She strongly advocated for:

1. Early career awareness in schools
2. Information on diverse courses and vocational options
3. Guidance on scholarships and entrance pathways
4. Short-term career counselling sessions

In conclusion, she emphasized that talent exists everywhere, but awareness does not. Timely information, mentorship, life skills, and structured guidance are key to enabling rural youth to transition confidently into higher education and stable employment.

Could you please share a comprehensive list of government schemes and programs focused on skill development and enhancing employability?

In response, Mr. Sanjay Kabir highlighted that India has several key schemes focused on skill development and employability, including DDU-GKY and Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY). He also referred to the Skill India Digital Hub (SIDH) portal, which consolidates information on various skilling programmes and opportunities.

He emphasized that skill development must promote dignified, upgraded, and globally competitive trades. Beyond schemes, peer learning, exposure, and mentorship are critical. Under JEEViKA (BRLPS), over 500 community-supported libraries are virtually connected with mentors from prestigious institutions, providing youth with guidance and broader exposure.

He concluded that while schemes provide structure, quality training, mentorship, and aspirational positioning of skills are key to strengthening employability.

Resource:

- <https://www.skillindiadigital.gov.in/>

What factors have hindered enrollment and performance under the PM Internship Scheme, despite its strong design and high relevance?

The PM Internship Scheme was conceptually strong, aiming to bridge the gap between education and employment through structured industry exposure. However, despite its relevance, several implementation challenges limited enrollment and performance.

One major constraint was limited awareness and outreach, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas. Many eligible youth either did not know about the scheme or found the application process unclear and documentation-heavy. Digital barriers further restricted access for first-generation learners.

Industry participation also varied. While some employers engaged meaningfully, others treated internships as short-term compliance rather than long-term talent investment, affecting the quality of exposure and mentoring.

Key operational challenges included:

1. Weak pre-internship counselling and expectation management
2. Mismatch between youth aspirations and stipend structures
3. Limited post-internship placement pathways
4. Geographic concentration of opportunities in urban areas
5. Mobility and safety concerns, especially for young women

In summary, while the design was forward-looking, gaps in awareness, handholding, industry depth, and transition support reduced its impact. Stronger local facilitation, employer ownership, and structured mentoring could significantly improve outcomes.

Resource:

- <https://pminternship.mca.gov.in/>

What is the employability opportunities for the Youth with special needs or differently abled

Mr. Sanjay Kabir highlighted that a dedicated Sector Skill Council for Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) has been established, with a mandate to guide all Sector Skill Councils in making their training programs inclusive. This includes ensuring accessible pedagogy, appropriate infrastructure, and necessary accommodations so that persons with disabilities can effectively participate in skill development initiatives.

However, he emphasized that the primary challenge lies not in training, but in placement. Many industry partners remain uncertain or hesitant about employing persons with disabilities. To address this gap, stronger industry engagement is essential. This includes proactive inclusion measures, positive discrimination where necessary, and sustained sensitization efforts to build confidence and create truly inclusive workplaces for PwDs.

Resources:

- <https://www.khs.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Disability-and-Child-Protection-in-India-.pdf>
- https://www.khs.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Mapping-of-States-on-Disability-and-Care-Reform-Report_28-11-25-1.pdf
- https://www.khs.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Disability-Adaptation-of-JJA-Case-Management-Tools_28-11-25.pdf

What shifts in mindset are needed within systems—such as schools, skilling centres, and employers—to recognize vulnerable youth as long-term assets rather than short-term beneficiaries?

The key mindset shift is redefining success. Systems often measure success through exam scores or immediate job placements. Instead, success should include life skills, resilience, adaptability, and long-term career growth.

Schools and skilling centres must move from a deficit view (“beneficiaries needing support”) to an asset-based view that recognises potential. Employers, too, should see vulnerable youth as investable talent who can grow with mentorship and exposure.

Greater focus is needed on early childhood and adolescence, providing diverse inputs—life skills, experiential learning, and career exposure—rather than only academic performance.

Ultimately, the shift is from short-term outputs to long-term development and sustained employability.

I feel that there is structural disconnect between what is taught and what is needed in the industry, making it a critical, long-term challenge for India's economic growth. Besides lack of industry exposure, limited practical experience, and insufficient career guidance contribute to the employability challenges faced by young people. What are the ways out to address these critical issues of young people?

Mr. Subhmoy responded that the disconnect between education and industry is a structural issue that requires systemic reform. When classroom learning remains theoretical and detached from workplace realities, young people struggle with employability despite having potential.

He emphasized that the way forward lies in aligning education more closely with market needs while strengthening transition support. This includes:

1. Regular curriculum updates with industry participation and greater focus on experiential learning, in line with the National Education Policy 2020.
2. Introducing structured career guidance from secondary school, helping students understand academic, vocational, and emerging career pathways.
3. Expanding internships, apprenticeships, and real-world exposure to bridge theory and practice.
4. Embedding life skills such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and workplace etiquette within mainstream education.
5. Providing mentoring and post-placement support to ensure sustained employment.

He concluded that bridging the employability gap requires convergence between education systems, skilling initiatives, and industry. The goal is not just placement, but enabling young people to transition confidently into meaningful and sustainable employment.

What is the role of parents in providing life education and essential life skills to their children?

Mr. Subhmoy emphasized that the role of parents remains consistent across contexts—whether in life skills development or parenting practices. At its core, parenting is about creating safe and enabling spaces where children can practice skills, make choices, and learn without fear of judgment.

He highlighted the importance of fostering open dialogue at home. Parents should engage children in conversations not only about academic learning, but also about their overall daily experiences—how school felt, what they learned, whether something new or meaningful happened.

Rather than stereotyping or being overly critical, parents need to cultivate an environment of trust and acceptance, where children feel heard, respected, and supported in their growth.

I hope to gain practical insights into effective education-to-employability pathways for youth from vulnerable family backgrounds.

In response, Nidhi Kumari shared that one of the most important practical needs for young people from vulnerable backgrounds is early awareness of policies, schemes, and procedures. Many students struggle not because of lack of talent, but because they do not know what options are available or how to plan ahead.

She emphasized that having clear information about government schemes, scholarships, skilling programmes, entrance processes, and eligibility criteria can make a significant difference. When youth understand what support systems exist and how to access them, they are better able to make informed decisions about education and career pathways.

According to Nidhi, even simple interventions—such as structured career guidance sessions, awareness workshops in schools, and guidance on documentation and application processes—can create a practical and accessible pathway from education to employment. Planning ahead with the right information transforms uncertainty into opportunity.

What coordinated systems can ensure children from alternative care get equal access to industry mentorship and job placement

Equal access can only be ensured through integrated, well-coordinated systems, not standalone interventions. CSA's aftercare approach highlights three key elements.

First, early transition planning must begin before a young person exits care. This includes mapping education, skilling pathways, and career options aligned with aptitude and interest.

Second, there must be strong convergence between child protection systems, skilling partners, and employers. Documentation, eligibility, training, and placement should move in one continuous flow to avoid disruptions.

Third, mentorship and post-placement support are crucial for retention. Industry exposure, role models, regular follow-ups, and personalised case management help young people adapt, grow, and sustain stable employment.

Sustained coordination—not one-time placement—is what ensures long-term success.

Resources:

- https://drive.google.com/file/d/1X9H6_2eaThgrphw_YI6dSLEJ7kiuLPya/view?usp=drive_link
- https://drive.google.com/file/d/1NJoG1gpxPuGZHAkeqsYOR7x3zImoQfFx/view?usp=drive_link

In India, which youth skilling and employment models do you find most innovative and inspiring?

In India, several models stand out as innovative and inspiring in the space of youth skilling and employment because they combine scale, inclusion, and market linkage.

One strong example is the Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY), which focuses on placement-linked skill training for rural youth. Its emphasis on structured training, certification, and post-placement tracking makes it a comprehensive rural employability model.

The Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) is another large-scale initiative that standardizes skill training across sectors through Sector Skill Councils and certification frameworks. While implementation varies, the scale and intent to align skills with industry standards are notable.

The National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (NAPS) is particularly promising because it promotes “learning while earning.” Apprenticeship-based models tend to create stronger industry alignment and smoother school-to-work transitions.

At the state level, JEEViKA in Bihar is inspiring for integrating livelihoods, community institutions, and youth skilling through SHG networks. It demonstrates how grassroots platforms can identify and support vulnerable youth.

The Kerala Development and Innovation Strategic Council (K-DISC) and Kerala’s focus on future skills, digital skilling, and migration support systems also provide a forward-looking model aligned with global labour markets.

Finally, blended models run by civil society organizations—combining life skills, mentorship, exposure, and financial support—are especially impactful for first-generation learners. These models show that skilling alone is not enough; guidance, confidence-building, and sustained handholding are equally critical.

Overall, the most inspiring models share three features: strong industry linkage, life skills integration, and structured transition support. When these elements come together, youth skilling moves beyond certification toward sustainable employment.

What are the innovative and inspiring models that supports education and employability?

Several innovative models are strengthening education-to-employability pathways by centring local relevance and life skills.

The community-integrated skilling initiative in Meghalaya connects school learning with local livelihoods, encouraging students to learn at least one skill from their family or community. This approach values traditional knowledge, strengthens parent engagement, and promotes local opportunities alongside formal education.

The Waldorf Education model integrates creativity, arts, and experiential learning into schooling, focusing on holistic development—head, heart, and hands—so students build life skills alongside academics.

Similarly, **Sector Skill Councils** align training with industry standards, ensuring skilling programmes remain market-relevant and globally competitive.

Across these models, the common thread is integration—linking schools with communities, education with industry, and life skills with employability to create future-ready pathways.