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Dayalal Sankhla
Department of Economic
Administration and Financial
Management, M.B.C.
Government Girls College,
Barmer, Rajasthan, India

Rural youth migration in India: Causes, consequences, and pathways to sustainable development

Dayalal Sankhla

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Abstract

Rural youth migration in India represents a profound demographic and socio-economic transformation, driven by a complex interplay of economic disparities, social aspirations, environmental pressures, and evolving demographic landscapes. This report examines the multifaceted causes, far-reaching consequences on both rural communities and urban centers, and proposes comprehensive solutions and policy interventions. Utilizing a robust theoretical framework encompassing push-pull dynamics, resource-based theories, modernization, social network, environmental, human capital, and lifestyle perspectives, the analysis reveals that the pursuit of better economic opportunities and improved social infrastructure in urban areas are primary motivators, while agricultural precarity and limited rural amenities act as significant push factors. The consequences manifest as demographic imbalances and agricultural labor shortages in rural areas, alongside infrastructure strain and social integration challenges in urban destinations. Remittances offer a vital economic lifeline but also foster dependency. The report concludes with actionable recommendations centered on integrated rural development, skill enhancement, employment generation, and climate resilience, advocating for policies that transform migration from a necessity into a choice, fostering balanced and equitable national development.

Keywords: India, rural youth migration, causes, consequences, solutions, economic disparity, agricultural impact, urbanization, skill development, remittances, climate change, policy interventions

1. Introduction

The movement of rural youth to urban centers stands as a critical and escalating global trend, significantly reshaping socio-economic landscapes, particularly within agricultural economies like India^[1]. This demographic shift is fundamentally propelled by the pursuit of enhanced job opportunities, superior educational avenues, and an overall improvement in living standards^[1].

1.1 Global and Indian context of rural youth migration

In India, where a substantial portion of the population continues to reside in rural areas estimated at 70%¹ and 69%^[3] the migration of young individuals exerts a profound influence on both rural and urban environments^[1]. The nation has witnessed a significant population redistribution from rural to urban areas over recent decades, with the urban population notably increasing from 17.29% in 1961 to 31.16% in 2011^[4]. This statistical progression underscores a long-term, accelerating demographic transformation. The annual rate of rural-urban migration in India is considerable, estimated to be around 8-10 million people, a scale that places immense pressure on existing urban infrastructure and services^[4]. The consistent emphasis throughout various studies on the "growing trend"^[1] and "complex challenge"^[5] of rural youth migration, coupled with substantial statistics, highlights a massive, ongoing demographic shift. This is not merely an aggregation of individual movements but represents a large-scale societal restructuring that often goes unacknowledged in its full profound impact on the fabric of rural India. This phenomenon can be characterized as a "silent exodus". The sheer magnitude of this migration suggests that it is not a peripheral issue but a central force shaping India's future. Its implications extend to critical areas such as food security, social stability, and urban sustainability, necessitating a comprehensive, national-level, and coordinated policy response rather than fragmented or isolated interventions.

Corresponding Author:
Dayalal Sankhla
Department of Economic
Administration and Financial
Management, M.B.C.
Government Girls College,
Barmer, Rajasthan, India

Migration, as defined by the International Organization for Migration, encompasses "the movement of a person or group of persons, either across an international border, or within a state" ^[1]. Within India, internal migration is considerably more prevalent than international migration, with movements occurring within states accounting for 84.19% and inter-state movements for 13.78% in 2011 ^[6].

1.2 Defining rural youth and migration in the Indian context

For the purpose of this report, "youth" generally refers to the demographic group aged 15-35 years, while acknowledging specific age ranges cited in individual studies, such as 16-30 years ^[1], 15-29 years ^[5], 15-30 years for males ^[7], or 18-35 years ^[8].

Migration patterns among rural youth can be broadly categorized into two types: 'fully migrated' and 'partially migrated.' 'Fully migrated' refers to individuals who have permanently moved out of their family's agricultural enterprise and relocated to a town or city, primarily in pursuit of new skills or employment ^[7]. In contrast, 'partially migrated' describes youth who temporarily relocate for employment opportunities, often during lean agricultural periods, and subsequently return to their villages ^[1]. Studies indicate a mixed distribution between these two categories, with one finding 55.83% of respondents to be partially migrated and 44.17% fully migrated ^[1].

The explicit distinction between "fully migrated" and "partially migrated" is crucial for a nuanced understanding of rural youth mobility. It reveals that migration is not exclusively a permanent break from rural life but frequently a dynamic adaptation strategy. Partial migration, in particular, suggests that individuals maintain vital ties to their rural origins, potentially contributing to both rural and urban economies. This challenges a simplistic "brain drain" narrative that assumes a complete loss of human capital from rural areas. Recognizing this dynamic nature of movement implies that policy frameworks should not solely focus on preventing or stopping migration. Instead, they should also aim to optimize its benefits and minimize its negative aspects by supporting the circular and temporary nature of much of this movement. Strategies that support partial migrants could be key to maintaining rural livelihoods, fostering resilience, and preventing permanent rural depopulation.

1.3 Significance of the study

Understanding the motivations and patterns of migration among rural youth is of paramount importance for policymakers. Such an understanding enables the development of effective strategies that can genuinely improve rural livelihoods and proficiently manage the escalating challenges posed to urban infrastructure ^[1]. The large-scale migration of youth presents a complex challenge that demands immediate and concerted attention from academicians, researchers, and policymakers alike ^[5].

This ongoing trend poses a significant threat to India's future food security, particularly given that regions like Punjab, a major contributor to the central rice and wheat pool, are experiencing substantial youth out-migration ^[8]. Despite these challenges, migration also contributes to economic growth and plays a vital role in shaping social and economic development in many developing nations, including India ^[1].

The consistent highlighting in various reports that rural youth migration has profound impacts on *both* rural communities affecting agricultural productivity and rural economies ^[1] and urban centers leading to infrastructure strain and social issues ^[1] demonstrates that rural and urban areas are not isolated entities but are deeply interdependent. The challenges faced by one sphere inevitably spill over into the other, creating a complex web of interconnected problems. This suggests that effective solutions must be holistic and integrated, recognizing the rural-urban continuum rather than treating these areas as separate domains. Policies promoting sustainable rural development can directly alleviate pressures on urban infrastructure and services, and vice-versa, fostering a more balanced and equitable national development trajectory.

2. Theoretical frameworks for understanding rural youth migration

Migration is a complex phenomenon, and its drivers are best understood through various theoretical lenses. These frameworks provide a structured approach to analyzing the motivations and decisions behind rural youth migration in India.

2.1 Push-Pull factors and the mooring framework

Migration is commonly understood as a process propelled by a combination of "push" factors, which are adverse conditions in the place of origin, and "pull" factors, which are the attractive attributes of the destination area ^[1]. The "push-pull-mooring" framework offers a comprehensive model for understanding the complex determinants of youth migration, particularly relevant in the Indian context, as evidenced by studies in regions like Punjab ^[8].

- **Push Factors:** These are the forces that compel individuals to leave their rural homes. They include a general disinterest in farming and perceived political instability ^[8]. More broadly, these factors encompass poverty, unemployment, and socio-political instability, low agricultural productivity, population pressure, landlessness, domestic and community conflicts, natural calamities, and a severe lack of essential infrastructure such as healthcare, education, and basic public services ^[6]. Specific findings highlight "less employment opportunities", "low wages", "drought", and "lack of basic amenities" as significant motivators for departure ^[10]. A notable factor is the "highly dependent on weather in farming", cited by 72.94% of respondents in one study ^[5], indicating the inherent risks and unpredictability of agriculture. Furthermore, the perception of "less social acceptance/recognition in villages due to farming" was a push factor for 55.96% of respondents ^[5].
- **Pull Factors:** These are the attractions that draw migrants to urban areas. They are typically associated with "better job/career opportunities", "higher income", "better education", "improved living standards", and enhanced access to "better healthcare" ^[1]. Other attractions include "rapid urbanization" and "industrialization", expanding "transport and communication networks", diverse "employment opportunities", "regional disparities in income", and access to "entertainment and leisure options" ^[6]. Behavioral beliefs and social values also act as significant pull factors, shaping perceptions of urban

life and success ^[8].

- **Mooring Factors:** These are contextual or personal factors that either facilitate or inhibit migration decisions. They include "switching costs", which refer to the financial, social, and psychological costs associated with moving, such as breaking social ties or the expense of relocation. Additionally, "subjective norms" play a role, encompassing social pressures, expectations, or the influence of one's social circle regarding migration, which can either encourage or discourage the move ^[8].

The consistent ranking of economic opportunities (e.g., "better job/career opportunities", "higher income") and access to superior social infrastructure (e.g., "better education," "better medical facilities") as the most significant pull factors across multiple studies ^[1] is striking. Simultaneously, the most prominent push factors are economic precarity (e.g., "low agricultural productivity", "unemployment," "landlessness") and social deprivation (e.g., "lack of amenities", "less social acceptance for farming") ^[5]. This recurring pattern strongly indicates that the core driver of rural youth migration is a profound and perceived disparity in economic and social mobility between rural and urban areas. Young people are not simply seeking survival; they are actively pursuing a better quality of life and greater opportunities for personal and professional advancement. This understanding implies that effective policy interventions must fundamentally address these core disparities, rather than merely focusing on superficial symptoms. This necessitates creating genuinely viable and attractive economic alternatives in rural areas and significantly improving social infrastructure to meet the aspirations of young people, thereby transforming migration from an imperative necessity into a genuine choice.

2.2 Other Relevant Theories

Beyond the push-pull-mooring framework, several other theoretical perspectives contribute to a comprehensive understanding of rural youth migration:-

- **Neoclassical Migration Theory:** This theory posits that individuals migrate to maximize their economic well-being, driven by limited labor market opportunities, unemployment, and underemployment in rural areas, and the promise of higher wages, diversified employment, and formal jobs in cities ^[2]. This perspective is strongly supported by findings indicating 100% agreement among surveyed youth on their intention to migrate for "better income, socio-economic status, and skill utilization" ^[1].
- **Resource-based Migration Theory:** This framework argues that declining agricultural productivity and land scarcity render rural livelihoods precarious, thus acting as a significant push factor for migration ^[2]. This aligns with findings that 29.17% of migrants possessed small landholdings ^[1] and that "land is too less" was identified as a push factor by 77.98% of youth in one study ^[5].
- **Lewis' Modernization Theory:** This theory highlights the perceived disparity in lifestyle and opportunities between rural and urban areas, with the allure of better education, healthcare, and infrastructure in cities drawing young people towards urban centers ^[2]. This is reinforced by survey results showing that 91.74% of youth desired "better education opportunities" and

77.06% sought "better medical facilities" ^[5].

- **Social Network Theory:** This framework emphasizes the significant influence of family and friends already residing in urban areas, who often portray city life as offering greater social mobility and freedom ^[2]. While not quantified as a top driver, "friends also migrated to city" was cited as a push factor by 45.41% of respondents in one study ^[5], demonstrating the role of existing social ties in facilitating migration decisions.
- **Environmental Migration Theory:** This theory suggests that threats such as climate change-induced droughts, floods, and land degradation can act as powerful push factors, displacing youth from their rural homes and compelling them to seek refuge in urban centers.² This is strongly supported by the identification of climate change as a "root cause of migration" ^[9] and "highly dependent on weather in farming" being a significant push factor for 72.94% of youth ^[5].
- **Human Capital Theory:** This theory emphasizes the crucial role of education and skill development in attracting youth, as access to higher education and vocational training in cities offers clear avenues for self-improvement and upward mobility ^[2]. This is reflected in the high educational attainment of migrants, with 88.33% possessing collegiate education ^[1], and 100% expressing readiness to acquire new job-related skills ^[1].
- **Lifestyle Theory:** This perspective points to the allure of improved amenities, entertainment, and communication facilities in cities, coupled with the perceived greater social freedom and anonymity they offer, compared to the perceived limitations and boredom of rural life ^[2]. Findings that "village life is full of boredom" (47.71%) and a desire "to get rid of traditional value system" (43.58%) support this theory ^[5].
- **Life Cycle Theory:** This theory suggests that age, marital status, and risk tolerance play a significant role in migration decisions, with young, unmarried individuals often exhibiting greater flexibility and risk tolerance for migration.² This is supported by findings that "if the youth is between 20-24 age, then the likelihood of migration is higher than that of lower ages" ^[2].

The overwhelming agreement (100%) among youth on their "intention to migrate for better income, socio-economic status, and skill utilization" and their "readiness to acquire new job-related skills" ^[1] strongly indicates a high aspirational component driving migration. However, the reality of urban migration, as described in other accounts, often involves living in "slums and squatter areas with limited infrastructure" ^[10] and facing the harsh truth that "it is difficult for a villager to survive in urban areas because in urban areas there is no natural environment and pure air. They have to pay for each and everything" ^[11]. This juxtaposition reveals a significant gap between the perceived benefits (the "allure of urban prosperity" ^[1]; "better climate") ^[5] and the often challenging actual lived experiences. The influence of mass media and globalization ^[5] in shaping these idealized perceptions of urban life could be a critical factor contributing to this information asymmetry. This implies that policy interventions should not only focus on creating tangible opportunities in rural

areas but also on providing realistic and comprehensive information about the challenges and realities of urban migration. This includes offering pre-migration counselling and supporting migrants with integration services in urban centers to mitigate the negative consequences of unmet expectations and ensure their well-being.

3. Causes of rural youth migration in India

The migration of rural youth in India is a multi-causal phenomenon, driven by a complex interplay of economic, social, environmental, and demographic factors. These factors often act in concert, pushing individuals away from their rural homes and pulling them towards urban centers.

3.1 Economic Drivers

Economic factors are consistently identified as the foremost drivers of rural youth migration. Unemployment and underemployment are primary motivators for leaving rural areas^[6]. Rural regions typically offer "less employment opportunities" and "low wages"^[10], leading to widespread underemployment and a lack of stable livelihoods. Many rural youth migrate because they perceive "no jobs in villages" and are generally "not interested for doing agriculture as a profession"^[13].

The low agricultural productivity and profitability further exacerbate this situation. The share of agriculture in the Indian economy has progressively declined to less than 15%^[5], making farming an unattractive and unprofitable profession for many young people^[5]. Small and marginal farmers, who constitute a significant portion of the agricultural workforce, often quit farming due to its "low viability" and "stagnated productivity and profitability"^[13]. A notable 29.17% of migrants possessed small landholdings, indicating a correlation between limited agricultural resources and migration^[1]. The "lack of remunerative price for farm produce due to unorganized market" was cited by 67.43% of youth as a push factor^[5]. Additionally, "limited access to agricultural land" and "scarcity of land" are significant contributors to youth migration^[2].

Inadequate financial services and the high risk inherent in agricultural sectors also contribute to the decision to migrate^[13]. The allure of "better income" and "better job/career opportunities" in urban areas is a powerful pull factor, with 100% of respondents in one study agreeing on their intention to migrate for these reasons^[1]. The prospect of higher wages and diverse employment in non-agricultural sectors is a strong magnet, as urban areas offer a wider range of jobs in industries, trade, transport, and services^[10].

3.2 Social and Educational Drivers

Social and educational factors play a crucial role in shaping migration decisions. The lack of quality educational facilities in rural areas compels many youth to migrate to urban centers for higher education^[10]. After completing their education, many choose to settle in cities for livelihood, further contributing to the urban population^[10]. The desire for "better education opportunities" was a significant pull factor for 91.74% of youth in one study^[5]. Access to better medical facilities in urban areas also acts as a strong pull factor, cited by 77.06% of respondents^[5]. Beyond basic amenities, the pursuit of social prestige is a subtle yet influential factor, with 63.76% of youth indicating a desire to gain more social standing in urban settings^[5].

The influence of mass media and globalization has made rural youth increasingly aware of the numerous facilities and modern lifestyles available in urban areas, significantly increasing their migration aspirations^[5].

Other social push factors include the perception that "village life is full of boredom" (47.71% of respondents) and a desire "to get rid of traditional value system" (43.58% of respondents)^[5]. The lack of recreational opportunities and perceived less freedom in rural areas can further aggravate the cause of migration^[5].

3.3 Environmental and Demographic Drivers

Environmental factors, particularly those exacerbated by climate change, are increasingly acting as significant push factors. Climate change and environmental degradation are identified as root causes of migration^[9]. Record high temperatures and unpredictable cycles of drought and flooding destabilize crops, a primary source of employment, putting millions at risk^[14]. Rural populations, whose livelihoods depend on agriculture, are particularly vulnerable to these pressures^[9]. "Highly dependent on weather in farming" was a push factor for 72.94% of youth^[5]. Slow-onset changes like sea-level rise, salinization, and desertification also contribute to displacement^[15].

Demographic shifts within rural areas also contribute to migration. There is a declining interest in farming among youth, driven by the perception of better opportunities elsewhere^[5]. India is reportedly losing over 2,000 farmers daily, with the overall number of farmers dropping by 15 million since 1991^[5]. The "changing demography of Indian agriculture" is occurring at a rapid pace, with masses of people quitting agriculture^[13].

Intra-rural inequality has also been identified as a major cause of rural-urban migration^[13]. The fragmentation of landholdings and land scarcity further limit opportunities in agriculture^[2].

3.4 Regional Variations

Migration patterns and their underlying causes exhibit significant regional variations across India. Studies focusing on Empowered Action Group (EAG) states (Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Uttaranchal, Rajasthan, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh) highlight these as major sources of out-migration^[16]. These states are characterized by lower socio-demographic indices and slower development rates, with reasons for high out-migration including sick industries, underdeveloped agriculture, and poor transport and communication facilities.¹⁶ Uttar Pradesh and Bihar alone account for 23% and 13% of total out-migration, respectively^[16].

Conversely, economically more developed states such as Maharashtra, Delhi, Haryana, Gujarat, Punjab, Karnataka, and West Bengal show high volumes of in-migration.¹⁶ These states, with their major urban, administrative, and business centers, act as powerful magnets for migrants from the rural agricultural areas of backward states.¹⁶ For instance, Maharashtra accounts for 19.88% and Delhi for 12.85% of total in-migrants^[16].

Intra-state migrations are also significant, particularly in Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Gujarat, and Madhya Pradesh, with Uttar Pradesh having the highest share (14.92%)^[16]. The sex ratio of migrants also varies regionally; while overall in-migration is female-dominated (often due to marriage), inter-state out-migration

is predominantly male, driven by employment and education opportunities ^[10]. These regional disparities underscore the need for context-specific policy interventions.

4. Consequences of Rural Youth Migration in India

The large-scale migration of rural youth has profound and dual-natured consequences, impacting both the rural areas of origin and the urban centers of destination. While some effects can be beneficial, many pose significant challenges to sustainable development.

4.1 Impact on Rural Areas

The departure of young people from rural communities leads to significant demographic shifts. Out-migration results in population loss, particularly of the working-age population, leading to generational imbalances where older demographics are left behind ^[6]. This can create a shortage of skilled labor in these regions ^[6]. While male migration for employment is common, female mobility is predominantly driven by marriage and family-related movements ^[10]. The migration of youth leads to an increase in female-headed households and leaves more aged people to accomplish farming tasks, especially those traditionally reserved for youth, which can reduce agricultural production due to lack of family labor ^[5].

The agricultural sector bears a significant impact. Migration causes substantial agricultural labor shortages, threatening the foundation of rural economies ^[6]. This shortage can hamper crucial farming operations like planting and harvesting, potentially leading to lower agricultural yields and financial losses ^[11]. High wages and input prices, partly driven by labor scarcity, also limit the labor pool and lower agricultural output ^[11]. The loss of human capital and skilled labor in rural areas also means a loss of talent and skills that could otherwise contribute to local development ^[6].

4.2 Impact on Urban Centers

The influx of rural migrants places immense infrastructure strain on urban areas. Rapid population growth often exceeds planned capacity, exerting pressure on existing physical and social infrastructure, including housing, transport, sanitation, and healthcare services ^[6]. This leads to increased competition for jobs, houses, and school facilities ^[11]. A common outcome of unregulated urban migration is the emergence of slums and shanty colonies, where migrants live in impoverished neighborhoods with inadequate infrastructure, threatening their health and the environment ^[6]. Overcrowding also leads to the over-exploitation of natural resources, such as groundwater, and contributes to increased air pollution and unmanaged waste, significantly deteriorating the urban environment ^[6].

Social integration challenges are also prevalent. Migration changes population distribution, leading to uneven population densities across India ^[11]. While migration can foster cultural exchange and diversity, it can also lead to social tensions, discrimination, and exclusion of migrants if they are not adequately integrated into the host society ^[6]. Many migrants, particularly those with limited education, may struggle to adapt to urban life, lacking basic knowledge and life skills, and facing difficulties in securing decent jobs ^[11]. This can lead to increased urban poverty, violence, inequality, and exploitation ^[11]. The separation of families, particularly in cases of long-term migration, can lead to

emotional and social challenges for both migrants and those left behind ^[6].

4.3 Socio-Economic Impact of Remittances

Remittances, the money sent by migrants to their families in rural areas, have a significant socio-economic impact. They play a vital role in helping rural communities and can reduce poverty and increase the standard of living ^[11]. Remittances contribute to financial inflows in rural areas, helping households financially ^[11]. They can also be reinvested as agricultural inputs, potentially enhancing agricultural output ^[11]. Studies show that remittances can significantly impact rising farm income, increasing cultivable land, livestock, and vegetable production ^[18]. They also contribute to fulfilling various household expenditures and mitigating food scarcity caused by crop damage due to natural disasters ^[18].

However, remittances also have a dual effect and can lead to rural dependency ^[13]. If the urban job market becomes unstable, families reliant on remittances can become vulnerable to economic shocks and poverty ^[13]. Remittances may also cause a labor shortage in the agricultural industry by reducing the incentive for work among family members left behind, potentially increasing the number of dependent household members ^[11]. While remittances support rural development by reducing urban-rural income disparities and regional inequalities, and boosting consumption and investment ^[19], some analyses suggest that migration, despite remittances, is not always economically justified in the long run, as it creates issues such as regional imbalance, overcrowded urbanization, and growing demand for socio-economic and health infrastructure, leading to fiscal problems for public authorities ^[18].

5. Solutions and Policy Interventions

Addressing rural youth migration in India requires a multi-pronged approach that focuses on making rural areas more attractive and sustainable, thereby transforming migration from a necessity into a choice. This involves targeted interventions in rural development, skill enhancement, employment generation, and climate resilience.

5.1 Rural development and agricultural transformation

To retain youth in rural areas and ensure food security, it is crucial to enhance agricultural productivity and profitability. This includes introducing modern farming techniques, advanced irrigation systems, and high-yield crop varieties ^[6]. Policies should aim to provide remunerative prices for farm produce, not just cereals but also pulses, oilseeds, and horticultural products, through mechanisms like Realistic Support Price (RSP) and effective procurement policies.³ Promoting crop diversification to include lower water and carbon footprint commodities can enhance soil fertility and mitigate climate change effects ^[3].

Encouraging integrated and intensified farming systems with on-farm processing can make farming more lucrative ^[3]. Allied activities such as horticulture, medicinal and aromatic crop cultivation, dairying, and fisheries can substantially enhance farmer income ^[3]. Value addition to harvested biomass and using crop residues for feed and manures can further improve productivity and income ^[3].

The establishment of cluster-based facilities including collection centers, grading and sorting centers, cold storage, packaging units, and quality control facilities will minimize

post-harvest losses and reduce transport costs for agro-produce.³ Price discovery through agro-commodity exchanges and promoting contract/cooperative farming and direct purchase of farm produce at appropriate prices will support higher income realization for farmers^[3].

5.2 Skill Enhancement and Employment Generation

A key strategy is to engage rural youth in secondary and specialty agriculture by providing proper incentives^[3]. This involves multifarious activities around the "plough to plate" concept, making farming both attractive and lucrative^[3].

Skill development and vocational training are crucial for enhancing employability outside traditional agriculture. Programs like the Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY) train rural youth in various trades, enhancing their employability and creating job opportunities beyond agriculture^[20]. DDU-GKY aims to reduce rural-urban migration by promoting employment within rural areas, thereby alleviating pressure on urban infrastructure^[21]. It also seeks to bridge the skill gap between industry requirements and the available skill base in rural areas^[21]. While DDU-GKY has shown positive outcomes in reducing poverty and migration, challenges such as ensuring quality training, addressing skill mismatches, and strengthening industry linkages need continuous improvement^[21].

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is another significant initiative, providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment per year to rural households^[20]. This scheme enhances livelihood security through unskilled manual work, reduces poverty, and supports rural infrastructure development^[20]. Studies suggest MGNREGA has contributed positively to mitigating rural distress and reducing rural-urban migration in certain contexts^[23]. It has also shown positive impacts on household income, food security, and health, particularly for women and disadvantaged groups^[23].

Other initiatives include the Skill Training of Rural Youth (STRY) program, which provides short-term training to young individuals in agriculture, agribusiness, and allied sectors to foster self-employment or secure jobs^[25]. The Agri-Clinics and Agri-Business Centres Scheme trains agricultural graduates to establish business units, providing subsidies and credit facilities^[26].

Project ARYA (Attracting and Retaining Youth in Agriculture) specifically aims to engage and empower rural youth in agricultural and related economic activities, creating jobs and ensuring stable income.²⁶

5.3 Infrastructure and Governance Improvement

Strengthening rural infrastructure is fundamental. This includes improving road connectivity (e.g., Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana-PMGSY), ensuring reliable electricity and water supply, and expanding digital infrastructure to bridge the digital divide^[6]. Better infrastructure makes rural areas more self-sufficient and less dependent on migration for basic services^[6].

Improving healthcare access through initiatives like the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) is vital, focusing on primary healthcare facilities, telemedicine, and mobile health units^[20]. Similarly, enhancing financial inclusion through programs like Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana and MUDRA can increase access to banking and microfinance

services for rural populations^[4].

Decentralization of governance, empowering Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) to make decisions on local development, can ensure more effective implementation of schemes^[4]. Encouraging public-private partnerships for infrastructure development and service delivery can also leverage additional resources and expertise^[4]. Implementing inclusive policies that address the needs of both rural and urban populations, such as the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) for housing, contributes to balanced development^[4].

5.4 Addressing Climate-Induced Migration

Given the escalating impact of climate change on rural livelihoods, specific interventions are needed to build resilience. This involves developing livelihood strategies for those who choose to stay, those on the move, and those returning to their rural roots^[14]. Strengthening the climate resilience of vulnerable households in rural areas is paramount^[14].

This includes improving access to information on climate-smart agriculture for rural people through mobile migration resource centers and community-led knowledge-sharing mechanisms^[14]. Enhancing the capacity of state and local stakeholders, including policymakers, to tackle the challenges and seize opportunities at the nexus of climate change, rural livelihoods, and human mobility is also critical^[14]. Policies should focus on helping rural communities better prevent and prepare for disasters and other crises, developing more resilient agricultural livelihoods, and systematically integrating migration, climate change, and agriculture into rural development and poverty reduction programs^[9].

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The migration of rural youth in India is a defining socio-economic phenomenon, driven by a complex interplay of economic necessity, social aspiration, environmental vulnerability, and demographic shifts. The analysis reveals that the allure of better economic opportunities, superior education, and improved living standards in urban centers acts as a powerful magnet, while the precarity of agricultural livelihoods, limited non-farm employment, and inadequate social infrastructure in rural areas serve as significant push factors. The distinction between "fully migrated" and "partially migrated" youth underscores that mobility is often a dynamic survival strategy, not always a permanent break from rural ties. This large-scale movement, a "silent exodus", profoundly impacts both rural areas through population loss and agricultural labor shortages, and urban centers through infrastructure strain and social integration challenges. While remittances offer a vital economic lifeline to rural households, they can also foster dependency and exacerbate labor scarcity. To foster a more balanced and equitable national development trajectory, it is imperative to shift rural youth migration from a necessity to a genuine choice. This requires a holistic and integrated policy approach that recognizes the deep interconnectedness of rural and urban destinies.

Based on the comprehensive analysis, the following recommendations are put forth:-

Strengthen Rural Economic Viability

- **Diversify Rural Livelihoods:** Implement policies that

promote non-agricultural enterprises, agro-processing industries, and rural entrepreneurship. This reduces over-reliance on agriculture and creates diverse, stable income streams for youth.

- **Enhance Agricultural Profitability:** Invest in modern agricultural techniques, improved irrigation, and high-yield varieties. Crucially, ensure remunerative prices for farm produce through effective market linkages, cold chain infrastructure, and agro-commodity exchanges to make farming a truly attractive and viable profession for young people.
- **Improve Access to Financial Services:** Expand microfinance, credit, and insurance schemes tailored for rural youth and small farmers, enabling them to invest in their livelihoods and mitigate risks.

Invest in rural human capital and social infrastructure:

- **Quality Education and Skill Development:** Expand access to quality education, including vocational training and digital literacy programs, in rural areas. Tailor skill development initiatives (e.g., DDU-GKY, STRY) to meet local and regional market demands, ensuring employability within or near their communities.
- **Improve Healthcare and Basic Amenities:** Prioritize investment in rural healthcare facilities, sanitation, clean water, and reliable electricity. Bridging the rural-urban gap in basic services is essential to improve quality of life and reduce the pull of cities.
- **Foster Social Inclusion and Opportunities:** Address social inequalities and provide platforms for youth engagement in local governance and community development. Promote recreational and cultural activities to enhance the vibrancy of rural life and counter perceptions of boredom.

Build climate resilience and sustainable rural development:-

- **Climate-Smart Agriculture:** Promote and support the adoption of climate-resilient agricultural practices, drought-proofing measures, and water conservation techniques to stabilize farm incomes and reduce vulnerability to environmental shocks.
- **Early Warning Systems and Adaptive Capacity:** Strengthen community-level preparedness for natural disasters and provide resources for adaptation strategies, reducing the imperative for distress migration due to environmental factors.
- **Integrated Land and Water Management:** Implement sustainable resource management practices to prevent degradation and ensure long-term availability of natural resources crucial for rural livelihoods.

Optimize Migration Outcomes

- **Support Circular Migration:** Recognize and support the benefits of partial or circular migration by facilitating safe, dignified, and informed movement. This includes providing pre-migration counseling, skill validation, and access to social protection in both origin and destination areas.
- **Leverage Remittances for Productive Investment:** Develop mechanisms to channel remittances into productive investments in rural areas, such as small

businesses, agricultural improvements, and community infrastructure, rather than solely for consumption.

- **Promote Realistic Information:** Counter idealized perceptions of urban life by providing comprehensive and realistic information about the challenges and opportunities associated with urban migration, enabling youth to make well-informed decisions.

By implementing these integrated and targeted interventions, India can foster dynamic, resilient rural economies and communities where young people perceive genuine opportunities for growth and prosperity. This approach will not only alleviate the pressures on urban infrastructure but also ensure a more balanced and sustainable development path for the entire nation, transforming rural youth migration from an unavoidable exodus into a strategic choice for a better future.

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