The inequality of opportunities for Rural and Urban Youth in education and livelihoods[[1]](#footnote-1)

by

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Abstract

*The inequality is generally measured in terms of outcomes like income, education level, and quality of assets people own and so on. However the outcome is the result of efforts a person make under the circumstances in which a person lives. The circumstances on which a person does not have control influence the outcome to a great extent. These circumstances provide or limit the ‘opportunities’ for a person to drive life progress – better education, health, amenities and so on. The research was conceptualized to look at the opportunities and not the efforts. This research was undertaken to understand the difference in the opportunities for education and livelihoods that the urban and rural youth have and also if there are constrains children have by being born as boy or girl and in different socio-economic status families. The primary data was collected by in-depth interviews through a structured questionnaire from 200 youth equally distributed in rural and urban area of Dausa and Alwar in Rajasthan. It was supplemented by focused group discussions with youth of the area. The data has shown that a child by being born in rural areas and in socially & economically challenged family and to less educated parents has low chances of getting educated and better livelihoods compared to a child born to educated parents and socially and economically better off family. It is also found that many of the opportunities have strong inter-relationships for example poor economic condition leading to early marriage of children which causes dropping of child from school and taking up low paying wage labor as livelihood. The study has not included the difference of educational physical infrastructure like number of class rooms, equipments in schools etc. It also came out very clearly that the youth are far more educated compared to their parents both in rural and urban areas. In terms of the livelihoods also the current generation has better livelihoods compared to the parents. It seems that to have inclusive growth, the opportunity gaps that youth face, have to be addressed, and sooner.*

Introduction

There has always been inequality in society. And the study of inequality has also been a topic of interest for researchers. The inequality is usually measured by the outcomes like the status of income, assets, level of education, and status of health and so on. The outcome is the result of effort and opportunity. Similar efforts by two people having different set of circumstances like place of birth (rural/urban), caste and religion in which s/he is born, gender (born as male or female), economic status of family and so on; do not result into similar outcome. There are these ‘circumstances’ beyond the control of a person that create opportunities; which along with the efforts lead to the status/ outcome.

The difference of the opportunities can be because of various circumstances like place of birth, caste, religion, sex etc. Therefore if the development has to be for all, irrespective of caste, religion, sex, rural/urban etc. then the difference of the opportunities that the different set of people have, has to be known. Then possibly suitable actions can be taken to create a situation where everyone has similar opportunities. If that happens, then one can say that the inequality would be only because of the difference in the efforts made by different people.

In India one of the important area for research has been to understand the rural and urban settings separately. Though urbanization is increasing at a fast rate but even now almost 65% people in India live in rural areas. There is a massive difference of the level of infrastructure and civic facilities that exist in urban and rural areas. Also there is heavy migration of people from rural to urban for the wages and also for availing better opportunities of education, livelihoods, health and so on.

It is normally alleged that the country (India) is slowly heading towards two separate countries within –one is ‘India’ (of people who have resources and influence) and the other is ‘Bharat’ (of poor and marginalised). The bigger issue is that it seems that ‘India’ is developing at the cost of ‘Bharat’. But there are recent reports that the number of ‘poor’ is constantly decreasing in India. There is no authentic data to prove or disprove whether the poor are progressing at the same pace at which rich are progressing. But it is certain that India needs more inclusive growth. And for inclusive growth to happen, it is also a truth that all should have ‘equal opportunities’, at least to the extent possible! High population of illiterate or poorly educated youth might become a liability, rather than the asset for a country. Well educated workforce is essential for economic growth of any area; therefore it should be a matter of concern for the policy makers to reduce the gap in rural and urban areas.

The livelihoods opportunities of a youth is also guided/ influenced by the cultural factors in the society. Traditionally the caste of a person used to dictate the kind of work s/he will take up as livelihood. For example a Gurjar and Yadav will take up animal rearing and sell the milk and milk products; a Bania will do trading, Brahmin will do teaching, and a Dalit will take up cleaning, leather work, Kumawat and Prajapati will be mason and make earthen pots and so on. The skills required for such livelihoods will be transferred to next generation by parents along with the knowledge of business and clients database. It will be interesting to see if the cultural and caste factors still provide/ limit opportunities for the youth.

Vikas Anvesh Foundation (VAF) – a Pune based development research organisation decided to undertake research on this issue and we decided to take northern Rajasthan as one of the location to explore the gap in the opportunities that rural and urban youth have in terms of education and livelihoods.

Objectives of the Research:

This research is done to develop an understanding on the difference of opportunities that youth faces to pursue education and livelihoods. A child born in a remote rural area, as a girl, to illiterate parents and in socio-economic marginalised family might have less opportunity to pursue higher education and have better career than a child born as a boy in a city to educated and high socio-economic status parents. Then there are a number of factors like availability of good guidance while selecting the subjects to study, guidance to choose the career or to set up an enterprise, access to finance, educational and economic status of parents, level of confidence and exposure etc. that play very crucial role in education and livelihoods of people. Also there is inter-relationship among these factors e.g. inability of parents to pay for high quality education or burden of earning on child at early age leads to drop outs from schools and such children end up taking up low paying manual work and complete lack of confidence.

This study was taken up with an objective of finding out above mentioned factors that children face by being born in different geographies (rural/ urban), in different castes/ religion, and in families having different socio-economic setting. It is also expected that the findings of the study will help in suggesting as what actions the state or policy makers can take to provide equal opportunities to children (level playing field) of different socio-economic families.

Methodology and research tools

In-depth interview of 200 youth from rural and urban area with a structured questionnaire were conducted. Additionally, focused group discussions were held with mixed groups (men and women of different age and of different economic background, different caste/ religion. The FGDs were conducted prior to the in-depth interviews and the outcome of the FGDs was used to design the questionnaire.

The Location (Geographical area) and Profile of the Participants

The data is collected from two locations in Rajasthan – Alwar and Dausa districts. 100 interviews were conducted in Alwar district (50 from Alwar City and 50 from villages in the district. Similarly 50 interviews were done in Dausa Town and 50 from villages in the district.

Both these location were selected purposely as there is significant population of Meo Muslims is Alwar and we thought that relevant data will be generated from the youth belonging to minority group as well. Dausa district is closer to the state capital i.e. Jaipur and also there is significant population of SC/ST in the area so we thought that data on the youth belonging to SC/ST along with minority will also be captured in the study.

The respondents selected for the in-depth interviews were in the age range of 18 to 25 years and the median age is 23 years. Though the efforts were made to interview equal number of women but it could not be done because most women approached for the interviews declined to participate in the study. Only 8% respondents were women.

Almost half (47%) of the respondents were married, and many of them married at very young age of 17-18 years. In later analysis we will see if the marriage at young age affected the education and livelihoods opportunities of such youth.

All caste and minority are well represented in the sample as it can be seen from the chart above that 14% are from minority, 30% from other backward caste (OBC), 26% from SC, 9% from ST and 20% from higher castes. 84% of the respondents are from above poverty line and 16% are from BPL. Within BPL- 9% are from poorest of the poor and 7% are poor.

Almost 84% of the respondents are more than 10th class pass (45% graduates and above) and only 3% are illiterate and 12% are educated till primary level. In 80% of the respondents, father is the head of the family and in 10% household mother is the head of the family. The average size of the family is 6 people and the average number of siblings is 3. 90% of youth had parents with them (one or both) and 10% grew up with grand parents or other relatives.

Research Findings:

**Positive correlation between education status and monthly income**

The level of the education has direct relationship with the income level of the youth. For respondents who were below primary level, the monthly income is Rs. 6000/- and for primary level it is Rs. 6500/-. But for youth who are educated till 10th class and 12th class, the average monthly income increases to Rs. 8000/-. And for graduates and above, it increases to Rs. 12,000/- pm. Thus the education seems to be an important factor deciding the monthly income and also nature of the livelihoods of the youth. The illiterate and less educated youth are engaged in agriculture and daily wages and the better educated youth (10th, 12th and graduates are either in salaried jobs or have set up their own small enterprises. There is a positive correlation (+.534) between the education status and monthly income of the youth.

**Early marriage is an impediment in education and livelihoods of youth**

Early marriage is one of the situations that close a lot of opportunities for youth in Rajasthan. Out of total 50 respondents who less than 21 years in age 15 were already married, this is very high percentage (30%) of youth getting married at early stage. This is more in Muslims, there are total 13 Muslim respondents of less than 21 years of age and 9 of them are already married, it is 69%. And 67% of these youths are with up to primary level of education or illiterate. In other words, 69% of Muslim youth got married at less than 21 years of age compared to 30% of total youth getting married at same age in the study area. Once the youth gets married, s/he gets additional responsibility of earning and they drop out of the schools. The low level of education practically closes their chances of getting any job either in government or in private sector. It is also worth mentioning that 90% of these Muslim youth are from rural areas.

**Early marriage is predominantly in rural area**, out of 15 youth who got married at less than 21 years age, 10 are from rural youth i.e. **67% from rural and 33% from urban**. And the decision of the marriage is taken by parents and relatives on which the youth has almost no control.

**Distance of School/ college and its impact on education**

Distance of school/ college and the mode of transportation is another important factor that affects the probability of a child to get educated. In the study area, there is no college within the village and therefore the rural children have to either live in city or travel daily to get college education. **90% of urban youth have the college within 5 kms distance whereas 53% rural youth have college at distance of 15-20 Kms** and 35% have to travel more than 20 kms to go to the college. The distances get slightly reduced as we go to intermediate and higher secondary schools. And in case of primary schools the distance is same for rural and urban children.

**Where did the youth of different caste/religion study?**

Overall, 55% of respondent youth have studied in government schools and 45% in private schools. The youth belonging to general category generally study in private schools (73% of them) whereas the Muslim youth study in government schools (71% of them) and only 29% study in private schools. In case of OBC youth, 50% study in government and 50% in private schools. Majority of the SC and ST youth (67%) study in government schools. Generally the quality of education in government schools is considered of low quality compared to that of private schools. The school education provides the foundation to the education and probably that is the reason that the youth of general and OBC category reach up to intermediate and graduation whereas the Muslim and SC/ST youth either drop out at primary level or complete maximum up to 10th standard. The low education then adversely impacts the chances of better quality livelihoods.

If we look at the rural and urban youth and see the type of school they studied, it becomes clear that the **more rural children study in government school and urban children study more in private schools**. And if the average monthly income of rural youth and urban youth is looked in to, it seems that children educated in private schools earn better. In **rural schools the presence of teachers is more irregular (16% respondents reported) compared to urban schools (6% respondents reported)**

It is interesting to see that 3% of the youth studied are below primary (almost illiterate) and 100% of them are from Muslim (83%) and SC (17%) community. Similarly 12% youth are of primary level educated and 83% of them are from Muslim (50%) and SC (33%). The youth from General Category and OBC are better educated- graduates and intermediate.

The chart below gives a clear picture of the educational standard of the youth belonging to different caste categories.

There is negative correlation (-.386) between education level of the youth and the size of the family; which means that the bigger the family size, less educated are the youth. This is probably because of the poor economic condition of the family which forces the youth to start earning at early age. Also there is negative correlation (-.253) between education level of youth and the number of siblings. This might also be because a family with limited resources is not able to provide better education to so many children and the elder child in the family is required to take care of younger children when parents go out to earn livelihoods. This argument is reinforced when we see a positive correlation (+.239) between ‘education status of youth’ with the ‘monthly income of the family head’.

**Whether the youth have completed their primary education on time?**

Overall 83% youth completed their primary education on time. But if we look at the caste/religion of the respondents, it is mainly the youth belonging to ST (32%) and Muslims (19%) who could not complete their primary education on time. This might be an important factor leading to positive or negative attitude of youth towards education.

About 35% of girls could not complete their primary education on time compared to 15% boys who could not do so. Similarly if we look at this issue from the rural-urban angle, **20% of rural children could not complete primary education on time compared to 14% of urban children of the sample**. And 35 % of such children are from the BPL families. Therefore it is clear that the poor rural children from marginalised social categories and from female gender are most likely that they are not able to complete their primary education on time.

**Contrast (for better) in education level of Parents and Youth**

It is very interesting to look at the education level of youth and their parents together. Almost half (46.3%) of the parents are illiterate & below primary, 33% are 10th standard and above, graduates are only 10.5%. The education status totally changes (for better) in next generation. The youth are better educated, more than 84% youth are educated 10th class and above and 44% are graduates and above. It clearly shows that educational opportunities for youth have undoubtedly increased in one generation.

**Education Level of Rural and Urban Parents**

The rural parents are more illiterate and less educated compared to their urban counterparts. In rural youth 62% of the parents are illiterate whereas in urban youth only 29% parents are illiterate. Even if educated, 64% of rural parents are educated till primary level, 29% are 10th & 12th level and only 7% are graduate and above. Whereas in urban 30% are till primary level, 45% are 10th & 12th and 25% are graduate and above. This is one of the factors contributing to low level of education of rural children and that leading to low monthly earning.

The **education opportunity is better for urban youth compared to the rural youth. Where 30% of rural youth are graduates and above, the graduate and above urban youth are 53.5%.** There are 6% rural youth who are below primary but there is none in this category in urban. Similarly about 30% rural youth are in primary and 10th class pass but only 20% of urban youth are in this category.

From the FGDs, it also came out that it is **difficult for rural schools to attract and retain good quality teachers.** Frequent change in the teachers adversely impacts the educational quality and outcome. Many a times a teacher in rural area is given the task of teaching many subjects, even the subjects which are not known to the teacher. There are colleges where only a few courses are offered because there is no faculty for other courses like science, mathematics and commerce. Only subjects like history, geography and political science are offered in rural area.

**Why youth leave studies?**

Main reason for the youth leaving studies in between are a) Poor economic condition of the family, b) Family problems (it is also somewhat related to poor economic condition, because children feel pressure to work and earn to contribute in family income or to take care of siblings when parents go out for work), c) not interested in studies and d) weak in studies or having failed in class. Early marriage is also important factor especially for women and Muslim youth.

**Attitude of youth towards education**

It is encouraging to see that almost 2/3rd of the youth interviewed have positive or very positive attitude towards education. But about 30% youth have neutral attitude towards education which means that they do not see much benefit of education or think that education is not going to help them in building a career. About 7% youth have negative attitude for education meaning that they believe that there is no use of education. From the discussion with the youth it came out clearly that some youth who were weak in studies and were from economically weak background, from minority or lower social status slowly developed negative attitude.

It is interesting to find out that out of the 13 youth having negative attitude towards education, 70% of them are those whose parents are illiterate; and 92% of them have studied in government schools (even 67% of youth who showed neutral attitude towards education have studied in government schools), 38% of them are Muslim and 32% are from ST. On the other hand the youth whose parents are literate and are from higher socio-economic background have positive attitude towards education.

**Subjects chosen by youth after 10th standard**

The career in terms of employment opportunity largely depends on the subjects studied by children after 10th class. The science and commerce subjects have higher scope for career as engineers, doctors, chartered accountants and so on. Even the civil services examinations which are open to graduates in any subjects are now predominantly cracked by engineers and doctor graduates. From this study it came out clearly that only 18% children after 10th class take up science subjects and 14% take up commerce. Majority (65%) take up arts subjects. There are mainly three reasons for that- firstly there is **huge shortage of experienced and qualified teachers of science subjects especially in rural area**; secondly the educational foundation of majority of the children is so weak that they are not able to muster the courage to venture for science subjects and thirdly, the study of science subjects is costly- even the college fee is higher for science subjects compared to arts subjects, then there are expenses on practical, books, additional coaching and so on. One of the youth said, “*higher education is just a formality, what we need is a degree and in any case we get the job by strong recommendation and paying heavy bribe*”.

Access to ‘experienced teachers’- most teachers like to get posted in towns and cities because they want to provide modern amenities to their wards. Government forces new teachers to spend initial 3-5 years in rural areas and therefore the **students in rural areas often have new and less experienced teachers.** The quality of education and the subjects chosen (arts) is not good enough to get them employment in private jobs. *Who will hire a BA if they can get engineers and B Sc graduates- said a respondent.*

**Who guides the youth to select the livelihoods/ career**

There is practically no one to guide them. 65% of the youth reported that they themselves decide what to do and 27% get guidance from parents and relatives, 7% are guided by friends and 4% by their teachers. In the focused group discussions also this issue came up very prominently that the youth in rural areas have very little guidance available. In fact the livelihoods stream is more or less decided by the education, the subjects a child chooses and the level of education. As the rural parents they are either illiterate or low educated, they are not in a position to guide their children. **Even the educated rural youth have no idea about the possible livelihoods opportunities and their vision is limited to government jobs.**

**In the opinion of youth, what are the livelihoods opportunities for them?**

We asked this question to the youth to understand the level of ‘knowledge about livelihoods opportunities’ they have. Also we believe that the person will make efforts only if one knows about the options. Also we thought that the rural and urban youth might have different types of livelihoods opportunities in mind for them and the awareness and knowledge is built by the exposure and interaction that they have within friends and family circles. So the knowledge of livelihoods options itself is an opportunity which is different for youth living in different location, caste, religion and so on. This was open ended question and a number of responses came from youth.

It is interesting to find out that 60% youth see small enterprises like general store, cloth shop, shoe shop, photocopy shop etc. as livelihood option for youth. 56% youth told white collar job in government and private like teacher, clerk, policeman, security guard, army etc. as the other major livelihood. 36% youth said blue collar job like mechanic, helper etc., and only 5% youth said agriculture & animal husbandry as livelihoods option. 15% told trading as livelihoods career and 14% as service providers like tailor, electrician, photographer etc as livelihoods option for youth.

**The rural youth predominantly think that the government jobs, service providers, small enterprises and agriculture are livelihoods options for youth while urban youth think government jobs, bigger enterprises, high end services are livelihoods options.**

**How about new livelihoods?**

When youth were asked if they would like to take up new livelihoods, 47% said yes. The main reason for thinking of new livelihoods are- the existing livelihoods are less paying, more risky, uncertain and irregular etc. About 42% of them want to switch over to small enterprises and 25% to regular jobs in private and government. This indicates their choice for better income and secures livelihoods.

Most of the youth have not been able to take up new livelihoods because a) they do not have access to capital for investing in the enterprises, b) not able to find suitable place to start the enterprise, c) lack guidance and d) lack courage to take plunge in the new venture. Those who want to go for government or private job, they are trying hard.

**Current occupation of youth**

The youth are engaged in a variety of tasks depending on their educational qualification and circumstantial opportunities. Surprisingly 40% of them are currently unemployed. This is the group which is educated (12th and graduates) and they are preparing for the examinations for government jobs. The normal trend in the area is that the youth keep on trying for government jobs and only a few lucky ones get the government job. Once they have passed the eligible age for a government job, they will then either continues their efforts for private job or will start a small enterprise like a shop, juice corner or tea stall etc.

22% of the youth interviewed have small enterprise as their occupation, followed by 16% each as salaried workers and casual wage earners. Only 6% are working as farmers. The difference in the occupation of the youth is more visible if we look at the occupation of rural youth and urban youth separately.

**Livelihoods of the Head of the Family in Rural and Urban areas**

The types of the occupation of the rural and urban parents are very different and this difference in the occupation type of rural and urban youth continues, except that equal number/ % age of youth in rural and urban are unemployed. Almost 40% urban parents have regular wages whereas it is only 15% of rural parents in this category. 26% of urban parents are in white collar jobs compared to only 9% of rural parents. Similarly 36% rural parents have agriculture as occupation compared to 10% in urban parents. When the occupation of the youth and parents across rural and urban is seen together, an interesting situation emerges. The agriculture as occupation has gone down from 36% (parents) to 11.3% (youth) in rural.

**Education Level and Livelihoods of youth**

It is very interesting that 55% of the unemployed youth are graduates and above. If we include the 12th pass youth in this then 90% of the unemployed are 12th pass and graduates & above. It must be explained here that it does not mean that the higher education leads to unemployment. The data also shows that 65% of youth having salaried jobs are ‘graduates’ and 20% are 12th pass. So it means that there are less jobs of the liking of the graduates available compared to the number of youth doing graduation and youth having educated to 12th and graduation, prefer to wait for salaried jobs rather than taking up ‘any type’ of livelihoods.

The small enterprises are also taken up predominantly by better educated (comparatively) youth. 60% of the enterprises are set up by graduates and 25% by 12th pass youth. Agriculture, casual wages and services are provided by less educated youth say primary and up to 10th pass. Also only very few less educated youth are unemployed, they seem to be taking up any work available for the livelihoods.

If the parents of a child are educated then there is likelihood of the child also getting more education. There is a positive correlation (+.338) between education status of the ‘parent’ and that of the ‘youth’.

Conclusion

The children born in socially and economically marginalised families are found less educated compared to other children. There are a variety of factors that are contributing to this situation. For example higher percentage of girls, Muslim and Scheduled Tribe youth could not complete primary education at right age and that led to ‘loss of interest in education’ and negative attitude towards education. Early marriage especially in Muslim youth and compulsion of earning at early age is leading to dropping out of school. The rural children mostly study in government schools where the presence of teachers is irregular compared to private schools. There is complete lack of guidance to youth about which subjects they should study and the various livelihoods options they have. In fact, majority of educated youth especially in rural area consider ‘government jobs’ as the sole livelihood option and they continue following it, there are more than 40% youth who are unemployed and most of them are graduates and above. About half of the youth wish to take up new livelihoods like small enterprises etc. but the major constraint is ‘lack of access to capital’ and ‘guidance’. The present youth is better educated than their parents both in rural and urban areas and their aspirations are also high. Youth belonging to SC and ST are still lowly educated and mostly engaged in irregular wage labor.

Though the influence of the caste and cultural factors on the selection of the livelihoods of youth is reducing with time and technology but it is still there. Now it is not only because of the caste alone that a Dalit will take up leather work as livelihoods but it is also the knowledge of the trade and the contacts, familiarity of the trade channels etc. that influences him/her to take up the parental business as livelihoods. At least in rural areas, the parental livelihood is still among the first options of the livelihoods.

For ensuring inclusive growth, the difference of the opportunities that different youth have, should be further studied and appropriate policies and programs should be rolled out to create a scenario where everyone has equal opportunities, at least to the extent possible. The rural areas need regular teachers and of all subjects especially of science, mathematics etc. so that children in rural area can take up these subjects after 10th class. The timely counseling for kids who are dropping out of schools because they have failed in class or they get married at early stage will be highly useful. It came out very clearly that the education status has highly positive correlation with earning/ livelihoods and therefore every child should get equal opportunity to be educated.

1. Thanks to Nikhil Dhanda for immense support in Data Analysis and inputs in writing this paper; also thanks to VAF and Minaj Singh for developing the concept, designing the study tools and special thanks to investigators and respondents in Alwar and Dausa [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
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