

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON THE YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN NORTH-EAST INDIA

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Abstract

While the population is growing quickly and education is improving, work prospects remain limited due to economic underdevelopment, perpetuating the problem of youth and educated unemployment. Most states in the Northeast have worse educated and youth unemployment than the rest of the country. Most of the Northeastern states, as well as the rest of the country, saw a higher rate of youth unemployment in urban regions than in rural ones, and among women than among men. Educated unemployment is common in both rural and urban areas, but it disproportionately affects women in many Northeastern states.

Keywords : *North-East India, Workforce, Industry, Determinants*

1. INTRODUCTION

Since India's independence, widespread unemployment and underemployment, as well as poverty, have been two of the country's greatest obstacles to development planning. Thus, previous five-year plans have focused primarily on reducing poverty and eliminating unemployment. These two issues are still present, albeit to varying degrees and breadths in different parts of the country. The majority of these states can be found in the North Eastern Region (NER), which is widely regarded as the most economically developed of the country's poorer regions.

The NE region of India consists of seven states, namely, Arunachal Pradesh (ARP), Assam (ASS), Manipur (MAN), Meghalaya (MEG), Mizoram (MIZ), Nagaland (NAG) and Tripura (TRI). Individually, most of these states depict lower level of economic development compared to even national averages as suggested by the various indicators for which information is available except for higher literacy rates.

There had been growing concern about increasing unemployment as a vital economic problem in NER. However, the extent and nature of unemployment is not properly known for these states. In fact, very few attempts have been made in the past to explain the various facets of unemployment at regional levels in India. This is more so in the case among states in the NER where we have not come across any systematic study dealing with this issue.

In this paper we provide an elaborate exposition of different facets of unemployment within the NER. The main purpose of this paper is to analyse the incidence of unemployment among the seven northeastern states. This study also highlights other relevant issues like relationship of unemployment with education and poverty.

1.1. Research Methodology

The study has made use of secondary data. The secondary data were drawn from various reports published by Government of India. The main sources of data on employment and unemployment are the various surveys being conducted by the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO), the population Census.

Purna Laxmi Jamatia, Dr. R. Gurumoorthy

2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

2.1. Youth Unemployment

Youth is defined, in terms of age category, as the period of transition from childhood to full adult status of full membership in the society. The definition of youth varied from nation to nation. The Indian Factory Act of 1948 defines child, young and adolescents (Ministry of Labour, 1979); however, youth is not defined by the same Act. "Youth is defined by the United Nations without prejudice to the definition adopted by individual nations, as those between the age of 15 and 25 years" (Subramanian, 1989: 47). Moreover, the shortage of people entering adulthood may well oblige a large number of societies to revise their definition of youth upwards. This would then include those unable to take on the full responsibility and rights of employed or working status (UNESCO, 1981). As such an educated up to 35 years person if depending on their parents because of unemployment is still considered as a youth (UNESCO, 1981). This extends the youth age period by including those individuals who are between 15 and 35 years of age (Nair, Vemuri and Faujdar, 1989). However, in India, child population covers between the age group of 0-14. Therefore, 15 years can be designated as the lower bound of youth. Most of them attain the desired level of education and enter the labour market while they are in the age of 15-29 years (NSSO, 1997). Thus, 29 years can be assigned as the criterion for defining the upper bound of youth.

In NE, according to 2011 census, youth (15-29) comprises about 29 per cent of the total population as shown in Table 1. It has slightly increased for the region in 2011 from the previous decades. Youth population share is greater in the region when compared to the country's level in rural as well as urban areas. Youth population grows at two per cent per annum in the region as in the country during 2001-2011.

Table 1
Youth (15-29 years) as a Percentage to Total Population in NE states/NER/India

| State/ e/region/ country | Total | | | Rural | | | Urban | | |
|--------------------------------|-------|------|------|-------|------|------|-------|------|------|
| | 1991 | 2001 | 2011 | 1991 | 2001 | 2011 | 1991 | 2001 | 2011 |
| Arunachal Pradesh | 26.9 | 26.4 | 29.7 | 26.0 | 25.2 | 28.6 | 32.9 | 30.8 | 33.6 |
| Assam | 28.0 | 27.2 | 28.2 | 27.5 | 26.7 | 28.1 | 31.6 | 30.0 | 28.8 |
| Manipur | 29.7 | 30.2 | 29.4 | 30.0 | 30.3 | 30.0 | 28.8 | 30.0 | 27.9 |
| Meghalaya | 26.9 | 27.1 | 29.1 | 25.8 | 26.0 | 28.0 | 31.9 | 31.9 | 33.4 |
| Mizoram | 29.6 | 30.6 | 29.6 | 27.5 | 28.4 | 28.1 | 31.9 | 32.8 | 30.9 |
| Nagaland | 29.8 | 32.1 | 30.9 | 29.2 | 31.9 | 29.7 | 32.5 | 33.1 | 33.7 |
| Tripura | 27.4 | 27.9 | 29.3 | 26.9 | 27.6 | 29.8 | 30.2 | 29.1 | 27.7 |
| NER* | 28.0 | 27.7 | 28.6 | 27.5 | 27.2 | 28.4 | 31.3 | 30.5 | 29.6 |
| India | 26.6 | 26.6 | 27.5 | 25.6 | 25.5 | 26.8 | 29.2 | 29.4 | 29.1 |

Notes: *NER includes all seven NE states (hereafter). Figures of 2001 of Manipur, NER and India exclude three sub-divisions of Manipur.

Source: Author's calculation based on RGCCI (1991, 2001 and 2011).

Unemployed is a person without a job; whereas employed is a person having a job. Unemployment is a condition of joblessness (Hughes and Perlman, 1984; Sinclair, 1987). The real unemployed are persons who can work, given the chance, but who do not easily get the chance (Saxena, 2000). A person is considered to be "seeking or available for work" or "unemployed" if, due to a lack of work, he or she has not been employed but has actively looked for work through employment exchanges, intermediaries, friends, or relatives, or by making applications to prospective employers, or has expressed a willingness or availability to work under the current conditions of work and remuneration (NSSO, 2001). Unemployed are those persons who sought work or did not seek but was available for work (NSSO, 2011).

Table 2

Usual principal status and usual status (adjusted) unemployment rates (%) for youth (15-29), NE states/India

| State/ country | Year | Usual principal status | | | | Usual status (adjusted) | | | |
|-------------------|---------|------------------------|--------|-------|--------|-------------------------|--------|-------|--------|
| | | Rural | | Urban | | Rural | | Urban | |
| | | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| Arunachal Pradesh | 1993-94 | 4.5 | 0.8 | 3.0 | 12.9 | 4.3 | 0.6 | 3.0 | 12.1 |
| | 1999-00 | 2.5 | 0.4 | 9.1 | 18.5 | 2.3 | 0.4 | 9.1 | 18.5 |
| | 2004-05 | 3.0 | 1.7 | 5.6 | 7.4 | 3.0 | 1.7 | 5.4 | 7.4 |
| | 2009-10 | 3.8 | 1.1 | 17.6 | 10.3 | 3.8 | 1.1 | 17.6 | 10.3 |
| | 2011-12 | 7.6 | 4.7 | 16.5 | 27.8 | 7.1 | 4.6 | 16.5 | 26.9 |
| Assam | 1993-94 | 16.6 | 27.9 | 17.0 | 49.8 | 11.8 | 16.0 | 15.9 | 46.1 |
| | 1999-00 | 10.2 | 24.5 | 22.2 | 45.0 | 7.1 | 14.0 | 18.9 | 37.5 |
| | 2004-05 | 8.5 | 15.3 | 20.9 | 33.4 | 6.6 | 7.2 | 19.6 | 21.3 |
| | 2009-10 | 10.8 | 16.1 | 19.5 | 32.9 | 10.5 | 13.6 | 17.4 | 28.9 |
| | 2011-12 | 15.2 | 19.7 | 19.2 | 19.6 | 14.8 | 14.2 | 18.7 | 18.0 |
| Manipur | 1993-94 | 6.9 | 2.5 | 18.0 | 8.0 | 4.0 | 1.4 | 16.3 | 6.0 |
| | 1999-00 | 5.2 | 7.2 | 22.6 | 24.2 | 4.9 | 4.5 | 19.9 | 15.0 |
| | 2004-05 | 5.1 | 2.3 | 19.7 | 18.5 | 3.5 | 1.4 | 19.2 | 14.6 |
| | 2009-10 | 15.5 | 12.1 | 22.6 | 12.9 | 13.7 | 11.1 | 21.1 | 12.0 |
| | 2011-12 | 12.8 | 13.3 | 24.1 | 33.8 | 8.6 | 9.4 | 28.8 | 31.6 |
| Meghalaya | 1993-94 | 1.0 | 0.0 | 5.3 | 11.0 | 1.0 | 0.0 | 3.8 | 9.9 |
| | 1999-00 | 1.1 | 0.7 | 11.9 | 17.7 | 1.1 | 0.7 | 11.9 | 17.7 |
| | 2004-05 | 0.2 | 1.6 | 12.9 | 12.0 | 0.2 | 1.4 | 11.9 | 10.0 |
| | 2009-10 | 0.8 | 2.1 | 9.2 | 22.9 | 0.7 | 1.1 | 9.2 | 22.9 |
| | 2011-12 | 0.5 | 0.3 | 3.6 | 7.1 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 3.6 | 7.1 |
| Mizoram | 1993-94 | 4.2 | 1.2 | 1.6 | 1.4 | 3.6 | 0.8 | 1.6 | 1.4 |
| | 1999-00 | 4.9 | 1.4 | 12.7 | 6.0 | 3.4 | 0.6 | 10.8 | 5.1 |
| | 2004-05 | 2.0 | 0.3 | 4.4 | 6.2 | 1.1 | 0.3 | 4.4 | 6.1 |
| | 2009-10 | 3.9 | 4.2 | 7.4 | 10.8 | 3.6 | 3.4 | 6.6 | 10.0 |
| | 2011-12 | 4.9 | 9.1 | 13.2 | 18.5 | 3.8 | 6.8 | 12.9 | 18.5 |
| Nagaland | 1993-94 | 5.9 | 0.0 | 17.5 | 8.3 | 5.4 | 0.0 | 17.5 | 7.3 |
| | 1999-00 | 9.9 | 10.0 | 31.1 | 23.3 | 8.8 | 5.9 | 30.7 | 19.5 |
| | 2004-05 | 20.8 | 9.5 | 22.1 | 35.5 | 7.5 | 3.6 | 18.3 | 19.6 |
| | 2009-10 | 42.2 | 52.5 | 38.9 | 71.2 | 28.6 | 26.5 | 25.8 | 46.0 |
| | 2011-12 | 61.3 | 70.9 | 74.2 | 90.8 | 42.2 | 37.2 | 63.3 | 80.6 |
| Tripura | 1993-94 | 4.2 | 18.6 | 18.4 | 43.3 | 4.7 | 12.6 | 17.8 | 34.5 |
| | 1999-00 | 2.8 | 12.8 | 22.1 | 17.3 | 2.6 | 12.5 | 21.9 | 16.7 |
| | 2004-05 | 25.7 | 60.8 | 45.4 | 83.7 | 25.2 | 57.2 | 44.9 | 80.8 |
| | 2009-10 | 18.2 | 59.3 | 26.8 | 73.6 | 15.1 | 42.9 | 26.7 | 73.6 |
| | 2011-12 | 19.1 | 63.4 | 32.3 | 76.6 | 18.1 | 54.4 | 32.2 | 76.6 |
| India | 1993-94 | 4.8 | 3.2 | 10.8 | 19.4 | 3.5 | 1.9 | 9.6 | 15.0 |
| | 1999-00 | 5.1 | 3.7 | 11.5 | 16.6 | 4.3 | 2.7 | 10.8 | 13.9 |
| | 2004-05 | 5.2 | 7.0 | 10.0 | 19.9 | 3.9 | 4.2 | 8.8 | 14.9 |
| | 2009-10 | 5.5 | 6.5 | 7.9 | 17.2 | 4.7 | 4.6 | 7.5 | 14.3 |
| | 2011-12 | 6.1 | 7.8 | 8.9 | 15.6 | 5.0 | 4.8 | 8.1 | 13.1 |

Source: NSSO (1997, 2001, 2006, 2011 and 2014).

For most of the NE states as in India, particularly in urban areas, the unemployment rate (usual principal status) for youth (15-29) was lower for males than girls across all time periods (Table 2). Domestic responsibilities and traditional gender roles kept many women from the workforce (Marchang, 2015a). According to Nath (1968), women's economic engagement is contingent on job availability, economic necessity, and institutional barriers to women's work. Specifically, as the number of college-educated young people has increased dramatically, the kinds of employment prospects that young people are seeking have shifted (Visaria, 1998).

*AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON THE YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN NORTH-EAST INDIA**Purna Laxmi Jamatia, Dr. R. Gurumoorthy*

Unemployment rates (UPS) among the youth was lower in rural than urban areas for all the NE states as in the country in all the periods for both the sexes, except for the males of Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram during 1993-94 and Nagaland in 2009-10 and for females of Assam during 2011-12. The concentration of formal jobs mostly in urban areas for the educated partially explains the pattern. The rate for females was considerably higher in urban areas than rural areas indicating that female job seekers do not easily accept or adjust with the available job in the labour market at the prevailing wage or salary level. The rate was higher for most of the NE states when compared to the level of India particularly in urban areas and particularly during 1999-00 and 2011-12 for both the sexes.

It has gradually increased for rural males throughout the periods and rural females from 1993-94 to 2004-05; however, it has slightly declined for rural females during 2004-05 to 2009-10 and again slightly increased during the later period for India. In urban areas for India, it has increased during 1993-94 to 1999-00; however, thereafter, it has declined till 2009-10 for urban males. Later it slightly increases by one percentage points for urban males of India. Similarly, for urban females it has declined during 1993-94 to 1999-00; however, it increased during 1999-00 to 2004-05; and again declined in the later periods. Among the NE states, it has increased for most of the states particularly in urban areas for both the sexes during 1993-94 to 1999-00. However, it has declined for most of the NE states during 1999-00 to 2004-05. During the later periods, the unemployment problem has regained the momentum with an increased in the rate in most of the NE states. Among the NE states the problem of unemployment is very severe, which is indicated by a high prevalence of unemployment rates, particularly in Assam, Manipur, Nagaland and Tripura as presented in Table 2.

A similar analysis of usual status adjusted unemployment rate of youth that is presented in Table 2 showed a lower rate for males than females for most of the NE states as for India particularly in urban areas during all the periods. It was significantly lower in rural areas than urban areas for all the NE states as in the country in all the periods for both the sexes; except for the males of Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram during 1993-94 and Nagaland during 2009-10. It was considerably higher for most of the NE states when compared with the level of India particularly in urban areas for both the sexes. The problem of youth unemployment is exceptionally severe, particularly in Assam, Manipur, Nagaland and Tripura.

In India the youth unemployment rates show a fluctuating trend as it increased during 1993-94 to 1999-00; however, declined during 1999-00 to 2004-05 in both the areas for males. Further, during the later periods, it has again increased in rural areas. However, in urban areas, it has declined during 2004-05 to 2009-10 and again increased during the later period. In the case of rural females in India, it has increased throughout the periods. It has declined during 1993-94 to 1999-00; however, it has increased during 1999-00 to 2004-05; again it has slightly declined during the later periods for urban female youth of India. Among the NE states, it has increased for most of the states particularly in urban areas for both the sexes during 1993-94 to 1999-00. During 1999-00 to 2004-05, the unemployment rate has declined for most of these states. However, in the later periods, it has increased in most of these states.

The youth are unemployed not so much because they are young and energetic but because they are educated (Nair, Vemuri and Faujdar, 1989). Youth unemployment rate is lower in rural than urban areas in NE states as well as India for both the sexes. Marchang (2015b) established that agricultural sector dominance in rural areas and the dominance of organised service sector employment in urban areas is the reason for greater urban unemployment problems. Specifically, the failure of the organised sector to absorb labour at a significantly increased rate is one of the reasons for the persistent unemployment problems within the organised sector (Hazra, 1991). The youth unemployment rate is considerably high because of their optimistic view of the preference of high salaried job while they are young and unmarried, apart from the inadequate availability of employment opportunities in accordance with their educational qualification, and lesser economic responsibility as they are young. Generally, youth remain unemployed by depending on family



income.

Table 3
Literacy rates (%) and proportions (%) of educated (matriculation and above) in total population/ literates in NE states/NER/India, 2011.

| State/Region/ country | T/R/U | Literacy rates* | | | Educated % population* | | | Educated % literates* | | |
|--------------------------|-------|-----------------|------|------|------------------------|------|------|-----------------------|------|------|
| | | P | M | F | P | M | F | P | M | F |
| Arunachal | T | 65.4 | 72.6 | 57.7 | 20.7 | 25.1 | 15.9 | 31.6 | 34.6 | 27.6 |
| Pradesh | R | 59.9 | 67.4 | 52.0 | 15.7 | 19.6 | 11.5 | 26.1 | 29.1 | 22.1 |
| | U | 82.9 | 88.4 | 76.7 | 36.8 | 42.3 | 30.6 | 44.4 | 47.8 | 40.0 |
| Assam | T | 72.2 | 77.8 | 66.3 | 18.8 | 21.7 | 15.9 | 26.1 | 27.9 | 23.9 |
| | R | 69.3 | 75.4 | 63.0 | 15.2 | 18.0 | 12.4 | 22.0 | 23.9 | 19.6 |
| Manipur | U | 88.5 | 91.8 | 84.9 | 39.4 | 42.7 | 35.9 | 44.6 | 46.6 | 42.3 |
| | T | 76.9 | 83.6 | 70.3 | 31.8 | 36.2 | 27.4 | 41.3 | 43.3 | 38.9 |
| Meghalaya | R | 73.4 | 80.3 | 66.3 | 26.4 | 30.8 | 21.9 | 36.0 | 38.3 | 33.1 |
| | U | 85.4 | 91.7 | 79.3 | 44.7 | 49.6 | 39.9 | 52.3 | 54.1 | 50.3 |
| Mizoram | T | 74.4 | 76.0 | 72.9 | 15.9 | 16.9 | 14.9 | 21.3 | 22.2 | 20.4 |
| | R | 69.9 | 71.5 | 68.4 | 10.0 | 10.8 | 9.2 | 14.3 | 15.2 | 13.4 |
| Nagaland | U | 90.8 | 92.5 | 89.1 | 37.2 | 39.0 | 35.4 | 41.0 | 42.2 | 39.8 |
| | T | 91.3 | 93.3 | 89.3 | 22.5 | 24.1 | 20.9 | 24.6 | 25.8 | 23.4 |
| Tripura | R | 84.1 | 88.2 | 79.8 | 11.1 | 13.0 | 9.1 | 13.3 | 14.8 | 11.5 |
| | U | 97.6 | 98.0 | 97.3 | 32.4 | 33.9 | 30.8 | 33.2 | 34.6 | 31.7 |
| NER | T | 79.6 | 82.8 | 76.1 | 22.0 | 24.4 | 19.5 | 27.6 | 29.4 | 25.6 |
| | R | 75.3 | 79.0 | 71.5 | 16.5 | 18.8 | 14.0 | 21.9 | 23.8 | 19.6 |
| India | U | 89.6 | 91.6 | 87.4 | 35.2 | 37.3 | 32.9 | 39.3 | 40.8 | 37.6 |
| | T | 87.2 | 91.5 | 82.7 | 19.2 | 22.8 | 15.5 | 22.0 | 25.0 | 18.7 |
| India | R | 84.9 | 90.1 | 79.5 | 14.4 | 17.9 | 10.7 | 16.9 | 19.9 | 13.4 |
| | U | 93.5 | 95.5 | 91.4 | 32.4 | 36.3 | 28.3 | 34.6 | 38.0 | 31.0 |
| India | T | 74.5 | 79.7 | 69.1 | 19.8 | 22.7 | 16.8 | 26.6 | 28.5 | 24.3 |
| | R | 70.9 | 76.6 | 65.0 | 15.5 | 18.3 | 12.6 | 21.8 | 23.9 | 19.4 |
| India | U | 89.4 | 92.5 | 86.1 | 38.1 | 41.4 | 34.6 | 42.6 | 44.7 | 40.2 |
| | T | 73.0 | 80.9 | 64.6 | 24.9 | 29.5 | 20.1 | 34.1 | 36.4 | 31.0 |
| India | R | 67.8 | 77.1 | 57.9 | 17.9 | 22.6 | 12.9 | 26.4 | 29.3 | 22.3 |
| | U | 84.1 | 88.8 | 79.1 | 39.8 | 43.9 | 35.4 | 47.3 | 49.5 | 44.7 |

Notes: T – Total, R – Rural, U – Urban, P – Persons, M – Males and F – Females. *7+ years.
Source: Author's calculation based on RGCCI (2011).

The increase in educational enrolment, which is also indicated by an increase in literacy rate, partially explains the decline of participation rate (Marchang, 2015a). Table 3 shows that in 2011 the rates of literacy were higher in most of the NE states as well as in the region when compared to the national level; however, the proportions of educated people were lower in the NE states, excepting the state of Manipur, and in the region when compared to the country's level indicating a higher educational underdevelopment in the region. Also, the rise in agricultural density which compels the unemployed to seek employment in a non-agriculture sector that is inadequately available hence renders to unemployment particularly among the educated youth. In addition, many people looking for work whose aspirations are higher than the current state of the labour market would rather remain unemployed for an extended period of time than settle for a position they view as beneath them. As a result, there is a negative correlation between education and joblessness. Shingi and Visaria (1988) found that the percentage of young people engaged in economic activities correlated negatively with the percentage of young people enrolled in formal schooling.

In the developing nations, "each worsening of the employment situation calls forth an increased demand for (and supply of) more formal education at all levels (primary, secondary or university)" (Todaro, 1991: 339); that is true for NER too. While Parasuraman (1989) has remarkably noted that in India the nature of formal schooling is not particularly job oriented and hence the problem of educated unemployment is increased. At first, the ranks of the unemployed are dominated by the ignorant. The supply of college graduates will always exceed the need for

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON THE YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN NORTH-EAST INDIA

Purna Laxmi Jamatia, Dr. R. Gurumoorthy

middle- and high-skilled workers, but as time goes on, the average educational level of the unemployed will climb inexorably.

3. SUGGESTIONS

Despite government efforts, the Northeastern region continues to struggle with high unemployment rates. In this section, we will discuss several potential solutions to the problem of unemployment in India. If tax rates could be lowered and government expenditure raised, the economy would grow faster and more steadily. When taxes are lowered, consumers have more money in their pockets, which boosts their discretionary spending and ultimately the economy's aggregate demand (AD). Reduced interest rates would make borrowing money cheaper and spur consumer and business spending and investment. Exports would increase as a result of lower exchange rates. Cutting income taxes would encourage both the employed and the unemployed to work harder. It's a tempting offer that encourages the jobless to seek employment and the employed to up their game. Young business owners are given a boost by the reduction in the corporate tax rate. The government needs to put more money into training and educating its citizens so that more people in the area are gainfully employed.

Quality education for the populace need to be a priority. The goal of education should be to equip young people with marketable skills that will allow them to find gainful employment. Unemployment is concentrated heavily in some areas, it has been noted. Government incentives, such as tax rebates, could encourage businesses to locate in underserved areas and thereby help level the playing field. A second option is to provide financial aid to the unemployed who have relocated to well-established communities with strong employment rates. In both undergraduate and graduate degree programmes, vocational education is a valued component. So that people can learn these skills early in life, the government should prioritise incorporating them into the elementary school curriculum. All students should have access to career guidance services offered through the school.

4. CONCLUSION

Due to insufficient and inappropriate job options, unemployment in India's North East Region persists as a social and economic challenge. With more young people entering the workforce and fewer positions available that are a good fit for their level of education, youth and educated unemployment has become an issue. Most states in the Northeast had higher rates of unemployment overall, and those percentages were especially high among young people and college graduates. Youth unemployment problem was more severe in urban than rural areas due to the aspiration for a non-agricultural or formal job by urban youth unemployed, and for females than males due to an institutional restriction or social reservation for females in most of the NE states as in the country. The prevalence of educated unemployment is both rural and urban phenomena and it demands to generate non-agricultural or formal jobs equally in both the areas to meet the labour supply; however, it is more severe for females than males in most of the NE states and it is determined by some sort of female's selectiveness for a job or have some institutional restrictions to employ females. It requires a policy intervention to generate job opportunities for the growing youth and educated unemployed in both rural and urban areas and removes the institutional or social barriers to raise the economic participation rate thereby reduce unemployment problems. Concurrently, strengthening skill development training among the youth and educated would enhance labour employability including self-employment.

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AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON THE YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN NORTH-EAST INDIA

Purna Laxmi Jamatia, Dr. R. Gurumoorthy

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