

India's Performance in the Achievement of SDG – 8: An Inquest with Special Reference to Employment Generation and Labour Force Participation

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ABSTRACT

In the last five years, since the adoption of the SDGs, India has been trying to improve in all aspects according to the set targets. Significant progress has already been made in India in recent years. India has taken several SDG initiatives in recent times. Most of the initiatives of the Government of India (GoI) are aligned with the SDG framework to steer development activities. At present, we have 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the specific targets for each goal are there. SDG – 8 for economic growth and decent work is one of them. The research question is how far India has achieved the targets of SDG–8 because this goal is directly related to economic growth. In this context, the paper attempts to analyse the performance of India in the achievement of SDG–8, presenting the trends of employment generation and labour force participation rate. These two indicators are analysed in this study with the help of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) database. It is possible to conclude from this analysis that the improvement in India's employment rate and labour force participation rate over the last decade has been insufficient.

Keywords: *SDG-8; Economic Growth; Employment Generation; Labour Force Participation Rate*

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are the most paramount development agenda ever produced in the World. Through these, the progress in developed and developing countries may be measured against the same parameter. These goals bring the Government sector, private sector, and common people together under common pursuit.

In the last five years, since the adoption of the SDGs, India has been trying to improve in all aspects according to the set targets. Significant progress has already been started in India in recent years (Sharma & Chaturvedi, 2020). India has taken several SDG initiatives in recent times. Most of the initiatives of the Government of India (GoI) are aligned with the SDG framework to steer development activities.

At present, the world has 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with their specific targets. These 17 SDGs are interconnected and the failure of one can affect the success of the other goals (Bangera & Gandhi, 2021; Comyn, 2018). One of them is decent work. SDG – 8 encourages inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all (Frey, 2017). It encourages innovation, jobs, entrepreneurship, and job creation. It tries to implement effective measures to eradicate forced labour, modern slavery, and human trafficking. It also protects labour rights, which ensures safe and secure working environments. With these targets in mind, the goal is to achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men by the coming decade. Ultimately, SDG–8 improves living standards.

The rate of employment growth has suffered stagnation at various time periods from 2000 to 2013 (Papola, 2013), and therefore a positive shift in this sector is required to help India in the coming years.

Among the nine indicators, as per the report of NITI Aayog (2021), only two factors, namely the employment generation and labour force participation, are considered here. In this context, the paper attempts to analyse the performance of India in the achievement of SDG–8 with the help of these two factors. In India, employment and labour force are always regarded as indicators of development (Sudhakar, Kumar, & Padmavathi, 2012).

Issue-specific hindrances

Two issues that ensures that fulfilment of SDG target is far from satisfactory, are discussed below -

India's Position in SDG Index

Since 2018, the National institution for Transforming India (NITI Aayog) has been publishing SDG Index in India. Here, countries are ranked by total score. The total score measures a country's overall progress towards all 17 SDGs. This score can be interpreted as a percentage of SDG achievement. A score of 100 means all SDGs have been achieved. As per Table – 1, India ranked 113th in SDG Index with a score of 60.07 in the year 2021, whereas China's rank was 57 with a score of 72.06.

Table 1: SDGs Index Ranking of East and South Asian Countries in 2021

Country	Score
Thailand	74.19
Vietnam	72.85
China	72.06
Malaysia	70.88
Bhutan	69.98
Singapore	69.89
Maldives	69.27
Brunei Darussalam	68.27
Sri Lanka	68.10
Nepal	66.52
Indonesia	66.34
Myanmar	64.95
Cambodia	64.54
Philippines	64.51
Mongolia	63.79
Bangladesh	63.45
Lao PDR	63.01
India	60.07
Pakistan	57.72

**Arithmetic Mean of SDG scores of each country.*

Source: Sachs et al. (2021)

Low Improvements in General Awareness on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The web search intensity, i.e. the number of searches as a proportion to the overall searches in a country across time, is extracted here to establish the degree of awareness for the keywords SDGs, labour force participation rate, and unemployment rate. It is considered to analyse the popularity of search terms among Internet users.

Figure 1 shows the intensity of Google searches related to the SDGs in India. However, evidence-based on Google Trends (Google Trends can be a powerful tool for understanding the pattern of Google searches made in different locations at different points in time). Google Trends provides access to a largely unfiltered sample of actual search requests made to Google. This allows us to display interest in a particular topic from around the globe or a particular country. suggests an increase in awareness of SDGs during the last six years, but it was not so satisfactory in comparison to other countries.

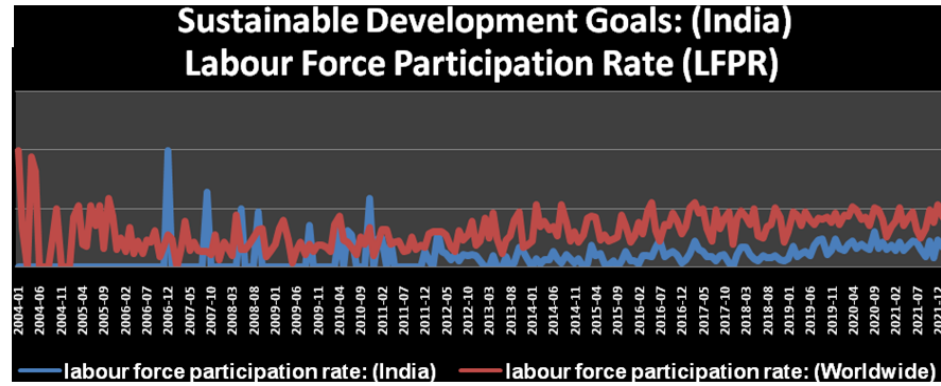


Figure 1: Google Trend of Searches on 'SDGs' and 'LFPR' in India and Worldwide during last 17 years

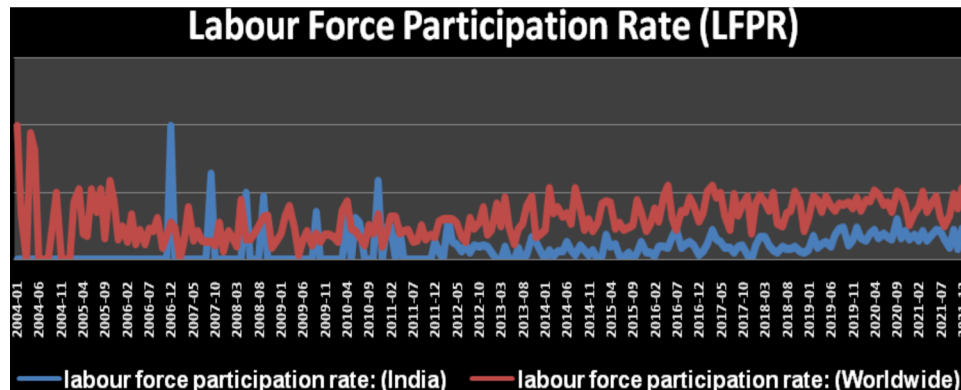


Figure 2: Google Trend of Searches on 'LFPR' in India and Worldwide during last 17 years

Figure 2 shows the intensity of Google searches related to the LFPR in India and Worldwide.

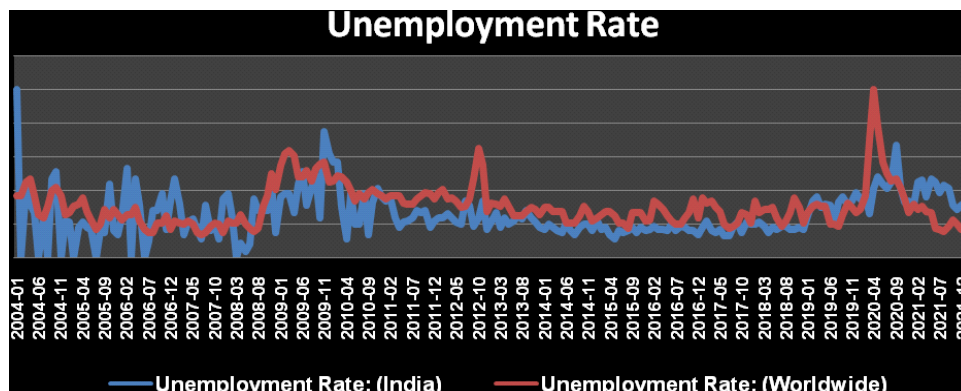


Figure 3: Google trend of searches on 'Unemployment Rate' in India and Worldwide during last 17 years

Figure 3 shows the intensity of Google searches related to the Unemployment Rate in India and Worldwide.

Figures 2 and 3 both show that general awareness for the keywords - labour force participation rate and unemployment rate in India are not satisfactory. So, general awareness of these two issues should be improved.

METHODOLOGY

The data are collected from the ILOSTAT (last updated on 6th February 2022) database of International Labour Organization (ILO). The time period of collected data is the last decade (2010 onwards). To measure India's performance towards the goal of decent work and economic growth, nine national level

indicators are there (NITI Aayog, 2021). Out of them, four indicators are analysed as variables in this study.

Table 2: Analysis of four indicators

Indicator	Aligned with SDG – 8	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unemployment Rate • Youth Unemployment-to-Population Ratio 	SDG 8.5 aims to achieve full and productive employment.	ILOSTAT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) • Proportion of Youth not in Education, Employment or Training 	SDG 8.5 aims equal pay for work of equal value and equal opportunity.	ILOSTAT

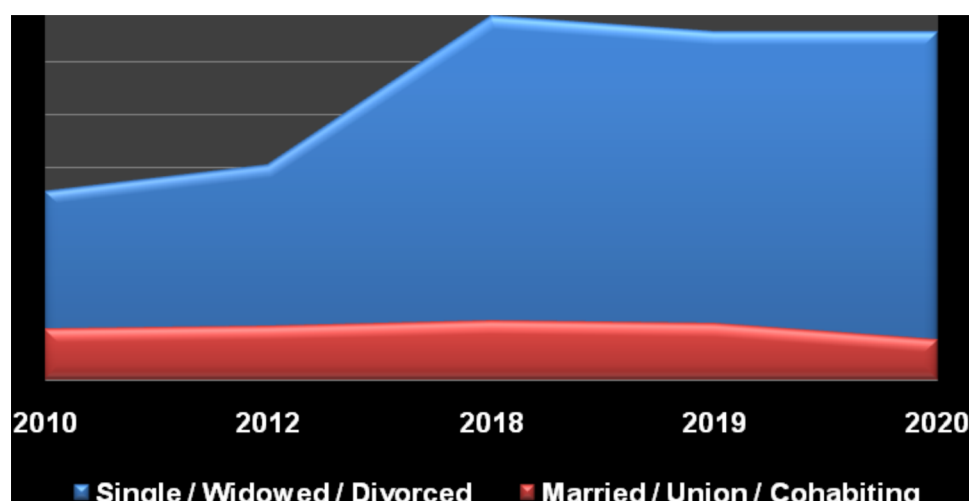
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The unemployment rate is a useful measure of the underutilization of the labour supply. It reflects the inability of an economy to generate employment for those persons who want to work but are not doing so, even though they are available for employment and actively seeking work (ILO, 2017). As per the formal definition given by ILO, the unemployment rate is the number of persons who are unemployed as a per cent of the total number of employed and unemployed persons (i.e., the labour force).

Table 3: Unemployment rate by sex and marital status (%) - Female

Year	Total	Single / Widowed / Divorced	Married / Union / Cohabiting
2010	3.3	7.1	1.9
2012	3.7	8.1	2.0
2018	5.3	13.7	2.2
2019	4.9	13.1	2.1
2020	4.4	13.1	1.5

Source: https://www.ilo.org/shinyapps/bulkexplorer56/?lang=en&segment=indicator&id=SDG_0852_SEX_AGE_RT_A



Source: Author's Own Presentation

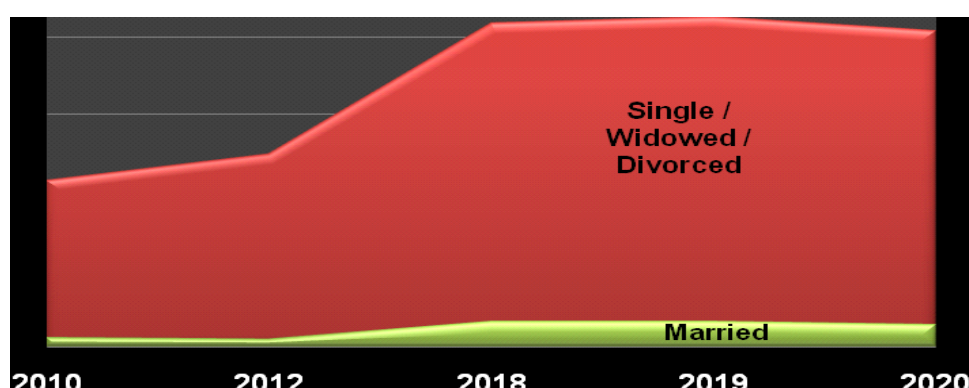
Figure 4: Allied area diagram to represent table - 3

In India, the unemployment rate of the single women category is more than the married women category during the last decade.

Table 4: Unemployment rate by sex and marital status (%) - Male

Year	Total	Single / Widowed / Divorced	Married / Union / Cohabiting
2010	2.2	8.2	0.4
2012	2.4	9.5	0.4
2018	5.3	19.5	1.2
2019	5.4	19.6	1.2
2020	4.8	17.7	0.9

Source: https://www.ilo.org/shinyapps/bulkexplorer56/?lang=en&segment=indicator&id=SDG_0852_SEX_AGE_RT_A



Source: Author's Own Presentation

Figure 5: Allied area diagram to represent table - 4

In India, the unemployment rate of the single men category was more than the married men category during the last decade. Actually, most of the Indian people first get employed then they marry. Now, the question is how marriage factor works in the case of employability. So, married men and women have a higher probability to be in the labour force than the single. Unemployment rate is higher in the case of the single men and women in comparison to married.

Table 5: Unemployment rate by sex, marital status and domicile (%) – Female

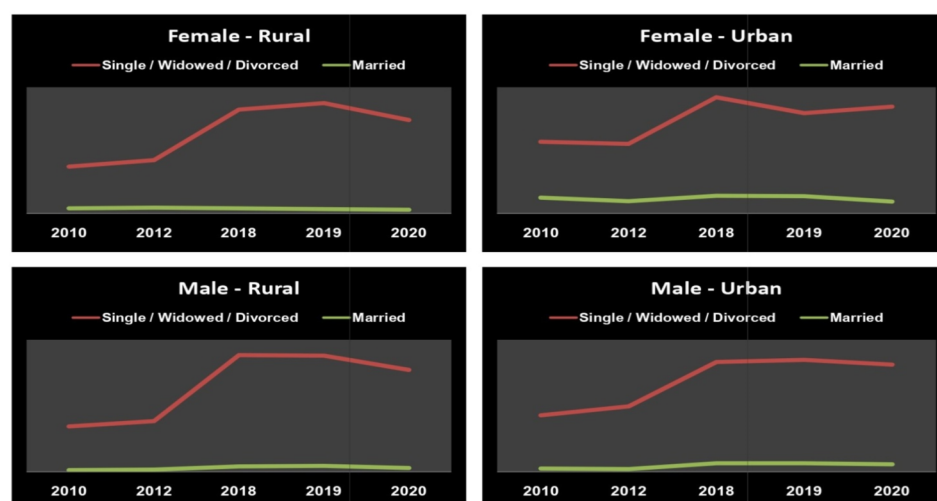
Year	Total	Single / Widowed / Divorced	Married / Union / Cohabiting	Total	Single / Widowed / Divorced	Married / Union / Cohabiting
	Rural			Urban		
2010	2.4	13.0	1.4	7.0	19.9	4.4
2012	2.8	14.8	1.6	6.6	19.3	3.4
2018	3.5	28.8	1.4	9.8	32.2	4.9
2019	3.4	30.6	1.2	8.9	27.8	4.8
2020	2.9	25.9	1.0	8.8	29.6	3.3

Source: https://www.ilo.org/shinyapps/bulkexplorer56/?lang=en&segment=indicator&id=SDG_0852_SEX_AGE_RT_A

Table 6: Unemployment rate by sex, marital status and domicile (%) – Male

Year	Total	Single / Widowed / Divorced	Married / Union / Cohabiting	Total	Single / Widowed / Divorced	Married / Union / Cohabiting
	Rural			Urban		
2010	1.9	8.6	0.3	3.0	10.7	0.6
2012	2.1	9.6	0.4	3.2	12.4	0.5
2018	5.0	22.1	1.0	6.2	20.8	1.6
2019	4.9	22.0	1.1	6.4	21.2	1.6
2020	4.2	19.3	0.7	6.0	20.3	1.4

Source: https://www.ilo.org/shinyapps/bulkexplorer56/?lang=en&segment=indicator&id=SDG_0852_SEX_AGE_RT_A



Source: Author's Own Presentation

Figure 6: Allied line diagrams to represent table-5 and 6

Almost the same pattern is observed for both men and women between rural and urban. The unemployment rate in rural India has been following decreasing trend during last three years. The probable reason of that rural areas got less affected by Covid – 19.

As per the definition given by ILO, the unemployment-to-population ratio is the number of persons who are unemployed as a per cent of working age population. Data are provided by school attendance status, student or not student.

Table 7: Youth Unemployment-to-Population ratio by age and school attendance status (%)

Age	Year	Total	Attending	Not attending
15-29	2010	1.8	0.4	2.3
15-29	2012	1.8	0.6	2.2
15-29	2018	2.5	0.2	3.6
15-29	2019	2.5	0.2	3.5
15-29	2020	2.8	0.1	4.0

Source: <https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/>

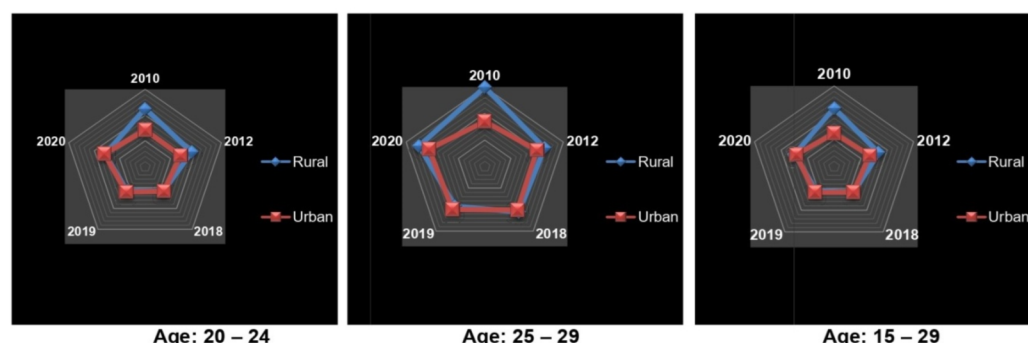
Here, 15-29 age group is considered. Among youth unemployed population under 15-29 age group, most are belonging to 'not attending' school. Total youth unemployment-to-population ratio for the same age group in India has been increased from 1.8% in 2010 to 2.8% in 2020.

As per the definition given by ILO, the employment-to-population ratio is the number of persons who are employed as a per cent of the total of the working age population.

Table 8: Youth Employment-to-Population ratio by age and domicile areas (%) - Female

Year	National	Rural	Urban	National	Rural	Urban	National	Rural	Urban
	20-24			25-29			15-29		
2010	20.0	22.5	14.2	26.2	29.9	17.0	19.1	21.8	12.4
2012	16.9	18.3	14.0	21.9	22.8	19.9	15.8	16.8	13.4
2018	11.7	11.7	11.8	20.8	21.1	20.2	11.8	11.8	11.8
2019	11.7	11.5	12.1	18.9	18.4	19.9	11.2	11.0	11.8
2020	15.8	15.7	16.0	23.9	25.1	21.3	14.7	14.9	14.3

Source: <https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/>



Source: Author's Own Presentation

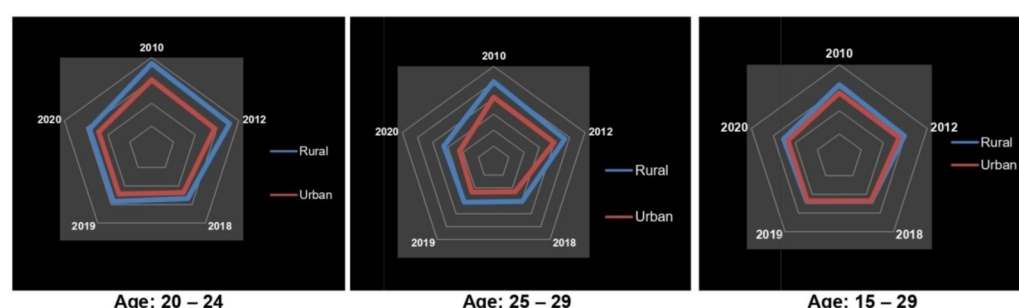
Figure 7: Allied radar diagrams to represent table – 8

The percentage of rural Indian employed women is higher than urban. India has been experienced more rural women at work than urban women during the last decade and the same pattern is found for all the youth age groups. The gap between rural and urban is more visible for the age group of 25-29. The most alarming is that youth employment of women is gradually decreasing in India. But it is also true that the number of women working in rural India is declining at a greater pace than that among women in the urban workforce. As per Table – 8, female youth employment-to-population ratio for the age group, 20-24 in rural areas has been decreased from 22.5% in 2010 to 15.7% in 2020. The same for the age group, 25-29 in rural areas has been decreased from 29.9% in 2010 to 25.1% in 2020 and for the age group, 15-29 in rural areas has been decreased from 21.8% in 2010 to 14.9% in 2020.

Table 9: Youth Employment-to-Population ratio by age and domicile areas (%) - Male

Year	National	Rural	Urban	National	Rural	Urban	National	Rural	Urban
	20-24			25-29			15-29		
2010	70.1	74.7	60.4	93.6	95.2	90.3	60.5	62.6	55.6
2012	66.9	71.5	57.8	92.2	93.4	89.9	57.8	59.3	54.6
2018	51.5	53.5	47.1	84.0	85.2	81.5	47.4	47.5	46.9
2019	53.9	56.7	48.6	84.2	85.5	81.6	47.5	47.7	47.0
2020	54.1	56.9	48.5	84.6	86.3	81.2	49.4	50.6	46.7

Source: <https://ilostat ilo.org/data/>



Source: Author's Own Presentation

Figure 8: Allied radar diagrams to represent table – 9

The percentage of rural Indian employed men is higher than urban. India has always been experiencing more rural men at work than urban during the last decade and the same pattern is found for all the youth age groups. The gap between rural and urban is highly visible for the age group of 20-24. For the most alarming is that youth employment of men is also gradually decreasing in India. India has witnessed a steep fall in both men and women employment during last decade and

the number of men working in rural India is declining at a greater pace than that among men in the urban workforce. As per Table 9, the male youth employment-to-population ratio for the age group 20-24 in rural areas has been decreased from 74.7% in 2010 to 56.9% in 2020. The same for the age group 25-29 in rural areas has been decreased from 95.2% in 2010 to 86.3% in 2020 and for the age group 15-29 in rural areas has been decreased from 62.6% in 2010 to 50.6% in 2020.

As per the definition given by ILO, the labour force comprises all persons of working age who furnish the supply of labour for the production of goods and services during a specified time-reference period. It refers to the sum of all persons of working age who are employed and those who are unemployed and Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) is defined as the percentage of population in the labour force (Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation. (2022).

Table 10: Female labour force participation rate -- ILO modelled estimates (%)

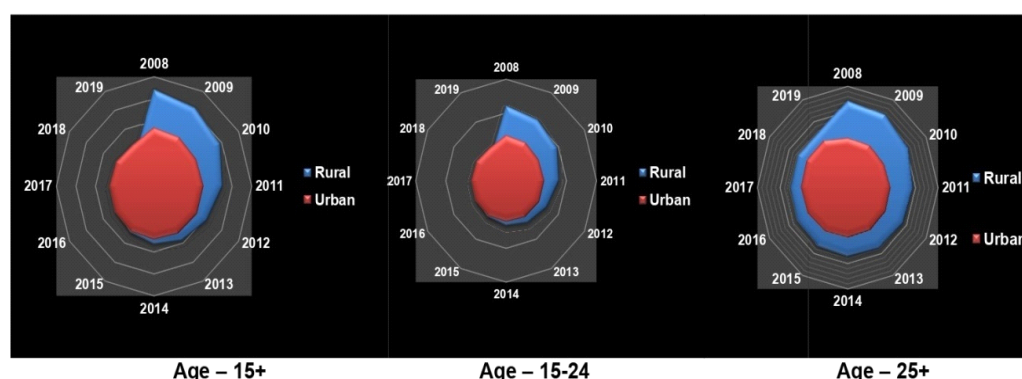
Time	National	Rural	Urban	National	Rural	Urban	National	Rural	Urban
	15+			15-24			25+		
2008	28.1	32.0	18.0	19.8	22.2	13.5	31.3	35.7	19.7
2009	27.0	30.7	17.4	18.6	20.8	13.0	30.1	34.4	19.1
2010	25.9	29.4	16.9	17.5	19.5	12.5	28.9	33.1	18.5
2011	24.4	27.4	17.2	16.1	17.5	12.7	27.4	30.9	18.9
2012	23.0	25.4	17.6	14.7	15.6	12.7	26.0	28.9	19.3
2013	22.6	24.7	17.8	13.8	14.3	12.5	25.7	28.3	19.6
2014	22.2	24.0	18.0	12.9	13.2	12.2	25.4	27.7	19.9
2015	21.8	23.3	18.2	12.1	12.2	12.0	25.1	27.2	20.2
2016	21.4	22.7	18.4	11.4	11.2	11.7	24.7	26.6	20.6
2017	21.1	22.1	18.6	10.7	10.4	11.5	24.4	26.0	20.9
2018	20.7	21.5	18.9	10.1	9.6	11.3	24.1	25.5	21.2
2019	20.8	21.6	19.0	9.8	9.3	11.0	24.3	25.6	21.4

Source: <https://ilostat ilo.org/data/>

Table 11: Male labour force participation rate -- ILO modelled estimates (%)

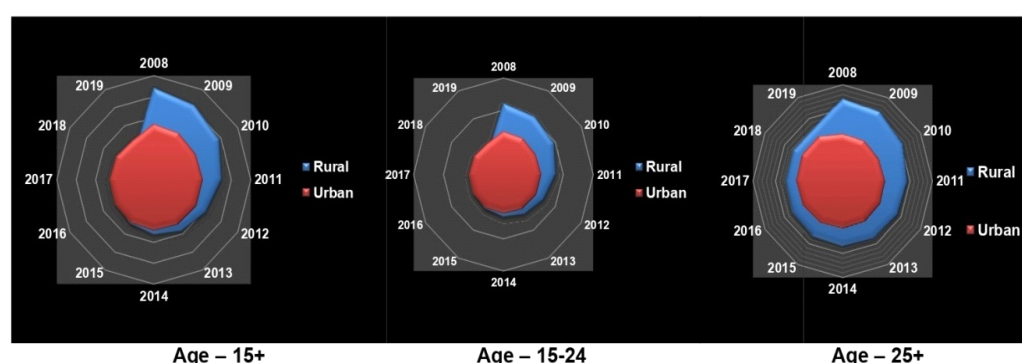
Time	National	Rural	Urban	National	Rural	Urban	National	Rural	Urban
	15+			15-24			25+		
2008	81.6	83.4	77.0	57.7	60.6	50.6	91.2	92.6	87.7
2009	81.1	83.0	76.7	55.8	58.6	49.0	91.2	92.6	87.7
2010	80.7	82.5	76.3	53.9	56.7	47.3	91.1	92.6	87.6
2011	80.3	81.9	76.4	52.2	54.6	46.6	91.0	92.4	87.7
2012	79.8	81.3	76.5	50.5	52.5	45.9	90.9	92.2	87.9
2013	79.2	80.6	76.2	49.3	51.0	45.2	90.4	91.7	87.5
2014	78.7	79.8	76.0	48.0	49.5	44.5	89.8	91.1	87.1
2015	78.1	79.1	75.8	46.8	48.1	43.9	89.3	90.5	86.7
2016	77.4	78.3	75.5	45.6	46.6	43.2	88.7	89.8	86.3
2017	76.8	77.5	75.2	44.4	45.2	42.5	88.1	89.1	85.8
2018	76.2	76.7	74.9	43.2	43.8	41.8	87.4	88.4	85.3
2019	75.9	76.5	74.7	42.4	43.0	40.9	87.2	88.2	85.2

Source: <https://ilostat ilo.org/data/>



Source: Author's Own Presentation

Figure 9: Allied radar diagrams to represent table – 10



Source: Author's Own Presentation

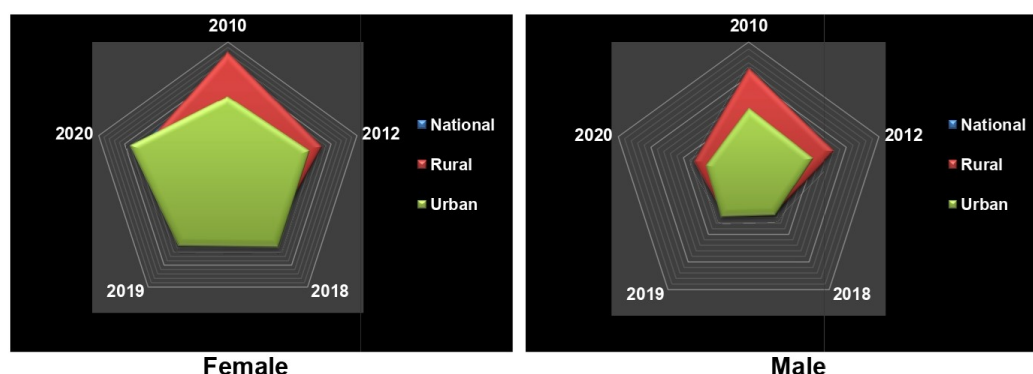
Figure 10: Allied Radar Diagrams to Represent Table – 11

Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) for both female and male are higher in rural than urban. LFPR decline rate is more marked for rural female and male. Table 10 shows that female LFPR for the age group 15+ in rural areas decreased from 32.0% in 2008 to 21.6% in 2019. For the age group 15–24, in rural areas, it is decreased from 22.2% in 2008 to 9.3% in 2019 and for the age group 25+, in rural areas, it is decreased from 35.7% in 2008 to 25.6% in 2019. As per Table 11, male LFPR for the age group 15+ in rural areas decreased from 83.4% in 2008 to 76.5% in 2019. For the age group 15–24, in rural areas, it is decreased from 60.6% in 2008 to 43% in 2019 and for the age group 25+, in rural areas, it is decreased from 92.6% in 2008 to 88.2% in 2019.

Table 12: Youth Labour Force Participation Rate (%) for the Age Group 15-29

Year	National	Rural	Urban	National	Rural	Urban	National	Rural	Urban
	Female			Male			Total		
2010	20.9	23.3	15.0	64.4	66.2	60.4	43.4	45.3	38.9
2012	17.5	18.3	15.9	62.1	63.1	59.9	40.5	41.2	39.1
2018	14.3	13.6	15.9	56.4	56.3	56.6	36.0	35.7	36.8
2019	13.7	12.8	15.6	56.5	56.3	56.9	35.6	35.0	37.1
2020	17.5	16.8	19.0	57.8	58.4	56.6	38.2	38.1	38.5

Source: <https://ilostat ilo.org/data/>



Source: Author's Own Presentation

Figure 11: Allied Radar Diagrams to Represent Table – 12

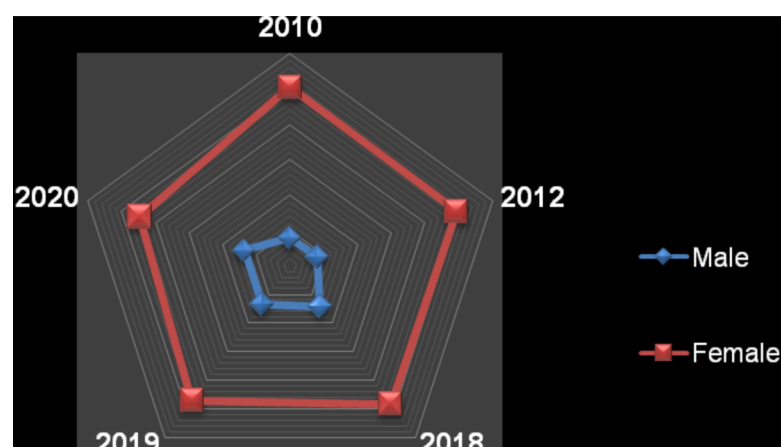
Table 12 and Figure 10 showed the LFPR for Indian youth including male and female both. Here, rural youth LFPR has been decreased remarkably. LFPR decline rate is more marked for rural youth. Female youth labour force participation rate in rural areas from 23.3% in 2010 to 12.9% in 2019 then again increased by 4% in 2020. Male youth labour force participation rate in rural areas from 66.2% in 2010 to 56.3% in 2019 then again increased by 2% in 2020.

In addition, the researcher checked the SDG indicator 8.6.1 – the proportion of youth (aged 15-24 years) not in education, employment or training (%). As per ILO definition, the share of youth not in education, employment or training (also known as 'the NEET rate') conveys the number of young person's not in education, employment or training as a percentage of the total youth population. It provides a measure of youth who are outside the educational system, not in training and not in employment, and thus serves as a broader measure of potential youth labour market entrants than youth unemployment, since it also includes young person's outside the labour force not in education or training.

Table 13: Proportion of Youth (Aged 15-24 Years) not in Education, Employment or Training (%)

Time	Total	Male	Female
2010	27.9	7.8	50.4
2012	27.5	8.0	49.3
2018	30.4	14.3	48.3
2019	29.5	13.5	47.0
2020	28.2	13.6	44.5

Source: <https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/>



Source: Author's Own Presentation

Figure 12: Allied Radar Diagram to Represent Table – 13

In India, 44.5% of female youth who are outside the educational system, not in training and not in employment in 2020 which was 50.4% in 2010. During the last decade, it decreased only by 6%. On the other hand, the percentage of male youth who are outside the educational system, not in training and not in employment is increased from 7.8% in 2010 to 13.6% in 2020.

Table 14: Summary of Findings

Findings	Probable Reasons
The unemployment rate for both single men and women are higher than married (Table – 3 and 4)	In India, men first make themselves employed then they get married.
Married women are more unemployed than married men. (Table – 3 and 4)	Factors like marriage (OECD, 2011), motherhood reduce women's probability of joining the labour force.
Rural women are less unemployed than urban. (Table – 5)	Most of these women are illiterate and engaged in agricultural work and the need for money is the only factor for women in rural areas to work. In rural India, the MGNREGA job is a lifeline for rural women.
Rural men are less unemployed than urban (Table – 6)	Most of these men are illiterate agricultural labourers and they need money. In rural India, the MGNREGA job is a lifeline for rural men also (Chahal & Kumar, 2020).
The unemployment rate in rural India has been following a remarkable decreasing trend during the last three years. (Table – 5 & 6) Youth employment of women is gradually decreasing in India. (Table – 8 & 9) Rural youth LFPR has been decreased remarkably. LFPR decline rate is more marked for rural youth. (Table – 12) LFPR decline rate is more marked for rural female and male. (Table – 10 & 11). For SDG 8, the UN estimates that incomes of informal employment and migrant workers have fallen by 60% globally (UN, 2020).	Formalisation of work. The mechanisation of agricultural work. Better education always increases employment for rural women – It's not true (Salve, 2019). Covid – 19 Pandemic is partly responsible. In the Asia and Pacific region, the lack of decent work opportunities for young people in the pre-COVID-19 period is evident (ILO, 2020, p.4 and p.7; UNESCO, 2021, p.12). Now, young girls opting to continue their education rather than join the labour force early. Less non-agricultural employment in the rural areas.
Youth unemployed population under 15-29 age group, are not serious about their school education. (Table – 7)	They need money for their family, specifically, low-income class population.
The percentage of Indian employed men and women is higher in rural areas than urban. (Table – 8 & 9) In India, rural youth (both men and women) are more employed than urban. (Table – 8 & 9) LFPR for both female and male are higher in rural than urban. (Table – 10 & 11)	The scope of unskilled or semi-skilled jobs is higher in rural areas. They need money for their family, specifically, low income class population. Rural youth are becoming more familiar with physical jobs.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings above, it is possible to conclude that the improvement in employment and labour force participation rates in India over the last decade has been insufficient. The recent decline in labour force participation and employment is largely due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. To achieve the target of SDG-8, i.e., to foster economic growth and decent work, the government of India should give more importance to the empowerment of women, which is aligned with SDG-5. The Indian government has already undertaken some programmes and policies which are closely aligned to the SDG priorities.

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