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**Vani NR**  
Government Arts College Dr  
Ambedkar Veedhi Bengaluru,  
Karnataka, India

## Empowerment of Youths and Marginalized Groups in India - Special Reference to Karnataka

**Vani NR**

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### Abstract

India's youth cohort and its constitutionally protected marginalized groups (Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes, religious minorities, persons with disabilities and women) are central to the country's inclusive development agenda. This paper critically examines national and Karnataka-specific policies, institutions and outcomes relating to youth empowerment with a focus on skilling, labour-market entry, social protection and political inclusion. Using a mixed-methods secondary-data approach (policy/document review, recent state-level developments including the Karnataka caste survey, and national labour statistics), the study identifies structural bottlenecks—educational–labour market mismatch, implementation gaps, and political economy constraints—and proposes evidence-informed reforms for Karnataka. The paper concludes that the state's new skill development policy and institutional footprint provide an important opportunity for inclusive transformation, but success depends on demand-led skilling, transparent use of caste-survey data for equitable targeting, strengthened local delivery systems and rigorous monitoring and evaluation.

**Keywords:** Youth empowerment, marginalized groups, Karnataka, skilling, caste survey, labour-market transitions, policy evaluation

### 1. Introduction

India's demographic profile — a large and growing population of young people — has long been framed as a potential “demographic dividend.” Realizing that dividend requires converting demographic potential into productive employment, social agency and political voice. This task is especially complex when intersecting with historical marginalization along caste, tribe, gender and religion lines. Karnataka is a strategically important state to study this interplay: it hosts a globally connected high-skill urban economy (Bengaluru) alongside sizeable rural, tribal and agrarian regions; it has a mature state-level skilling institutional architecture (Kaushalkar, CMKKY) and has recently released politically salient data from a state caste survey that reconfigures assumptions about population composition and equity targeting. These features make Karnataka an informative case for assessing how state policy, implementation capacity and political economy shape empowerment outcomes for youth from marginalized backgrounds.

This paper addresses three core questions: (1) How effective are Karnataka's skilling and welfare programmes in improving economic and social agency among youth from marginalized backgrounds? (2) What state-specific structural and political factors enable or hinder empowerment? (3) What set of policy reforms and implementation changes would most likely yield inclusive gains? The analysis draws on national datasets (PLFS), state policy documents and recent news reporting, synthesising evidence to offer practical policy recommendations and a targeted research agenda.

### 2. Conceptualizing Empowerment

Empowerment is multidimensional and should be understood across economic, social and political axes. Economically, empowerment refers to access to decent, remunerative work and the means to exercise career choices (skills, finance, networks). Socially, it implies equitable access to education, health and social protection; politically, it means voice, representation and the capacity to claim rights. For youth from marginalized groups, empowerment requires interventions that are sensitive to intersectionality — for example, the

**Corresponding Author:**  
**Vani NR**  
Government Arts College Dr  
Ambedkar Veedhi Bengaluru,  
Karnataka, India

simultaneous disadvantages of caste, gender and rural location — and which combine capability-building (skills, education) with structural supports (anti-discrimination enforcement, income supports, and local governance). This multidimensional framing guides the evaluation criteria used in this paper: coverage and quality of skill provision, labour market linkages and placement outcomes, accessibility for marginalized groups, and institutional transparency and accountability.

### 3. Methods and Data Sources

This study uses a mixed-methods secondary analysis approach:

1. **Policy and programme review:** official portals and documents for Karnataka Skill Development Corporation (Kaushalkar), Chief Minister's Kaushalya Karnataka Yojane (CMKKY), the newly approved Karnataka State Skill Development Policy 2025–32, and national skilling frameworks (PMKVY/Skill India guidelines).
2. **Secondary quantitative data:** Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) published bulletins and annual reports to analyse labour-market indicators (labour force participation, unemployment, NEET rates) at national and state levels where available.
3. **Contextual and political-economy sources:** coverage and analysis of the Karnataka caste survey and related debates, plus recent media and government reporting on the state skill policy and implementation initiatives.
4. **Analytical approach:** synthesize evidence to identify structural constraints and programmatic gaps. Where primary data are lacking (e.g., district-level placement rates disaggregated by caste/gender), the analysis highlights research needs and suggests evaluative methods (pilots, quasi-experimental designs).

**Limitations:** The paper is based on secondary sources and public-domain reporting; it does not include new primary fieldwork. Some administrative datasets and implementation metrics (e.g., disaggregated placement rates for Karnataka's state programmes) are limited in public availability; the paper flags this as an accountability gap and recommends specific M&E steps.

### 4. National Landscape: Skilling and Youth Employment

National-level skilling initiatives — most prominently PMKVY under the Skill India umbrella — aim to train large numbers of youth across sectors and skill levels. PMKVY 4.0 and related components emphasize digital integration, credible certifications and a broader ecosystem of training providers; however, national evidence indicates uneven training quality and variable conversion of training into sustained employment across states and demographic groups. Meanwhile, PLFS data show persistent challenges: relatively high rates of educated unemployment in urban areas, significant NEET proportions among both sexes, and low female labour-force participation compared with global benchmarks. These national patterns set the backdrop against which state-level action must be judged.

#### Key national takeaways relevant for states

- Certificates without industry linkages and apprenticeships produce low placement rates.

- Gender gaps remain large and require gender-responsive program design (safe transport, childcare, flexible training schedules).
- Disaggregated administrative monitoring (by caste, gender, disability, district) is often missing but necessary to target the most disadvantaged.

### 5. Karnataka: Institutional Architecture and Recent Developments

#### 5.1 Institutional footprint: Kaushalkar and CMKKY

Karnataka has a visible institutional architecture for skilling. The Karnataka Skill Development Corporation (Kaushalkar) consolidates many state-level skilling efforts; the Chief Minister's Kaushalya Karnataka Yojane (CMKKY) seeks to skill large numbers of youth annually with explicit quotas for disadvantaged groups. The state also operates district-level skill offices and has experimented with large employment fairs and targeted initiatives such as SkillConnect and integrated local skilling hubs. These institutional elements are valuable assets for scaling localized interventions.

#### 5.2 Karnataka Skill Development Policy 2025–32

In late September 2025, the Karnataka cabinet approved the Karnataka State Skill Development Policy 2025–32, with a planned multi-crore outlay over seven years and a mandate to unify fragmented skilling initiatives under an umbrella framework (MKKY 2.0). The policy emphasizes digital technologies (including AI) for training and assessment, international certification pathways for workforce mobility, modernization of ITIs and expansion of apprenticeship linkages. Crucially, it includes explicit attention to marginalized groups (women, persons with disabilities, informal workers) and reserves budget for monitoring and evaluation. While the policy signals strong political commitment and resources, the critical test will be in implementation and the policy's ability to convert resources into measurable outcomes for the marginalized youth it prioritizes.

#### 5.3 The caste survey: a new datum for targeting

Karnataka's state caste survey — whose headline finding estimates the OBC population at roughly 69–70% — has major implications for equity calculus and reservation debates in the state. The survey's recommendations (Including a suggested increase in OBC reservation to around 51%) have immediate political salience and will affect how the state designs entitlement programmes and target outreach for skilling and welfare. The survey also raises administrative and legal considerations for implementing changes in quota and allocation. Using the caste-survey data transparently for programme targeting could improve equity, but mishandled or politicised deployment risks creating legal challenges and diverting administrative focus away from program quality improvements.

### 6. Evidence on Outcomes and Gaps in Karnataka

#### 6.1 Training reach versus employment outcomes

Karnataka's state programmes (CMKKY and Kaushalkar initiatives) have expanded training access substantially, with annual targets in the hundreds of thousands. However, available evaluative evidence suggests that training-to-placement conversions are uneven. National PLFS data and

programme-level reporting indicate that without strong employer engagement, apprenticeships and placement cells, certificates do not reliably translate into decent employment. Karnataka's new policy addresses these issues in principle (apprenticeships, ITI modernization, employer incentives) but must focus on implementation fidelity and sectoral alignment with the state's economic base (IT, manufacturing, agri-processing, tourism).

## 6.2 Access barriers for marginalized youth

Despite state scholarships and welfare schemes, marginalized groups — particularly tribal youth, rural women and urban-slum minorities — face multiple access barriers:

- **Geographic and infrastructural constraints:** remote areas have poor connectivity and limited training infrastructure, reducing participation.
- **Socio-cultural constraints:** social norms and safety concerns limit women's mobility and labour-market participation.
- **Information asymmetry and elite capture:** outreach often fails to reach the most disadvantaged due to administrative bottlenecks or capture by better-connected groups.

These challenges require not just more training slots, but equity-by-design measures (stipends, transport subsidies, community outreach, flexible training modalities) to ensure inclusion.

## 6.3 Political economy and redistribution risks

The caste-survey's reconfiguration of population shares creates redistributive pressure. Politically, this can be a lever for correcting historical under-allocation of benefits to OBCs and other disadvantaged communities, but abrupt quota changes can also create social tensions and legal challenges. Policy adjustments must therefore be transparent, evidence-based and accompanied by administrative capacity-building to implement them without undermining program effectiveness.

## 7. Critical Analysis: Why Implementation Falls Short

This section synthesises the reasons many promising policies do not translate into empowerment outcomes for marginalized youth in Karnataka.

### 7.1 Supply-driven training, weak demand linkages

A common design flaw is supply-driven training that expands the number of certificates without ensuring industry absorption. Training providers sometimes prioritise enrollment over employability metrics; employer engagement and mandatory apprenticeships are weak or inconsistently enforced. The result: credential inflation without wage or employment gains. The 2025 state policy aims to mandate employer linkages and expand apprenticeships, but operationalising these requirements will require employer incentives and a transparent placement-tracking system.

### 7.2 Fragmentation and coordination failures

State and central schemes often overlap or operate with different eligibility and monitoring systems, leading to duplication and administrative inefficiency. The new policy's consolidation aim is therefore sensible; however,

consolidation must be accompanied by interoperable MIS systems, single-window beneficiary registries, and data disaggregation so that caste/gender/district targeting can be implemented and audited.

### 7.3 Weak monitoring, transparency and accountability

Many state programmes lack third-party evaluation and public dashboards that report outcomes (placements, retention, wages) disaggregated by key social categories. Without such transparency, it is difficult to identify which providers or districts underperform and why. The Karnataka policy's explicit allocation for M&E is a positive step, but implementation norms must ensure independence of evaluators and public accessibility of results.

### 7.4 Intersectional invisibility

Administrative categories (SC/ST/OBC) do not always capture multi-layered disadvantage (e.g., tribal women in remote hamlets). Programmes designed around single-axis identity may miss those at intersectional disadvantage. Explicit intersectional targeting and outreach — for example, prioritising tribal women in certain district hubs — must be embedded in programme rules and budgeting.

## 8. Policy Recommendations for Karnataka (Actionable and Prioritised)

This section provides prioritized recommendations tailored to Karnataka's institutional context and the recently approved state skill policy.

### 8.1 Make skilling demand-led and apprenticeship-anchored

- Mandate minimum apprenticeship/placement linkages for all state-funded training programmes (e.g., at least 30–40% of trainees placed into apprenticeships or employer-sponsored internships).
- Provide employer incentives (wage subsidies for the first 6–12 months, tax breaks for SMEs that hire marginalized youth) and support for sectoral apprenticeship brokers to match trainees with local industry needs (IT, manufacturing clusters, agri-processing).  
Rationale: Converts training into jobs and builds employer trust.

### 8.2 Use caste-survey data transparently to institute equity-by-design

- **Publish disaggregated eligibility and need maps** using caste-survey outputs to allocate training seats and stipends proportionately while protecting constitutional safeguards.
- **Institute reserved training seats and stipends** for marginalized groups (SC/ST, disadvantaged OBC communities, tribal youth and women) with clear eligibility rules to reduce elite capture.
- **Rationale:** The caste survey provides a better population denominator for equitable targeting; transparency reduces politicisation.

### 8.3 Strengthen local skilling hubs with gender-sensitive services

- Convert district CMKKY hubs into integrated empowerment centres offering skills, career counselling, childcare facilities, safe-transport



arrangements and digital access points for blended learning.

- Prioritise tribal and remote-rural catchments with mobile training units and satellite centres linked to district hubs.
- Rationale: Reduces access barriers for intersectionally disadvantaged youth.

#### 8.4 Mandate robust M&E and public transparency

- Reserve 5% of programme budgets for independent M&E (as the state policy suggests) and publish placement, retention and wage outcomes disaggregated by caste, gender, district and disability on a publicly accessible dashboard.
- Commission third-party evaluations (random audits and tracer surveys) and use results to close contracts with poor-performing providers.

#### 8.5 Strengthen panchayats and civil-society partnerships for outreach

- Use performance-linked grants to panchayats for showing demonstrable placement outcomes among marginalized youth, and contract credible NGOs for outreach in hard-to-reach areas (tribal belts, urban slums).
- Rationale: Local actors reduce information asymmetries and can ensure culturally appropriate mobilization.

#### 8.6 Pilot and evaluate integrated support packages

- Design integrated pilot packages combining stipend, skill training, apprenticeship and social support (transport, childcare) in representative districts (coastal, tribal, urban-periurban). Use rigorous evaluation designs (RCTs or strong quasi-experimental methods) to test cost-effectiveness and scalability.
- Rationale: Evidence will guide scale-up and ensure fiscal prudence.

### 9. Implementation Roadmap and Costs (High-level)

#### A pragmatic phased roadmap can help translate policy into outcomes

- **Phase I (0–12 months):** Establish a unified MIS, publish caste-survey-based targeting maps, pilot integrated empowerment centres in 6 districts, reserve M&E funds and tender third-party evaluators.
- **Phase II (12–36 months):** Scale district hubs, operationalise employer incentives and apprenticeship brokers, roll out panchayat performance grants.
- **Phase III (36–84 months):** Full state rollout with international certification pathways, sustained public dashboards, and legislative adjustments to reservation policies if legally required.
- **Budgetary note:** Karnataka's announced policy outlay (approx. ₹4,432 crore over seven years) provides a fiscal envelope to implement these measures; prudent allocation toward apprenticeships, M&E, and outreach will be key. Transparent accounting and co-financing (ADB, PPPs) as announced can further de-risk fiscal burden.

### 10. Research Agenda and Data Needs

To strengthen evidence-based policy, the following research priorities are recommended:

1. District-level tracer studies tracking cohorts of trained youth (disaggregated by caste, gender, disability and urban/rural) to measure employment, wages and retention at 6, 12 and 24 months.
2. Employer demand-mapping across Karnataka's key sectors to identify skill gaps and region-specific demands.
3. RCTs/quasi-experiments testing integrated support packages (stipend + training + placement + social supports) to estimate causal impacts and cost-effectiveness.
4. Qualitative studies documenting barriers faced by intersectionally disadvantaged groups (e.g., tribal women) to inform gender- and caste-sensitive programme design.
5. Public data infrastructure improvements: interoperable MIS, beneficiary registries, and routine disaggregation by caste, gender, disability and district.

### 11. Conclusion

Karnataka stands at a consequential juncture. The state possesses structural advantages: a sizable institutional skilling footprint (Kaushalkar, CMKKY), strong political interest (evidenced by the 2025 State Skill Development Policy with a substantial fiscal package) and newly available data from the caste survey to guide equitable targeting. However, converting these assets into meaningful empowerment for youth from marginalized groups requires careful attention to demand-led skilling, apprenticeships, equity-by-design using caste-survey data, localised delivery models with gender-sensitive supports, and rigorous, publicly transparent M&E.

Policies alone are insufficient without sustained implementation capacity and data-driven adaptive management. If Karnataka operationalises the recommendations here — especially mandatory apprenticeship linkages, transparent caste-survey-based targeting, strengthened local hubs, and independent evaluation — it can become a replicable model for inclusive youth empowerment in India. The stakes are high: success would unlock human potential and strengthen social cohesion; failure risks perpetuating credential inflation and exclusion for those who need empowerment the most.

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