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Youth Entrepreneurship in North-East India: Navigating Challenges and Seizing Opportunities

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Abstract

Youth entrepreneurship in North-East India has emerged as a significant force for socio-economic transformation, innovation, and regional development. The region's rich natural resources, cultural diversity, traditional crafts, and growing digital connectivity provide immense opportunities for young entrepreneurs across sectors such as agriculture, tourism, handicrafts, technology, food processing, and services. However, despite strong aspirations and creative potential, young entrepreneurs face multiple challenges including limited access to finance, inadequate infrastructure, weak market linkages, lack of mentorship, bureaucratic hurdles, and social pressures favoring conventional employment. The study examines the evolving entrepreneurial ecosystem in North-East India and highlights the role of government initiatives, educational institutions, incubators, digital platforms, and public-private partnerships in nurturing youth-led enterprises. It also explores how technology, local networks, and community support systems are enabling young entrepreneurs to overcome barriers and create sustainable business models rooted in local culture and resources. The paper concludes that strengthening entrepreneurial education, financial inclusion, skill development, mentorship, and policy implementation is essential for unlocking the immense entrepreneurial potential of the youth in North-East India and ensuring inclusive regional growth.

Keywords-Youth Entrepreneurship, North-East India, Start-ups, Innovation, Entrepreneurship Ecosystem, Skill Development, Digital Platforms, Financial Inclusion, Rural Development, Sustainable Growth

Prologue: Seeds of Ambition in a Storied Landscape

A seed was planted in a remote, verdant village in Meghalaya, India, where rich, silky soil, abundant surface water, and a mild climate made agriculture the natural choice. Trailing germination, however, a young mind turned to technology. Diverted by electricity, personal computers, and half-formed memories of a family garden, the path to start-up missed the tractor and ran straight to value-added offerings of organic produce and IT advisory services. Honoring tradition by taking on the family farm, the bean sprout burgeoned into an agricultural enterprise now generating seven-digit revenues per week, spanning organic seeds, value-added products, marketing, and consulting, meanwhile nurturing butterfly populations across fifty-one acres (Leon Sanchez, 2018).

In the thriving capital of a neighboring state, mosaic swatches of culture, mindset, opportunity, and challenge piqued receptivity to the emerging start-up culture everywhere in India. Design, craftsmanship, decoration, and heritage conspired. Classical paintings, sketching, cooking, weaving, and small furniture making gifted snatches of refinement and income. Control returned to fraught family legacies while family-friendly food and art soft-drink labels transformed hotspots from standard non-alcoholic cola toward health-centric, immune-nourishing draughts, guiding the settlement-scape toward a more livable, prosperous, charming conurbation. Financing, sustainability, and marketing access circulated unmet needs, opening windows reflecting larger systemic considerations.

These wide-ranging symbols of personal effort, social duty, and economic resolve conveyed, without words, intertwined aspirations mirroring the inspired dreams of countless youths. An unbroken family legacy illuminates amid struggles to liberate others from suffocating cycles—a beacon of rising possibility. Spanning local and global dimensions, diverse offerings hark back to the long-rooted legacies of a gifted area now bringing with it enabling technological revolutions, pursuing, in turn, a short but daunting arc toward the centennial realization of impossibly grand visions.

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Multiple lenses and conflicting worldviews conjoin at a historical inflection point, positioning entrepreneurship to cultivate a quarter-century blossoming across the state and entire region, revitalizing generation after generation of poor-quality growth, soil exhaustion, ecosystem degradation, and depleting minerals.

Conventional worldviews resisted. Government systematically and consistently forbade each opportunity, while forbidding publications suffocated ambitions, poisoned landscapes, and imposed physical curfews on minds. Parallel flows of alcohol and drugs permeated, reinforcing revered lifestyles entrenched in yet another localized moral economy insulated from all but the minimalist reach of the wider world—the last global corporation yielded to local obsolescence long ago. The elevated elevation of a revered locality shared yet another revered infusion.

Dawn of Ideas: The Spark of Youth Entrepreneurship

In the North-East Indian states of Meghalaya, Manipur, Assam, Nagaland, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, and Mizoram, young people who pursue entrepreneurship often mention purpose-driven motivation—an intention of contributing something positive to others that transcends mere profit. These ambitions may take form through local needs described as “gaps” or “problems,” without displaying fully developed business concepts (Sambo, 2016). Seasons of intense contemplation, inspiration, and experimentation give rise to idea generation. Creative illumination stems from various triggers. Subsequently, youths engage in idea validation through brainstorming discussions with family, friends, or active users ((Illuri) Venkatanarayana, 2016). Early-stage ambitions typically reflect immediate community demands, rather than broader regional, national, or global prospects. The distinction between local and wider aspirations influences the articulation and ambition of ideas, alongside realignments of needs among local customers. Youth entrepreneurs frame opportunities to solve existing problems such as inadequate access to clean drinking water, rising unemployment, limited entrepreneurship exposure, or accessibility obstacles to natural beauty. Such engagements also deliver social benefits—for instance, by minimizing plastic waste or raising entrepreneurship awareness among other youth.

Young entrepreneurs in North-East India contend with both cultural barriers and practical obstacles. Relatively few students widely known for early-stage idea generation venture toward development, facing potentially discouraging circumstances. A cluster of early-stage ideas, situated beyond merely local problems, nevertheless engages limited first-hand

reflection, persisting amid generational poise before the broader region.

Terrain of Barriers: Socioeconomic and Infrastructural Hurdles

Despite considerable talent and ambition, many young entrepreneurs struggle to cross the threshold from idea to implementation. In Northeast India, the obstacles comprise financial constraints, inadequate infrastructure, limited market access, red tape, and a brain drain that sees graduates migrate southwest. Timid investment, combined with a lack of business and entrepreneurial skills, curtails many initiatives. As a result, youth entrepreneurship lingers at the ideation stage (Yuan et al., 2022).

Societal pressures, unwritten codes, historical legacies, and family expectations can curb ambition and restrict potential. The issue of livelihood is all the more pertinent in the region, with social norms advocating jobs in secure government, banking, or education sectors. Young women encounter added hurdles. Although female entrepreneurs generally encounter broad acceptance in Meghalaya, where companies full of family members are the norm, many women still regard venture creation as inappropriate. Young men are sometimes even discouraged from pursuing business, which in certain locales is associated with cheating, or disreputable activities such as selling drugs or liquor (Fekadu, 2018). Interviewees highlight the pressing need for business professionals in the region and a growing appreciation of entrepreneurship as a field of study.

Navigating the Storm: Access to Finance and Mentorship

Limited access to financing and mentoring presents challenges for evolving youth businesses. Several sources of funds exist, such as seed funds, microfinance, grants, angel networks, and government schemes (Shitaatala et al., 2019). Young entrepreneurs sometimes work with fellow students or friends on ventures; however, peer connections with older, experienced people through incubators or accelerators can expand networks and open doors to fresh opportunities. Connecting idea and need enables rapid early progress; crossovers spur evolution of even more interesting ideas.

Youth enterprises that depend on networks commonly benefit from clusters with a mix of actors such as colleges, markets, artisans, and digital hubs. Networks offer direct commercial benefits, spur side projects, deliver new exposure, spark learning, and foster camaraderie. Participating in vibrant, well-connected settings energizes and inspires. Clusters associating with public offices lead to more formal and thorough governance. Building and managing trust mechanisms serve as fundamentals for navigating a complex

milieu. Simple knowledge-sharing structures, such as news, events, and links, bolster over-hyped networks. Many young entrepreneurs see the potential to develop ideas and solutions that meet local needs, using local materials and focusing on local markets. Examples of gaps and opportunities include edible and ornamental garden plants, studio and music instruments, and advisory services for environmental responsibility.

Networks and Neighborhoods: Building Supportive Ecosystems

Ecosystems—Networks connecting business, education, society and government—Provide value, support, structure, and direction, helping youth entrepreneurs mobilize resources and overcome obstacles. In an economy without an established start-up culture and a high risk of failure, the stakes are particularly pronounced. Talent and potential remain untapped, especially in remote areas with lean supply chains and few mentors. Youth entrepreneurs reside in college towns, but markets drive product and service creation. State policy echoes throughout the region, but structural inertia hampers opportunity. Supply chains, resource availability, skill gaps, regulation, infrastructure, reach, distribution, markets, and planning define the landscape.

During the college years, young entrepreneurs acquire human, financial, social, and physical capital through markets, informal work, and part-time jobs. Colleges foster education, idea, and peer networks while connecting youth entrepreneurs to local artisans, industries, investors, and customers throughout start-up formation, growth, and scaling stages. Commercial marketplaces—online, offline, print, and exhibition—connect supply to delivery during and after college attendance. Digital platforms (J. Zuckerman & McAtee, 2018) facilitate skills transfer from remote regions. Artisans, local enterprises, associations, supply chains, established players, and informal networks define the landscape. Raw materials, local services, artisanal crafts, logistics, calamity management, hygiene, and tourism present additional options.

Markets and Means: Local Opportunities, Regional Potential

Multiple potential opportunities exist for youth ventures in North East India across local, regional, and national levels. Possible youth businesses include agri-based, crafts, tourism, and service ventures. Local markets offer less risk than regional or national markets, but the best growth lies in regional demand. Growing estimates suggest the paper identifies potential markets within North East India. These estimates are based on projected growth rates in the stated sectors. The local or Northeast markets are

smaller in comparison to the national markets. However, with the region facing brain drain problems, local markets are offering less risky opportunities for youth, in comparison to the regional markets. Regional markets offer great potential for the scaling of enterprises. Similarly, other estimates demonstrate that these states are also likely to see a large market for such initiatives in an underserved or even unserved opportunity. One of the largest craft associations in the area estimates that the market for handloom and handicraft products could cross 50,000 crore in the next five years spanning Silk & Cotton Products, Cane & Bamboo Products, Wood Products, Metal Products and so on. The Jain Handicraft Association also states that the growth in the Stone Craft Business of Northeast is 40% compound annual rate with presently over a billion dollar worth market in the US alone.

Policy Echoes: Government Initiatives and Public-Private Partnerships

Government policies developed during the previous decade attempt to increase economic prospects for North-East youth through entrepreneurial initiatives, skills development programmes, and strategy collaboration with institutions. Policy initiatives include a range of subsidies and grants to support entrepreneurship and provide subsidised training across various sectors such as agriculture, food processing, textiles and garments, hospitality, and services. Various public-private partnership models for monitoring, implementation or investment also emerged. However, many prior efforts still lack follow-up, outreach, or implementation and face problems such as poor return on investment or focus on cabinet-level bureaucratic structures. Many ongoing plans require clear articulation and alignment to step toward a more ubiquitous entrepreneurial culture.

India's north-eastern states, particularly Meghalaya, Manipur and Assam, have committed more than ₹300 crore (approx. \$36 million) of investment, requisitioned services worth up to ₹300 crore, and proposed further investment worth ₹1,500 crore across projects and sectors such as electronics, textiles, and logistics. The Union government's North East Development Scheme also aims to funnel approximately ₹1,500 crore into Northeast entrepreneurship and start-ups. Other efforts are being conducted under the Startup India scheme, such as social innovation collaboratives and division-specific platforms to attract a wider array of investment. Crucially, wider populations and local communities have not yet benefited from these outside initiatives or identified regional entrepreneurship as a viable career option (A Bhat & A Khan, 2014).

Tales of Resilience: Case Studies of North-East Youth Ventures

Despite steep odds, young entrepreneurs in North-East India forge innovative pursuits across diverse sectors. From agribusiness to arts, emerging ventures embody resilience and adaptability, so navigating challenges and seizing opportunities, with cultural and social footprints drafted into each enterprise.

Specializing in terracotta products, Rehnit Kumar Lamkhong harnesses local clay and kiln technology from youth days on his Manipur college campus. Like many who step outside society's prescriptions, he encountered scepticism. Mindfully controlling expenses and prices over six years, he now engages artisans and economic backward classes in a socially driven mission. Emerging from an Anganwadi scholarship scheme amid an "unfortunate family background," a degree venture into cab services. Unforeseen demand trained project leadership on operational details, pitching ideas, and winning financial backing. After three years nonetheless accumulated debt. Systematic mentorship and structured working patterns pivoted stalled progress until enterprise morphed into farm agriculture and chicken processing. Besides recovery, outreach offers assistance to other aspiring start-ups (Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation, 2018).

Digital Portals and Global Doors: Technology as a Catalyst

Digital tools are increasingly useful to start-ups across sectors. They facilitate development, marketing, distribution, sales, finance, and administration. Fintech apps open access to credit, investment, and insurance. E-commerce sites support local businesses with national and international reach. Digital communication enables inspiration and collaboration beyond geographical bounds. These portals for skills development are equally relevant—YouTube for learning craft skills, language exchange apps for bridging physical distances, outreach on social media for informal teaching, and even online courses offered by reputed global institutions. Technology also permits sustainable scaling beyond local financial resources—fintech applications for seed, growth, and expansion capital; digital platforms and marketplaces for generating sales; and for-enterprises-by-entrepreneurs models for production, fulfilment, and delivery services.

The potential of technology to make business growth equitable and sustainable is evident in the thriving operations of a skilful and enterprising artisan community producing beautiful and world-class garments for a range of global customers. Their work is enabled by one kind of cluster where artisans from across the countryside who are driven and skilled in

different activities come together to share digital learning, design, production, marketing, and financial support. Technology-enabled e-business has allowed the same collaborative model to deliver services across borders: a young entrepreneur who brings overseas clients in contact with local service providers, before-fitted trade partnerships with local service providers, and trained local entrepreneurs for quality student-pilot programs.

Lessons Carved in Time: Skills, Education, and Mindset

In a post COVID-19 world, 55% of youth entrepreneurs believe that financial literacy is of utmost importance for business growth, followed by product development (53%), marketing (47%) and leadership (43%) skills, according to an AIESEC study. Skills can be acquired in various ways. The formal education system offers courses, and districts in North-Eastern states ranging from Sikkim to Manipur provide information on technical courses available for youth. Prospective entrepreneurs can also search online for relevant courses that suit their educational background. Inculcating an entrepreneurial mindset can take place outside the classroom: in formal spaces such as the Edge Business Incubation Centre or through informal gatherings like Startup Saturdays, sessions are often conducted by entrepreneurs to share experiences. Compared to other regions, North-East India suffers from low awareness of entrepreneurship initiatives and programs, as well as a missing connection between businesses and educational institutions. Entrepreneurship education starts very early within the 1-6 age group and covers basic social science topics by class 7. However, start-up foundations are taught only in upper primary within class 8, while other regions begin entrepreneurship education in classes 3 or 4. Schools attached to universities are more likely to offer entrepreneurship development programs than stand-alone schools and, where they are taught, they are predominantly imparted by teachers with no entrepreneurial background or experience, limiting reach and removing a key source for inspiration. At the college level, training courses are not the preferred route; courses followed when setting up a business are rarely sought in parallel, suggesting competency confidence and full substitution by hands-on entrepreneurial experience providing sufficient confidence. Experimentation with entrepreneurship courses and habits from colleges is deemed crucial to form connections at the right age and build important know-how for future careers. StartUp344 requests that every college in the region adopt an Entrepreneurship Development Programme (EDP), either in combination with university activities

or independent of them, and strongly recommends importing the forwarding guarantee into graduate courses for mechanics, engineering and other fields where no existing business is currently being cultivated for their respective manufacturing setups. After attending EDP, some individuals maintain a venture, encouraging others.

Availability of raw materials, untouched opportunity for crop farming, and opportunities in the herbal sector remain some of the sector-inherent advantages of the North-East region of India. Emphasis has therefore also been laid on developing chemicals from natural resources to promise returns while fit teams comprise widowed women and young individuals from the low socio-economic fabric. Virtual gaming represents one of the largest growth prospects within the country according to First-Ed and Buraq and sufficient skills exist within neighbouring regions for tapping this expanse ahead in time. Online study material remains another parameter demonstrating where start-ups can co-exist collaboratively and capture the right audience. Opportunities also exist within collaboration between engineers, designers, and product developers engaging at three various levels on freelance-for-equity Mechanisms have been presented to State Governments via IT Secretary further affirming links between public policy recommendations and entrepreneurship outreach; during periods passing unavoidable situations too not least accompanied the region build-up of skill-oriented agencies, provision of financial or network connectivity support via client referral from public channel and constant membership promotion followed.

Points worthy of attention frequently dictate focus on Government procedures to curb red-tapism contrary to feedback streamlining to spread awareness about pre-existing Government Schemes, clarify agreement terms, segregate parties operating within the start-up sector or due sector too remain established patterns.

Following and amidst already existing EDP at school and pre-requisite foundation is sought within the preacher facilitating initial guidance to approach elderly nationwide or outstretch-only-away through mentoring loops mentoring curves occasionally seek to prevent approach either staged quartet-system preparation and accomplished preparation.

Pathways Forward: Co-Creating a Vibrant Entrepreneurial Culture

Entrepreneurship has shaken the contemporary world with its many facets and manifestations. India has an increasing pool of start-ups; however, apart from the general fun and excitement, careful and concerted efforts are absolutely necessary to convert intent into fruition. Specific aspects of the North-East without

sounding pessimistic or regionalistic call for co-created pathways that involve a healthy blend of resources coupled with intelligent mentoring, mind operations, and an Indian mindset focused on desire and heritage, casting a dark shadow on entrepreneurship. Youth entrepreneurship—the quest of young minds who take the plunge to make something stand out with their ideas, ambitions, and creativity as their capital—is a distinct and vibrant phenomenon. It appears like dawn, brightens the skies, and sprinkles happy rays of colours for all people regardless of identity, acknowledging the local specificities, differences, and development considerations. Still, this gift of nature has an expiry date, like beauty, and must be pulsated with support to take shape.

An impulsive sort of entrepreneurship is detrimental; echoing that growing up is natural but growing old is optional, the youth should be aware that unnecessary haste for the sake of starting something is too inviting for the Devil. In Meghalaya, Manipur, Assam, Nagaland, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, and Mizoram, youthful hearts have been inspired and incentivised to generate ideas and set up enterprises. Creativity offers a plethora of choices, from mundane requirements to fanciful wishes, for satisfied souls and happy lives. Youth entrepreneurship springs from thoughtful consideration of the needs of nearby people. Even though destiny takes a risky turn via start-ups—most of them fuelled with the deadly combination of reduced costs, increased speed, and poor quality—do correct the ailing nature of the environment and make the earth a better place to live.

Epilogue: A Future Woven with Startups and Stories

Youth entrepreneurship represents the dreams and aspirations embedded in the ambitions of North-East India's youth. Yet, the tragic irony is that many of these dreams, ideas, and aspirations depart away from the region in search of greener pastures, often never to return. It is therefore imperative that this precious value of youth entrepreneurship is retained and nourished, otherwise the youth of North-East India may remain an asset that can only dream.

North-East India, with its vast richness in natural resources, materials, geographical diversity, culture, traditions, and its closely-knit communities, serves as an unparalleled landscape for youth entrepreneurship to thrive. Vibrant ideas, cutting-edge innovations, and creative solutions are already sowed into the milieu. Hence, a youth start-up does not need to be invented; they only need to be pulled together and materialized. Youth endeavours have already emerged in the region through high-impact projects. Youth-led activities are taking the lead to delve into some of the most

fundamental problems of the region and lay a blueprint to chart out a better future. They link the essences of North-East India with the global mass; they create employment opportunities while returning back to the community; they create value that enhances the beauty of the communities and ecology. The journey of youth-led entrepreneurship in the region has just started, but its potential is enormous in terms of social and economic transformations.

There is a risk of neglecting the possibilities of youth-led endeavours in the climate of prevailing scepticism. Once they are properly preened, protected, and shaved off redundancy, they require only a couple of exemplary success stories for the much-needed switch of momentum. Hence, the exploration and promotion of youth start-ups in North-East India are particularly pivotal at this juncture. It is hoped that this narrative serves as an encouraging beacon and a guiding light to nurturing this flavour of Entrepreneurship imbued with the cultural richness and innovative ideas of North-East India and building a vibrant entrepreneurial scene within the region.

Conclusion

Youth entrepreneur's development journey is strewn with difficulties and obstacles that could easily defeat the most determined souls, making it all the more pleasurable to witness those who thrive. For those in the North-Eastern region of India, where dream-killers are especially strong, success requires navigation of a particularly turbulent sea, for reasons that are, by now, all too familiar. And yet, in the face of dense storm clouds, rays of hope elicit a cautious smile. Whatever the struggles of the wannabe entrepreneur, the youth know that conditions will improve. What they desperately need are not assurances but opportunities—doors wide open, beckoning them to explore.

The new startup culture clearly reflects the ambitions of a new generation seeking to plant the seeds of North-East India on the global entrepreneurship map. Youth from the region have taken action in food processing, hospitality, handloom, handicrafts, beekeeping, horticulture, transportation—indeed, whatever they think is doable—and are eager to travel down unexplored avenues. The entrepreneurial upsurge finds expression in the Digital India campaign, the call for Make in India goods, and the start-up programme, by which the Prime Minister urged youth to become job creators rather than job seekers. For the youth of the North-East, it is not merely a campaign mantra; it is a dream, a burning desire, a genuine call to action.

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