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समावेशी विकास – विकसित कुरुक्षेत्र

INCLUSIVE GOVERNANCE - DEVELOPED KURUKSHETRA

(A Human Development Agenda Report for Kurukshetra District)



IDEAS - Office of Interdisciplinary Studies
O.P. Jindal Global University

KURUKSHETRA



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DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILING OF KURUKSHETRA DISTRICT

The district of Kurukshetra holds great historical and religious importance in Haryana and the country. It was established as a district in 1973 and is strategically situated along the Grand Trunk Road on the National Highway 1, only 150 km from the national capital, New Delhi. Its location is between two bustling towns of Haryana, Karnal (34 km to the north) and Ambala (40 km to the south). Thanks to its advantageous position and excellent road and rail connectivity, Kurukshetra is easily accessible and a crucial transportation hub in northern India.

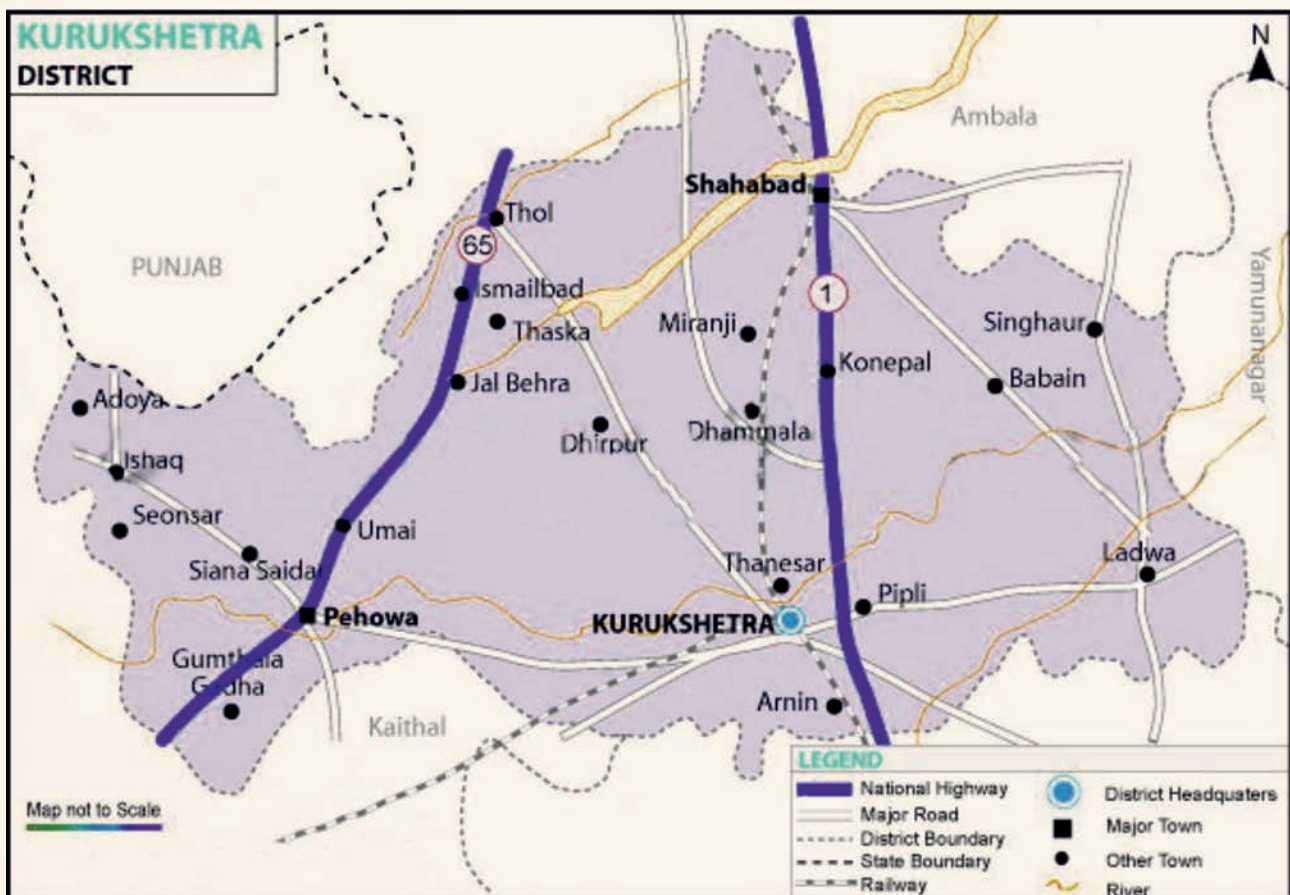


Figure 1: Kurukshetra District Map

WHERE IS KURUKSHETRA

Kurukshetra district is spread over 1,530 square kilometres, which is 3.46% of the state's total area (44,212 square kilometres). From an administrative point of view, the district is divided into two sub-divisions - Thanesar and Pehowa. It has three tehsils - Thanesar, Shahbad, and Pehowa, along with three sub-tehsils - Ladwa, Babain, and Ismailabad. The district comprises 419 villages organised into six community development blocks - Thanesar, Shahbad, Pehowa, Ladwa, Babain, and Ismailabad- to facilitate decentralised governance and developmental initiatives.

Total area (in sq. km.)	Sub-Divisions	Tehsils	Sub-Tehsils	Towns	Blocks	Villages
1530	2	3	3	4	6	419

Table 1: Administrative details of Kurukshetra District

PEOPLE OF KURUKSHETRA

The district has experienced a significant and continuous increase in its population density. Based on the latest available census data 2011, the district's population density has surged to 630 individuals per square kilometre. This is a substantial increase from the previous figure of 540 individuals per square kilometre recorded in 2001. As of 2011, the population of Kurukshetra was approximately 1 million. This rise in population density has positioned Kurukshetra as the 9th most populous district among the 22 districts in Haryana state, highlighting its growing demographic significance in the region. Additionally, Kurukshetra's Scheduled Caste population comprises 20.17% of the total population, slightly lower than the state's 22.3%. Table 2 summarises the key population characteristics for Haryana State and Kurukshetra District based on 2011 Census Estimates.

	Haryana	Kurukshetra
Population (in lacs)	253.51	9.646
Density (per sq. km.)	573	630
Sex Ratio (females per 1000 males)	879	888
Percentage of Rural Area	65	71
Per Capita Income for 2019-20 (lakhs per person per year)	2.63	2.14
% of SC population to total state population	20.17%	22.30%

Table 2: Population characteristics for Haryana State and Kurukshetra District (as per 2011 census)

According to the latest census data, the district is primarily rural, with a population growth rate of about 12% in rural areas and 30% in urban areas between 2001 and 2011.

SHARE OF RURAL POPULATION IN HARYANA DISTRICTS (2022)

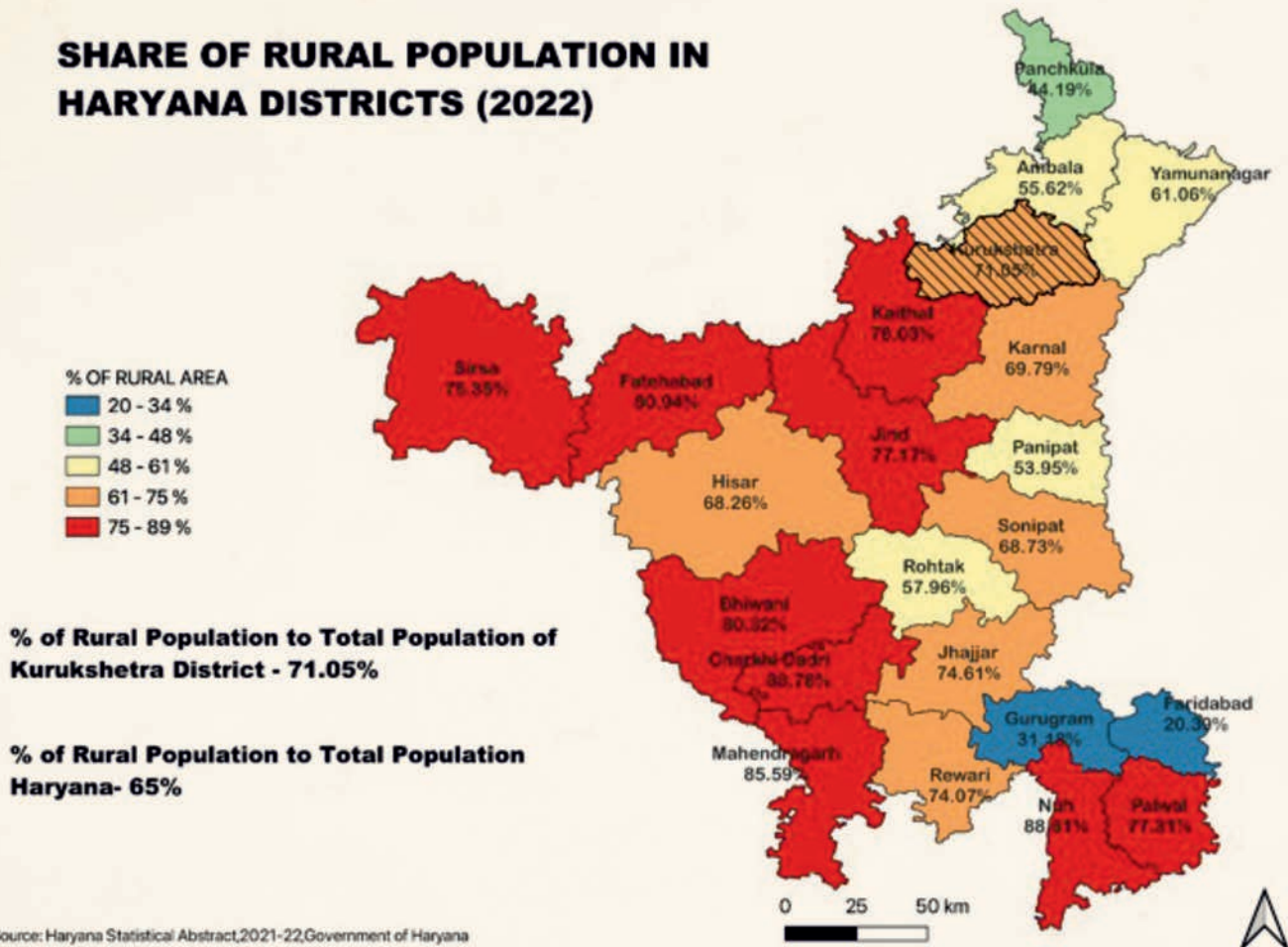


Figure 1: Share of Rural Population in Haryana

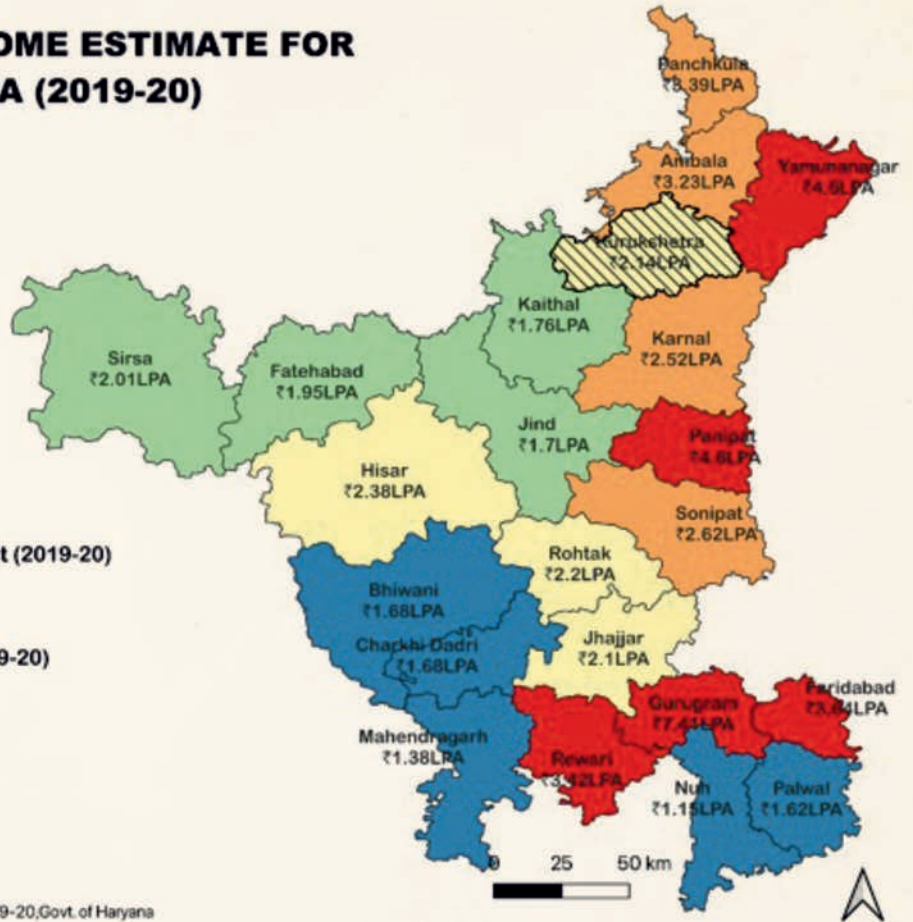


The per capita income of Kurukshetra residents in 2019-20 was INR 2.14 lakh per person per year, which is lower than the state's per capita value of INR 2.63 lakh per person per year.

PER CAPITA INCOME ESTIMATE FOR HARYANA (2019-20)

INCOME ESTIMATES (in LPA)

- 1.15 - 1.68
- 1.68 - 2.05
- 2.05 - 2.46
- 2.46 - 3.41
- 3.41 - 7.41



Per Capita Income of Kurukshetra District (2019-20)

₹ **2.14 Lacs/ person/year**

Per Capita Income of Haryana State (2019-20)

₹ **2.63 Lacs/ person/year**

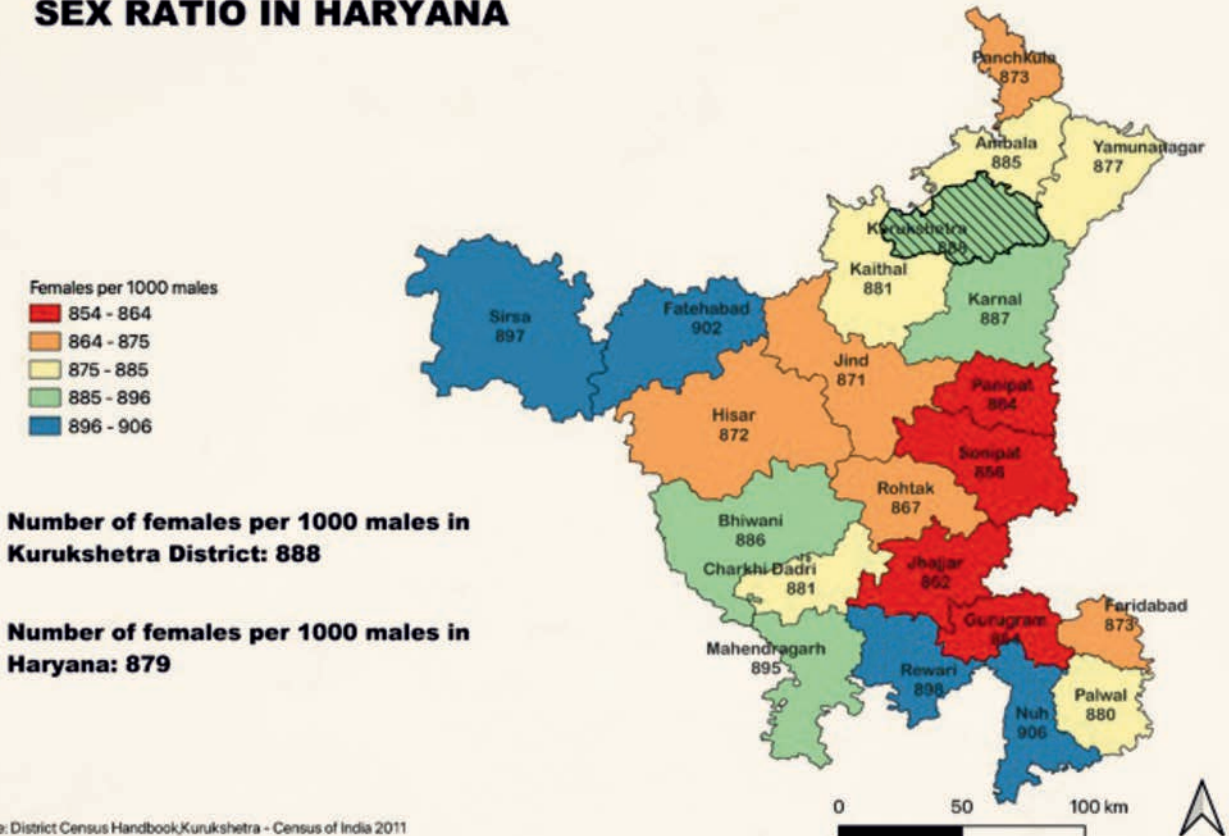
Source: Estimates of State Domestic Products of Haryana 2019-20, Govt. of Haryana

Figure 2: Per Capital Income Estimate for Haryana



The sex ratio is a concerning statistic in Haryana, with all districts falling below the national average of 943 females per 1,000 males in the 2011 census. The state's sex ratio worsened between the last two censuses, reaching 879 females per 1,000 males in 2001. The sex ratio for Kurukshetra, though marginally better than that of the state of Haryana, remained at 888 in 2011. Unfortunately, Kurukshetra district ranks a dismal 540 out of 640 districts nationwide in terms of sex ratio, reflecting its poor performance on this crucial demographic indicator.

SEX RATIO IN HARYANA



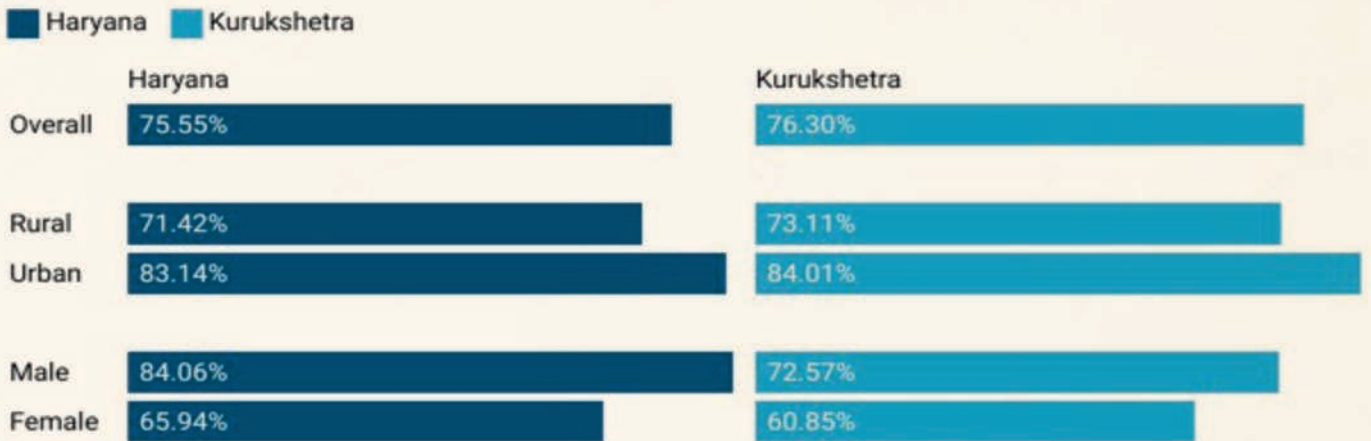
Source: District Census Handbook, Kurukshetra - Census of India 2011

Figure 3: Sex Ratio in Haryana



In terms of literacy, the literacy rate in Kurukshetra district stands at 76.3%, marginally higher than the state literacy rate of 75.6% for Haryana. The district ranks 11th among all districts in the state in terms of literacy levels. The urban areas exhibit a higher literacy rate of 84% compared to the rural areas' 73%. Unfortunately, there is a gender gap of around 14 percentage points between the literacy rate for men and women. In terms of female literacy, the district secures the 10th position statewide.

Literacy Rates in %



Created with Datawrapper

Table 3: Literacy Rates for Haryana State and Kurukshetra District



The religious landscape of Kurukshetra is predominantly Hindu, with 87.46% of the population adhering to Hinduism, significantly higher than the state average of 83.47%. Muslims constitute 7.03% of the population, a higher percentage than the 1.66% state average. Sikhs form a notable minority at 14.55%, significantly higher than the state's 4.91% Sikh population. The Christian, Jain, and other religious communities each account for less than 0.3% of the local population.

Religion Wise % of Population

	Haryana	Kurukshetra
Hindu	87.46%	83.47%
Muslim	7.03%	1.66%
Christian	0.20%	0.20%
Sikh	4.91%	14.55%
Jain	0.21%	0.04%
Others	0.21%	0.08%

Table 4: % of population across religions for Haryana State and Kurukshetra District



WHERE DOES KURUKSHETRA WORK?

People earn their livelihoods through three main occupation sectors: agriculture, industry, and services. In the financial year 2022-23, Haryana's Gross State Domestic Product was Rs. 9,94,154 crores in current prices. The primary sector contributed Rs. 1,70,018 crores, the secondary sector contributed Rs. 2,58,847 crores, and the tertiary sector contributed Rs. 4,41,363 crores.

Percentage of workforce distribution across different sectors

	Haryana	Kurukshetra
As Cultivators	28%	20%
As agricultural labourer	17%	26%
In household Industry	3%	2%
Other workers	52%	52%

Table 5: Percentage of workforce distribution across different sectors





AGRICULTURE

Spanning an expansive geographical area of 1,530 square kilometres, Kurukshetra district remains predominantly rural, with a staggering 95% of its total area classified as such. A vast majority, approximately 87% of the district's land, is dedicated to agricultural pursuits. Unsurprisingly, the region's primary economic driver is the agricultural sector, with a substantial 44% of the primary workforce deriving their livelihood from farming activities. Wheat and rice form the principal crops cultivated within the district. Paddy, potatoes, and sugarcane hold significant importance among the commercial crops. Furthermore, vegetable cultivation, particularly potato farming, enjoys widespread popularity across Kurukshetra, contributing substantially to the region's agricultural output.

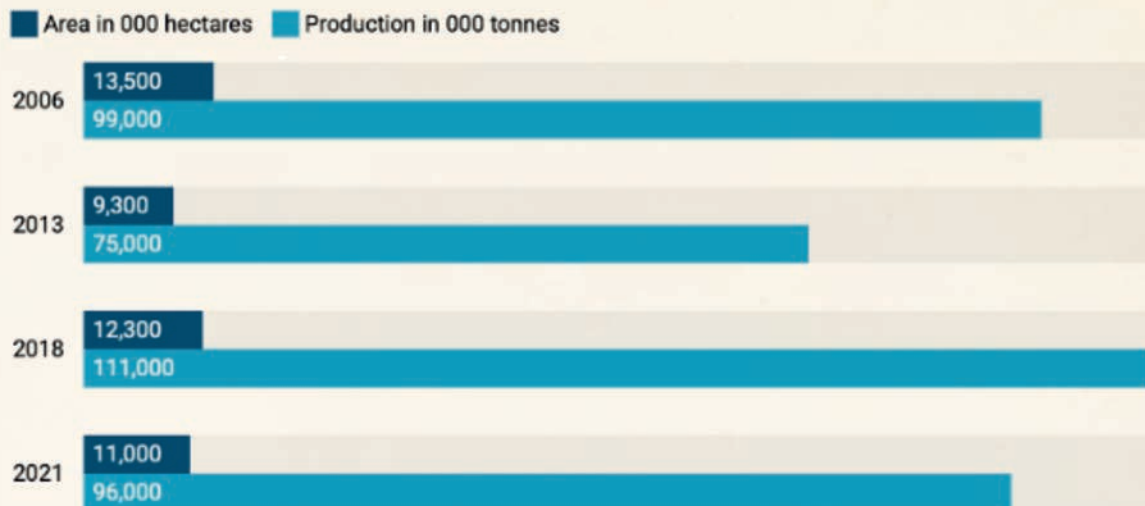
Cultivation of Rice in Kurukshetra



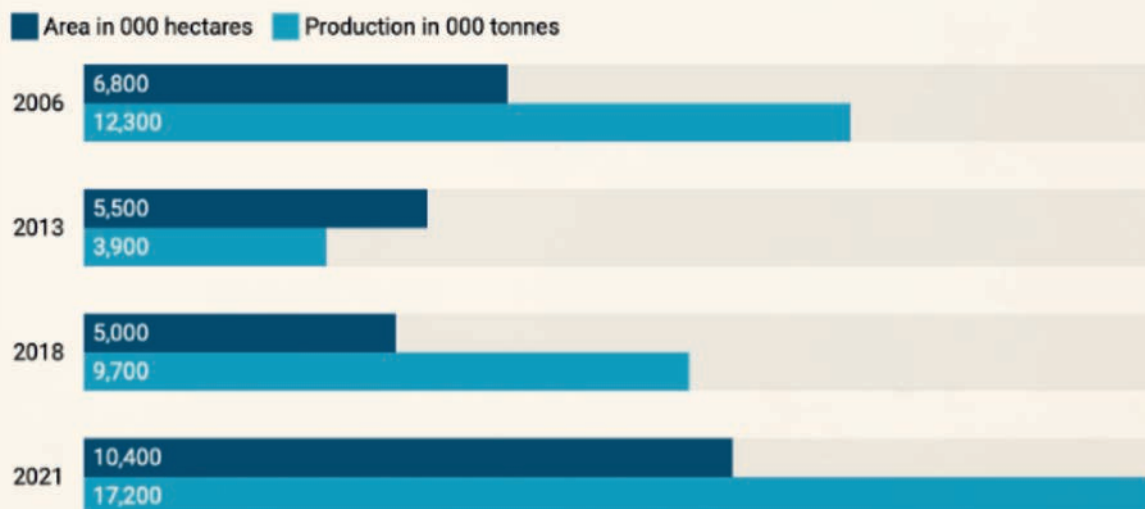
Cultivation of Wheat in Kurukshetra



Cultivation of Sugarcane in Kurukshetra



Cultivation of Oilseeds in Kurukshetra



Cultivation of Pulses in Kurukshetra

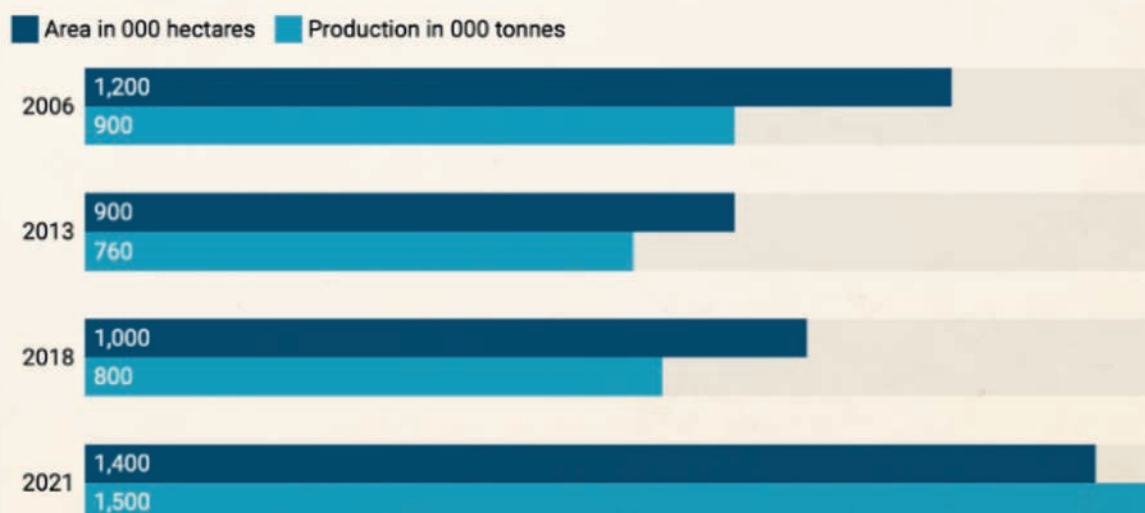


Table 6: Land Area under Cultivation and Production for major crops in Kurukshetra District

A fascinating emerging pattern is the relationship between land area under cultivation and the resulting production from that land. This relationship varies by crop type. For rice and wheat cultivation in Kurukshetra between 2006 and 2021, there has been a consistent sharp increase in production with a marginal increase in land under cultivation. This pattern is not seen for sugarcane, oilseeds, and pulses. For these reasons, there has been a fluctuation in production over the same period. With a more significant push for crop diversification, incentivising the farmers to transition to crops other than rice and wheat is critical.





INDUSTRY

By 2022, Kurukshetra district had around 8000 workers employed in 242 registered factories in the industrial sector. The district's industrial prowess was evident across several key sectors, which emerged as areas of concentration based on factors such as the number of factories, workforce employed, and overall production levels. Among these were the industries related to food products, beverages, non-metallic mineral products, wood and wood products, paper and paper products, and chemical and chemical products.

While these sectors formed the core of Kurukshetra's industrial might, the district witnessed notable activity in comparatively smaller but equally vital fields. These included wool, silk, synthetic fibre production, electricity generation, repair services, bare metal and alloy manufacturing, metal and parts fabrication, and textile manufacturing. This diversified industrial base not only contributed to the overall economic vitality of the region but also provided employment opportunities across various domains, accommodating a significant workforce within the district's boundaries.

Number of working factories across major industries in Kurukshetra from 2006-2021

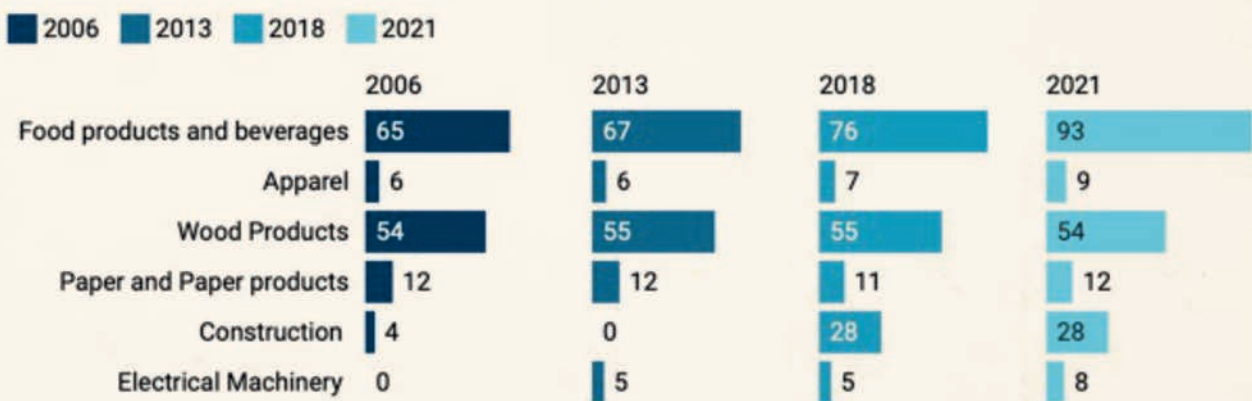


Table 7: Number of working factories across major industries in Kurukshetra in 2021

Among the six top employment-generating industries in the district of Kurukshetra, as listed in Table 7, the factories catering to wood products, paper, and paper products stagnated between 2006 and 2021. The sharpest rise has been in the construction sector. This is in line with the overall trend seen in the Indian economy. In 2021, 28 factories were concentrated in the construction industry within Kurukshetra itself.





SERVICES

According to the latest Statistical Abstract released by the Haryana government, the services sector makes up 52% of the workforce. The state is aware of unemployment, as the annual growth rate of employment is not keeping up with the yearly additions to the labour force. This situation worsens each year due to the accumulation of backlogs. Traditionally, the primary sector (primarily agriculture) has been the major source of employment. However, its share in employment generation has declined over time, and the continuously expanding tertiary sector has picked up pace in increasing employment opportunities. In 2021, 5,66,839 shops, commercial establishments, hotels, and restaurants in Haryana employed 30,68,497 individuals. In Kurukshetra, this translated to 24,957 shops, commercial establishments, hotels, and restaurants, generating jobs for 52,131 individuals.

Regarding access to institutions such as schools, hospitals, and colleges, Kurukshetra district generally outperforms the state of Haryana. This is evident from Table 8, which lists the number of institutes in 2021. The district has more hospitals, community healthcare centres, and primary healthcare centres compared to the state average relative to the population. A similar trend is observed in the education sector, where Kurukshetra has more schools and higher education institutions than the state average, except for senior secondary schools. Notably, out of the 22 Industrial Training Institutes in the district, only two are dedicated to training women in skills such as cosmetology, programming assistance, sewing, embroidery, and others.

Institutes	Number	Institute: Population Ratio	
		Kurukshetra	Haryana
Health			
Number of Hospitals	3	1: 3.21 lacs	1: 3.57 lacs
Community Health Centres	5	1: 1.92 lacs	1: 2.11 lacs
Primary Health Centres	21	1: 46000	1: 48000
Education*			
Senior Secondary/High Schools	317	1: 3000	1: 2800
Middle Schools	278	1: 3500	1: 4500
Primary Schools	546	1:1800	1:2600
Medical colleges*	2	1: 4.82 lacs	1: 1.81 lacs
Engineering colleges	26	1: 37000	1: 51000
General Education	51	1: 19000	1: 15000
University	3	1: 3.21 lacs	1: 4.52 lacs
ITI	22	1:44000	1: 62000

Table 8: List of Health and Education Institutes in Kurukshetra in 2021

Table 8 shows the number of health and educational institutions per population in Kurukshetra. The district has one hospital for every 3.21 lakh people, which is better than the state of Haryana. This trend is also true for community health centres and primary health centres. However, the analysis of educational institutions should be taken with a grain of salt as the numbers represent the total number of schools, colleges, and universities per population, not by age categories. Nonetheless, this analysis aims to provide a comparative understanding of Kurukshetra in relation to Haryana. In terms of medical institutions, Kurukshetra is better than Haryana, but the situation is the opposite when it comes to educational institutions. Fewer institutions are catering to a larger population at all levels of schooling and all types of colleges.

The following section provides a detailed analysis of the Kurukshetra district's Employment, Health, and Education sectors. We examine three critical concerns under each sector, describing the current situation in Kurukshetra and comparing it to the state of Haryana. Our analysis is supplemented by fieldwork conducted across the district to gather real-life experiences and challenges faced by people in both urban and rural areas. This interaction with various stakeholder groups has provided valuable insights into these core sectors' specific needs and expectations. Consequently, we will shortly offer recommendations for potential development initiatives in each sector.



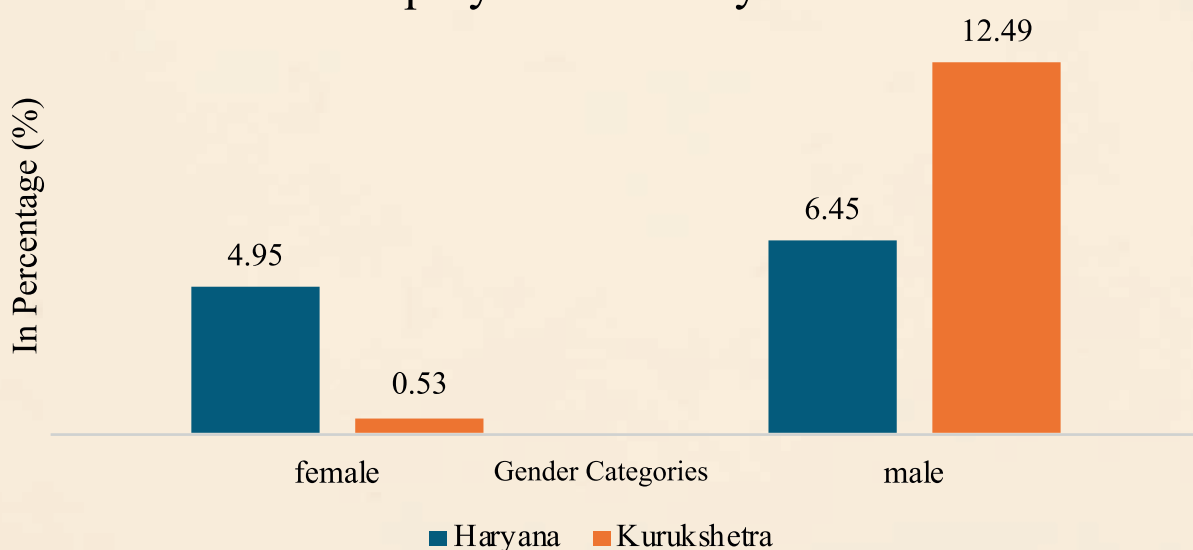
SECTORAL FOCUS LIVELIHOOD

CONCERN AREA - HIGH UNEMPLOYMENT RATES

Description

Unemployment is a significant concern for the state, and it requires active participation from the government to reduce it. India is experiencing a demographic dividend, which amplifies the negative impact of unemployment. It leads to a waste of resources and an increase in inequality. Moreover, research suggests that high unemployment is linked to personal anxiety, which can sometimes lead to social unrest. According to the latest Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) data, the unemployment rate for males in Kurukshetra is significantly higher than the rate for Haryana in the 2022-23 period. The unemployment rate for males in Kurukshetra is almost double the state average. For women, the unemployment rate in Kurukshetra is much lower than the state average. However, this may be due to lower female labour force participation and, as a result, a lower worker-population ratio for females in Kurukshetra.

Unemployment Rate by Gender



Narratives from the field

“The biggest problem in our area is unemployment. Families sell parts of their land, and even mortgage their houses so that their children can go abroad to work and earn a better living.” – Interview with farmers.

It is common for many young people to seek employment opportunities abroad, even resorting to illegal means due to a lack of job prospects in their home country. In Kurukshetra, daily wage workers face difficulties in securing regular work. They often complain about the issue of periodic unemployment, especially among unskilled workers. Agricultural workers tend to get only seasonal employment, while a brick mason we spoke to also expressed that he struggles to find work regularly.

Agenda Action

A large portion of MPLAD funds is used for constructing roads and bridges, generating casual and temporary wage employment. It is recommended to utilize a part of these funds to expand existing MSMEs' capacity by improving infrastructure, providing wage employment and developing MSMEs' ability to generate additional jobs. Additionally, less than 19% of MGNREGA households in Kurukshetra could get more than 50 days of employment in 2022-23, indicating the potential for better implementation to create wage employment.

Additionally, industries such as fisheries, dairy, paper industries, and horticulture have growth potential, but lack a roadmap to utilize it. Expanding food processing infrastructure is an effective way to address unemployment and underemployment. In the long run, a roadmap to attract domestic and foreign industrial capital is needed to develop the industrial zone, leveraging connectivity with Delhi and Chandigarh.

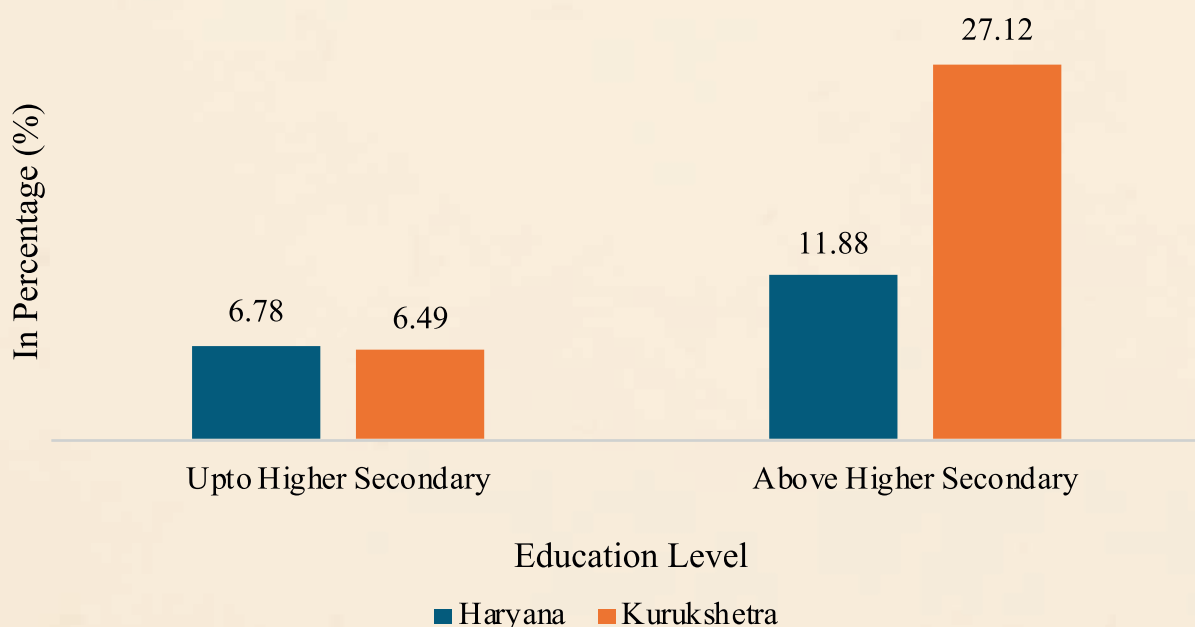


CONCERN AREA - EDUCATED UNEMPLOYED

Description

Unemployment is commonly viewed as a problem faced by those who lack education. The assumption is that education opens up a wide range of employment opportunities. However, in India, the issue of unemployment is affecting even those who are well-educated. According to the PLFS 2022-23 report, the unemployment rate among people who have at least completed higher secondary education is very high. In Kurukshetra, the unemployment rate is almost 2.5 times higher than the overall rate in Haryana, at over 27%. Even those who have completed their education up to a higher secondary level witness an unemployment rate of almost 6.5%. This indicates that the job prospects for educated individuals are significantly lower in Kurukshetra. The lack of quality jobs is a significant concern in the state, particularly in the Kurukshetra district.

Unemployment Rate by Education Level



Narratives from the field

We came across multiple cases of young people who have completed primary and secondary education but have not acquired any special skills. Vivek runs a mechanic shop in Kurukshetra. Having studied up to the 10th standard, he learned all his skills on the job.

“Youth must move out of Kurukshetra to get better paying jobs. Substance abuse is leading to high rates of dropouts in higher secondary education. Our elders feel concerned about it, so they urge us to move out.”

Agenda Action

Only a small portion of MPLAD funds is used for education and skill development. As some MSMEs are expanding, it is crucial to identify the required skills and **utilize MPLAD funds to create additional training courses** in Kurukshetra's existing institutes to bridge the skill gap. Additionally, establishing skill development and training institutes, including more **Industrial Training Institutes exclusively for women**, will improve the employability of the labor force and bridge the demand-supply gap for skilled labor. Currently, there are only 2 ITIs dedicated to training women. In the long run, establishing more manufacturing units under MSME and organized factory systems would increase the availability of quality jobs in the districts.

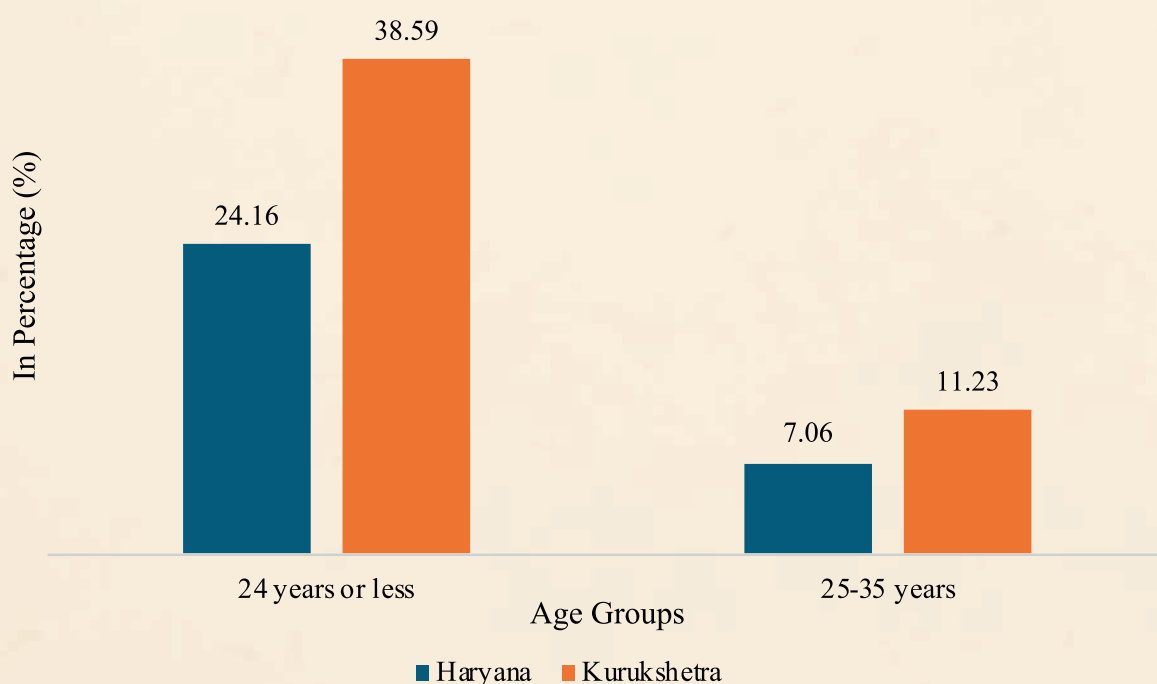


CONCERN AREA - YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

Description

Across space and time, the ability to contribute to the economy has been much higher among youth than people of other age groups. As the country is going through a demographic dividend, Haryana and Kurukshetra are no exception. The potential of youth, if not utilised by engaging them in productive activity, becomes the liability of the state, and it is likely that youth's energy not only goes to waste but is possibly directed towards destructive activity, leading to their involvement in crime and drug use, etc. Recent PLFS data (2022-23) shows that the unemployment rate in Kurukshetra for persons 24 years and below of age has been enormously high at around 39%. So, while for Haryana, this ratio is high enough at nearly 24%, Kurukshetra is witnessing almost 14.5 percentage points higher unemployment among young and most productive age groups. Besides, for age groups between 25 and 35, the unemployment rate in Kurukshetra is a little over 11%, which is again much higher than Haryana's average (nearly 7%).

Youth Unemployment Rate by Age Groups



Narratives from the field

Kurukshetra University graduates feel that their education is good. Still, the issue is the lack of employment opportunities in Kurukshetra, forcing them to move out of the district and the state.

“Private sector jobs in Kurukshetra are not paying enough money. We have invested money in our education but are not getting adequate returns. *There are no more government jobs. We get better paying jobs abroad no matter what kind of job we do there.*” – Rohit, former student of Kurukshetra University.

Agenda Action

MPLAD funds can be utilized to start **job-oriented skills training like computer software and hardware through collaborations with existing universities like Kurukshetra University**. Providing scholarships for acquiring advanced skills would immediately help the young and educated enter the tertiary sector job market.

Subsequently, since youth unemployment is high, adequate skills development is recommended for a sizable labor force by identifying required **training and opening dedicated skill development institutes** as per regional requirements. This will help the young and educated get better jobs. Creating a technical support pool and a **fund corpus to upgrade production techniques and overcome liquidity constraints** would also help local MSMEs expand their activity. A medium term action plan would be to **increase the number of working women hostels** in the district. The Ministry has sanctioned 20 working women hostels since 1975, out of which only 8 working women hostels are functional in Hisar, Rohtak (2), Kurukshetra, Panchkula, Gurugram, Jind and Faridabad. The bottlenecks in operationalizing these should be cleared and more of these pre-sanctioned hostels should be opened in Kurukshetra.

In the long run, creating industrial corridors, clusters, and opening public sector manufacturing and service units are needed to utilize the youth's potential. Integrating MSME clusters with higher value chains by connecting them with large industrial units through backward and forward supply linkages is also essential.



MISSING YOUTH!

Kurukshetra is facing a severe shortage of employment opportunities, particularly for its educated youth. Urban and rural areas report that young people must leave Kurukshetra to find work. Many young people seek employment abroad, even if it means doing menial work, as they can earn more than they would in many private sector jobs in Kurukshetra and Haryana.

Many children of farmers do not want to continue in agriculture, as it cannot support their desired lifestyle. People seek regular employment in an industry that is not dependent on seasons and offers better-paying job opportunities.

Interview with chemist shop owner

"I want the government to discover why so many youth migrate abroad. The government should generate employment here so our children do not have to leave. Parents send their children out at 20-22 years old, and once they have left, they will not return. So there is nothing much left here. I want the government to set up an education system which will land them jobs here, so that children don't have to move away, leaving their parents behind."



Interview with three farmers in the village

“Young people are moving out in large numbers for work. Even women move out for work but in lesser numbers than men. They go out and mostly do wage labour. They will finish their plus two education and migrate out. Or they might resort to illegal means of immigration. They are not finding any employment here. They sell whatever little property they own and move out. You can see in our village there are no young people around. If you look at the people standing around, no one is under the age of 50 years.”

“What can we say to make them stay here without jobs? Or they get jobs paying them Rs 8,000-10,000 for 12 hours a day. No government jobs are available, and the private sector pays less.”





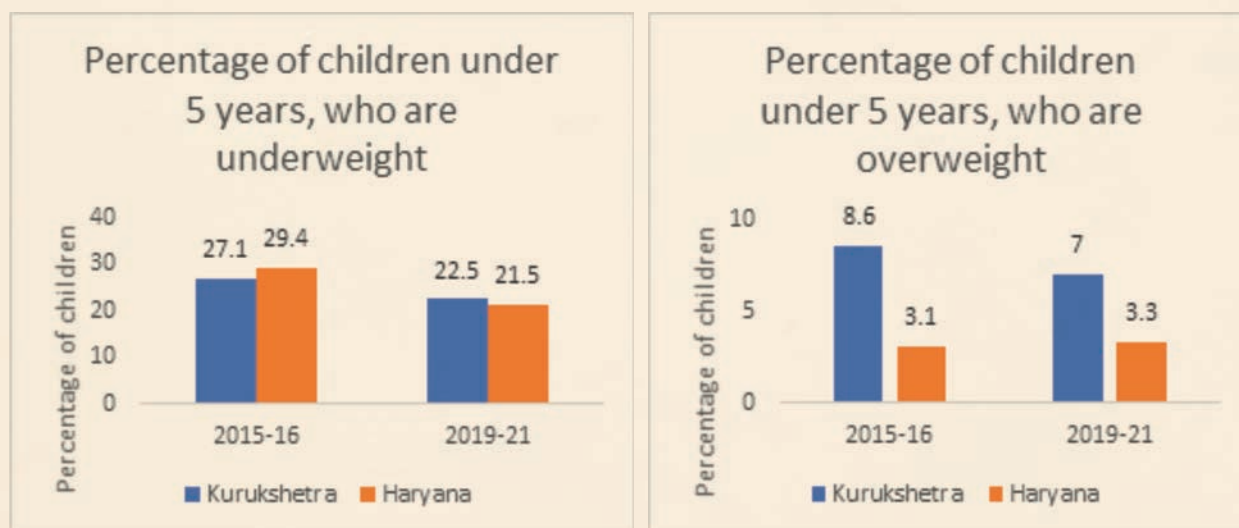
SECTORAL FOCUS HEALTH

CONCERN AREA - CHILDREN'S HEALTH

UNDER- AND OVER-NUTRITION

Description

Malnutrition in early childhood can significantly impact the life outcomes of children later in life. Malnutrition – under- and over-nutrition - remains a persistent issue in the state. As per the two rounds of the National Family Health Survey dataset, between 2015-16 and 2019-21, although there is some reduction in the proportion of underweight children in both Haryana and Kurukshetra, the improvement is less significant for Kurukshetra, compared to Haryana. Kurukshetra continues to have more than one-fifth of its children under five years who are underweight. Further, the co-existence of overnutrition poses a dual burden for Kurukshetra, in which the district's performance is much worse than the state's. The two rounds of NFHS show that not only is the proportion of overweight children in Kurukshetra double that of the state average, but there is also hardly any improvement. Rapid urban expansion and changing dietary habits are some of the most important contributing factors that could explain the growing problem of overnutrition.



Narratives from the field

We found a disparity in the maintenance and upkeep of Anganwadis near Kurukshetra versus those further away from the city. Anganwadis near Kurukshetra are well maintained, but the facilities need to be improved in other tehsils. An Anganwadi located an hour away from Kurukshetra needed much infrastructural improvement. This is reflected in the nutritional status of young children in the area.

Workers in a village located in the Pehowa tehsil have to travel to Pehowa town to access better healthcare facilities, as the Primary Healthcare Centre around their village does not have adequate facilities. This presents a significant challenge for daily wage workers as they lose their livelihood due to the time spent in hospital visits, resulting in a loss of the day's wage and a high possibility of being replaced at work since unskilled labour is readily available.

Furthermore, the random location of health centres due to unplanned land allocation often leads to areas desperately needing medical facilities being overlooked. For instance, the village of Nimbwala in Pehowa tehsil is reporting an increase in cancer cases. Perhaps specific attention can be drawn towards medical conditions like cancer, and medical facilities can be allotted in a more planned manner.

Agenda Action

Some interventions that can be immediately introduced to address the issues discussed previously include increasing honorarium of Anganwadi workers (AWWs) from the current level of Rs 4500, after consultations with the stakeholders, to also take into account the effect of inflation. This will give an instant boost to the morale as well as economic incentives of the Anganwadi Workers (AWWs) – the most crucial agents to implement any policy at the grassroots level.

Further, as a move towards dietary fortification, a very cost-effective intervention to fortify wheat flour with iron and folic acid, can be implemented with immediate effect. Similarly, protein-rich dietary items, based on the food behaviours of the area, can be included in food menu of AWCs.

In the medium to long-term, the focus needs to be towards improving service delivery via strengthening of Anganwadi Centres (AWCs). The density of AWCs in Kurukshetra, in 2020, was 1075 centres for a total of 53215 beneficiaries (pregnant and lactating mothers, plus 0-6 years aged children); making the ratio to be around 50 beneficiaries per centre. It is imperative to increase the density of AWCs, to achieve a target of 30 beneficiaries per centre, for efficient delivery of AW services. This will also ensure better coverage under AWCs, which currently stands at just about 25% of population covered under AWCs, for overall Haryana.

Efforts to be made to ensure uninterrupted supply of nutritional food for at least 300 days in a year for all beneficiaries registered at Anganwadi Centres.

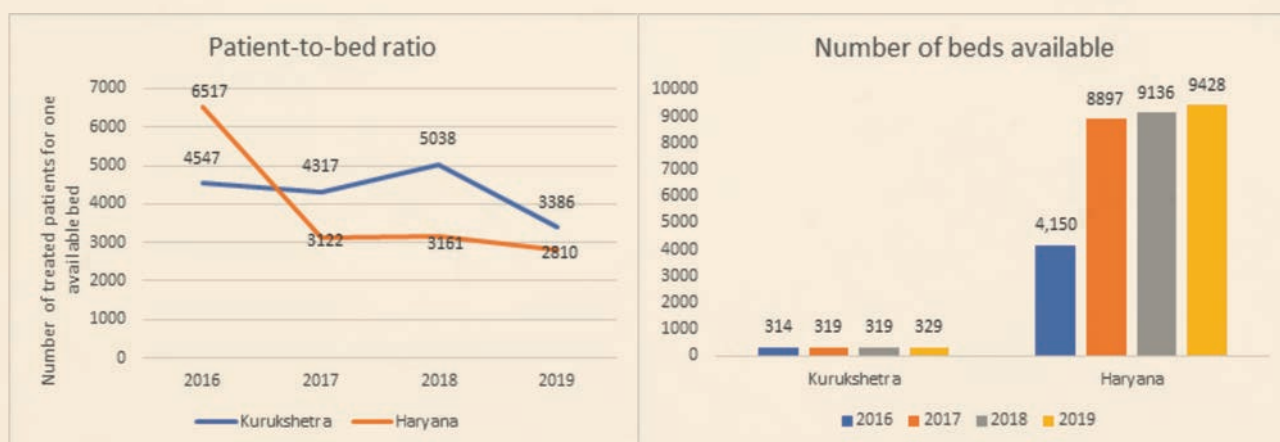
Lastly, as a long-term measure to better incentive AWWs, it can be suggested to link a part of AWW's honorarium to their performance.



CONCERN AREA - PATIENT-TO-BED RATIO

Description

A robust physical health infrastructure forms the backbone of any healthcare system. COVID-19 further highlighted the critical importance of this health infrastructure. Based on the data across years from the reports of the Statistical Abstract of Haryana, it is evident that Kurukshetra is performing poorly on this front, at absolute and relative levels, compared to the overall state average. The patient-to-bed ratio, the number of patients for one hospital bed, remains high for Kurukshetra across 2016-2019 and remains significantly higher than the corresponding figures for the overall state. This is also evident from the district's figures for the number of hospital beds. Kurukshetra seems to have added only 15 hospital beds between 2016 and 2019. In fact, as per the Statistical Abstract of Haryana, 2021-22, there are only three hospitals and five community health centres in the entire district. Scarcity of govt.-run hospitals and community health centres may compel the households to depend on private hospitals. This instantly increases their expenditure on healthcare, making this basic right a costly affair for them.



Narratives from the field

"Health care has become very expensive for us. It costs us Rs. 500 to get basic treatment in private clinics – Rs. 300 for consultation and Rs. 200 for medicines for a fever. It is difficult to afford with our earnings." – Rampal, farmer.

People have told us that the Ayushman Bharat Yojana is a good scheme, but private hospitals often allow patients to undergo unnecessary medical tests. Medicines available under the scheme are not appropriately distributed to patients.

A preference for private healthcare appears to be the case because the quality of doctors, nurses and facilities is better, even though it costs much more. However, this choice is made out of compulsion because government-run healthcare does not provide the requisite service.

Agenda Action

The interventions to address lack of basic health infrastructure can be introduced in the medium to long term. At the patient-to-bed ratio of 3386, Kurukshetra is one of the worst performers within Haryana, doing better only compared to Ambala and Panchkula.

Thus, with the immediate target of achieving a patient-to-bed ratio closer to state average – around 2800 patients per bed, and a long-term target of improving it further, massive expansion of hospitals and community health centres is required in the district.

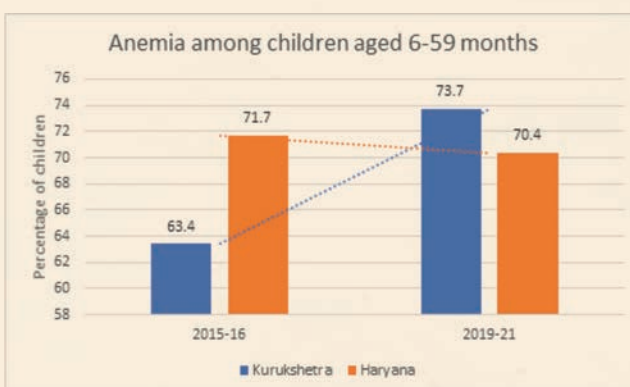
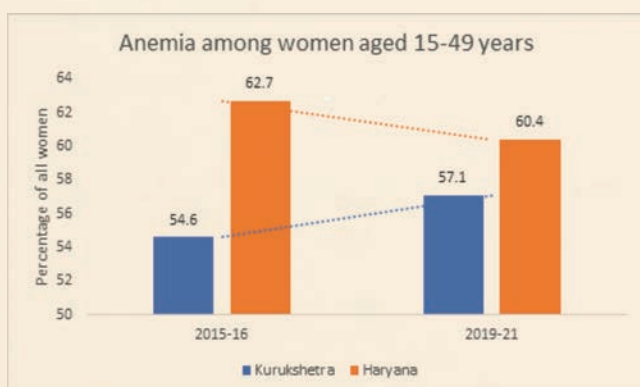
Further, given the norms set by Indian Public Health Standard (IPHS), there should be 3.3 beds per 1000 population in district hospitals. The district hospital of Kurukshetra needs to be upgraded to achieve this target.



CONCERN AREA - PREVALENCE OF ANAEMIA AMONG CHILDREN AND ADULTS

Description

Anaemia among children and women continues to be one of the most significant burdens endured by India. The figures for the proportion of children and women who are anaemic are strikingly high for Haryana as well as Kurukshetra. Based on the two rounds of NFHS, between 2015-16 and 2019-21, while the prevalence of anaemia among women and children has reduced in Haryana, it has significantly increased in Kurukshetra. Anaemia among young children, in particular, has risen by around 10 percentage points in Kurukshetra in 2019-21 and is, in fact, now much higher than the state average. This is puzzling, as with economic and social progress, the indicators ought to have improved over time; however, for Kurukshetra, they are only getting worse.



Agenda Action

The first step to address rising prevalence of anemia is to start distribution of iron supplements in AWCs, as well as door-to-door delivery of the same via ASHA workers.

Similarly, dietary fortification is a very cost-effective and quick measure to address this issue. As a move in this direction, it is vital to fortify wheat flour with iron and folic acid, for take home rations as well as cooked food at AWCs.

As discussed previously, as a long-term solution to eradicate this issue, concerted efforts need to be made to generate awareness among women, by holding weekly focused group conversations between the Anganwadi workers and mothers, and sharing best practices; and to strengthen the network of AWCs.

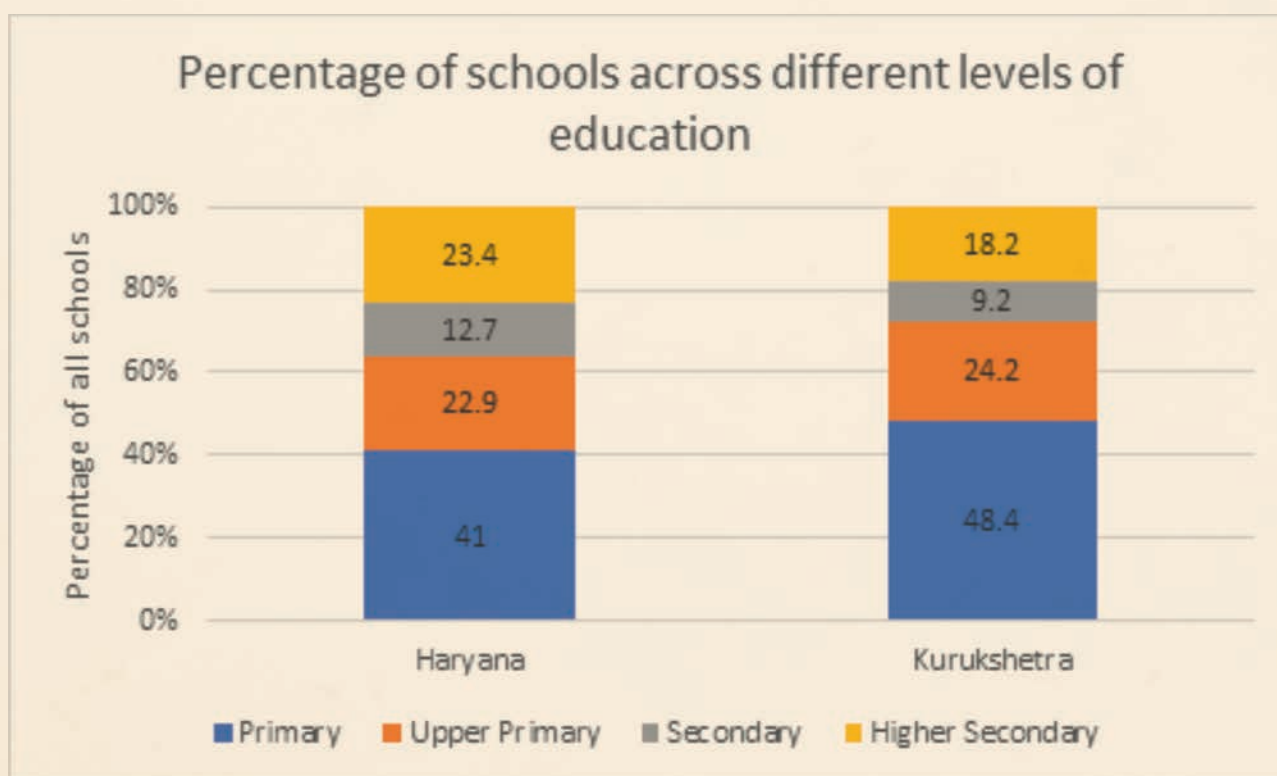
A close-up photograph of two young children, likely of South Asian descent, wearing blue school uniforms. They are both smiling and holding white books with a teal cover. The child on the right has a small nose ring. The background is a blurred wall with some faint text or drawings. A white rectangular frame is overlaid on the left side of the image, partially enclosing the text.

SECTORAL FOCUS EDUCATION

CONCERN AREA - DISTRIBUTION OF SCHOOLS ACROSS DIFFERENT LEVELS OF SCHOOLING

Description

Education has been recognised as a fundamental right of every child between the ages of 6 and 14 by our Constitution, as enacted under the RTE Act 2010. The most basic requirement to provide holistic education to children is the presence of a school. It is important to note that while ensuring enrolment of children at the entry level of schooling, that is, at the primary level of education, is a necessity; it is also essential to ensure that children who are enrolled in schools can complete their schooling. The continuation and completion of education is, thus, crucially dependent on the proximate availability of schools with secondary and higher secondary levels of education. Based on the data from the Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE) for the year 2021-22, it is evident that a considerable proportion of schools in Kurukshetra are only until the primary level (classes 1-5). Compared to Haryana, Kurukshetra has a significantly smaller percentage of schools which provide complete schooling; that is, they are till class 12.



Narratives from the field

Primary schools are accessible to most people, and villages even have primary schools nearby. The problem appears with access to secondary education, where the schools tend to be located at a distance, making commuting a challenge for many households wanting to educate their children.

A daily wage worker told us he wanted all his children, boys and girls included, to study further. However, the secondary school in Pehowa is located much further away, creating barriers to access to education.

Agenda Action

As per the rules laid down under the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, children of classes 1-5 must have access to a school within 1 km radius, while those in classes 6-8, must have a school within 3 km radius. While there is almost universal access to primary schooling in Kurukshetra, interventions are required to ensure children's universal access to middle, secondary and higher secondary schooling. This is particularly important for children to be able to complete their schooling.

To address this issue of access, on an immediate basis, more children need to be connected to the schools offering higher-level education through interventions easing access, such as ***providing public bus or any other transportation services to transport children to those schools, providing bicycles for girls and boys who have completed middle education to help them complete schooling.***

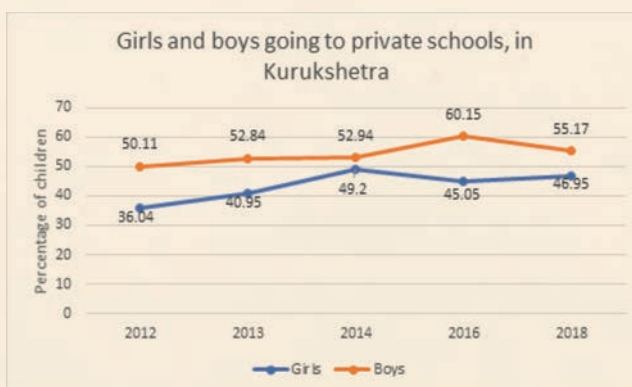
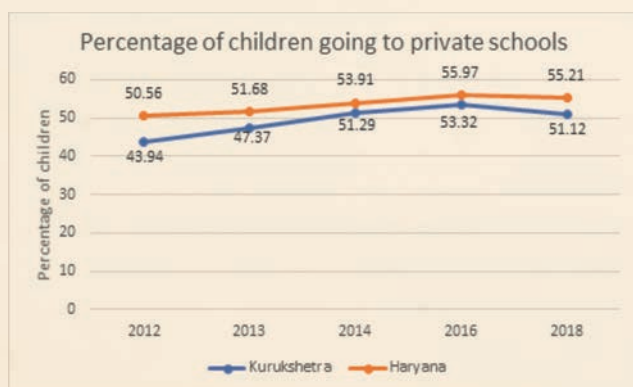
While in the long-run, in order to ensure that every child has a primary school within 1 km and **a secondary and higher secondary school within 3 km radius**, new school buildings need to be constructed, or the existing schools with classes 1-5 need to be upgraded to higher levels of schooling.



CONCERN AREA - PRIVATE SCHOOLING PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN GOING TO PRIVATE SCHOOLS

Description

Even though there is a vast network of government schools in the states of Haryana and Kurukshetra, there is a considerable preference among households to send their children to private schools. This could be due to the perceived higher quality of education at the private schools. Further, it is also believed that children in private schools will learn to speak fluent English, which is considered an essential skill in the job market in the future. Based on the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) between 2012 and 2018, the increasing preference for a private school is visible in both Haryana and Kurukshetra. Although the percentages of children enrolled in private schools are marginally lower in Kurukshetra, compared to Haryana, it is vital to note that more than half of Kurukshetra's children are enrolled in private schools, which, unlike government schools, provide education at a cost, which could be too high for households to bear, furthermore, due to lack of access to govt. Schools which provide education to a higher level, households may sometimes be compelled to send their children to nearby low-quality private schools at a higher cost. In Kurukshetra, a significantly higher percentage of boys are enrolled in private schools than girls. Since private schooling is costly, households are willing to spend it on boys' education, vis-à-vis that of girls.



Narratives from the field

Due to the scarcity of teachers and the quality of teaching in public schools, many people send their children to private schools to give them a better future, even though it is pretty costly.

"Education has become very expensive. My relatives had to pay Rs. 50,000 as advance to admit their boy to playschool! The government school building here is in bad shape; there are not enough teachers, and some schools don't even have electricity. People would like to send their children to government schools if good teachers were present and some facilities were available." – Rampal, Farmer.

Agenda Action

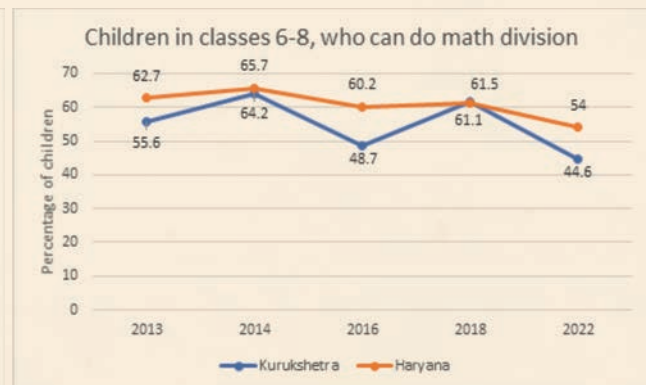
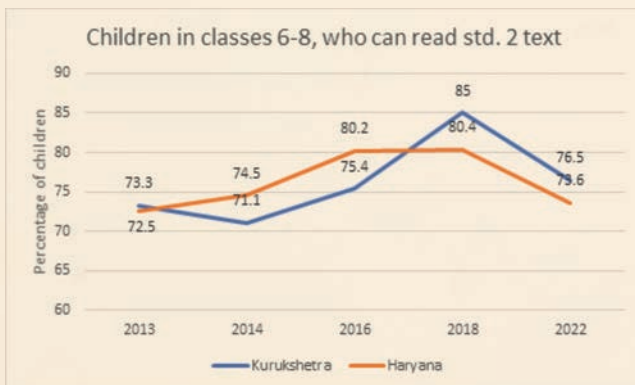
One of the important causes of growing preference towards private schools is lack of access to government schools, which can be addressed via measures discussed previously. However, in addition, these growing preferences could also be stemming from perceived higher quality of education in private schools. To address these concerns, specific measures need to be adopted to improve overall quality of education in government schools, such as capacity development training, monitoring of teachers' performances, offering specialised courses in government schools, such as English-speaking course, etc.



CONCERN AREA - QUALITY OF EDUCATION - LEARNING OUTCOMES AMONG CHILDREN IN CLASSES 6-8

Description

One of the most important indicators of the quality of education in schools is children's learning outcomes. The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) conducts an annual survey among children of different age groups, assessing them based on learning tools like essential reading and basic mathematical ability. Based on the ASER dataset for years between 2013 and 2022, it can be highlighted that in 2022, Haryana had 26% of children currently enrolled in classes 6-8 who could not read the text of class 2 level. The corresponding figure for Kurukshetra is only marginally lower than Haryana, at 24%. Whatever gains were achieved on this front, between 2013 and 2018, appear to have diminished between 2018 and 2022. The indicators of children's mathematical abilities are even worse, wherein, more than half of the children in Kurukshetra, who are enrolled in classes 6-8 cannot do a sum of basic math division. This will consequently feed into poor critical thinking and problem-solving skills, essential requirements for STEM-based professions.



Narratives from the field

A chemist who owned his shop, highlighted the issue of low quality of education due to the understaffing of public schools as vacant faculty positions were not being filled:

"The government has built a school here costing Rs. 3-4 crores, but there are not enough teachers. The students are there, but what is the point of education without enough teachers? There is no science teacher for 9th and 10th standards. It is a senior secondary school for plus two educations, but no disciplinary stream has been established. Vacancies for teacher posts have not been filled. We spoke to the school principal, who said they had sent an application to the government requesting more teachers, but no action had been taken. The government has to pay attention to this issue. Otherwise, the schools will shut down if students stop attending (due to a lack of teachers). Then what will be the point of spending Rs 3-4 crores on the school building?"

"Recently, the government-affiliated some schools with the CBSE board at the block level. If those are successful, other schools can also follow the CBSE pattern. If the teachers are good and in adequate numbers, then people sending their children to private schools would go to government schools. The teachers in government schools are better; they have qualifications like B.Ed, MPhil, and PhD, which private schools don't have. The government should focus on this area."

Agenda Action

Poor learning outcomes among children is a growing concern in not just Kurukshetra, but also in Haryana. To address these glaring gaps in learning outcomes, targeted interventions are required at the school and child level.

At the child level, providing bridge classes, such as math camp during summer break, specifically for students facing cognitive challenges, can play a vital role in improving their overall learning outcomes. This measure can be adopted on an immediate basis, utilizing the existing infrastructure of schools and teachers. Such interventions can, however, have huge implications in the long run, specifically from the point of view of enhancing employability after school.

Further, more teachers with specialised education and skills need to be employed for schools, such as teachers with a higher education degree in sciences and mathematics. This could mainly be important for improving the mathematical ability of students.



KURUKSHETRA UNIVERSITY AND ISSUES OF GRADUATE STUDENTS

Kurukshetra University is a well-reputed institution with a wide variety of departments and faculties. It is considered amongst the best educational institutions in Haryana and has a good position at the national level. The students passing out of the institution are skilled, but due to a lack of good employment opportunities in the private sector, they have to move to bigger cities or go abroad. The youth emerging from such institutions want regular and well-paying employment nearby. One of the suggestions is for Kurukshetra University to help its students find suitable employment, even if it is outside of the region. The university has the potential to grow and improve itself, thereby enabling better access to job opportunities for its students.



AGENDA PLAN FOR INTERVENTIONS

To conclude, we summarize the interventions across Livelihood, Health, and Education, with a strategic timeline categorizing them into short-term (within a year), medium-term (one to three years), and long-term (three to five years) action points. This comprehensive approach aims to address immediate needs while simultaneously laying the groundwork for sustainable, long-term solutions. By systematically tackling livelihood challenges, enhancing healthcare access, and prioritizing educational opportunities, these interventions collectively strive to uplift communities, empower individuals, and pave the way for a brighter, more equitable future. Through this holistic, multi-faceted strategy, stakeholders can collaboratively drive positive change, fostering resilience, self-sufficiency, and overall well-being.

Short-Term:

Livelihood

- Utilize MPLAD funds for job-oriented skills training, such as computer software and hardware, through collaborations with existing universities like Kurukshetra University.
- Provide scholarships for acquiring advanced skills to help the young and educated enter the tertiary sector job market.
- Identify the skills required for expanding MSMEs and create additional training courses in existing educational and training institutes to bridge the skill gap.

Health

- Increase honorarium of Anganwadi Workers (AWWs) from the current level of Rs 4500, after consultations with stakeholders, to also account for the impact of inflation. This will instantly boost the morale and economic incentives of AWWs, who are crucial for implementing policies at the grassroots level.
- Implement a cost-effective dietary fortification intervention by fortifying wheat flour with iron and folic acid, with immediate effect.
- Include protein-rich dietary items, based on the local food behaviors, in the food menu of Anganwadi Centres (AWCs) to improve nutrition.
- Start the distribution of iron supplements in AWCs and door-to-door delivery through ASHA workers, to combat the high prevalence of anaemia.

Education

- Provide public bus or other transportation services to transport children to schools offering higher levels of education like middle, secondary and higher secondary schooling. This will improve access to higher education in the immediate term.
- Distribute bicycles to girls and boys who have completed middle education to facilitate their mobility and help them continue and complete their schooling.

Medium-Term:

Livelihood

- Establish dedicated skill development and training institutes, including more Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) exclusively for women, to improve the employability of the labor force and bridge the demand-supply gap for skilled labor.
- Create a technical support pool and a fund corpus to upgrade production techniques and overcome liquidity constraints for local MSMEs to expand their activities.
- Focus on improving healthcare infrastructure and facilities, including increasing the number of healthcare professionals and resources.

Health

- Improve service delivery by strengthening Anganwadi Centres (AWCs) through measures like better infrastructure, resources, and training.
- Increase the density of AWCs in Kurukshetra to achieve a target of 30 beneficiaries per centre, from the current ratio of 50 beneficiaries per centre, for efficient delivery of AWC services.
- Ensure an uninterrupted supply of nutritional food for at least 300 days in a year for all beneficiaries registered at AWCs, to address malnutrition.
- Implement a cost-effective and quick measure of fortifying wheat flour with iron and folic acid for take-home rations as well as cooked food at AWCs, to address anaemia.

Education

- Adopt specific measures to improve the overall quality of education in government schools and address the growing preference for private schools:
 - Conduct capacity development training programs for teachers to enhance their skills and teaching methods.
 - Implement a system for monitoring and evaluating teachers' performances to ensure quality education.
 - Offer specialized courses like English-speaking classes in government schools to provide additional skills.
- Provide bridge classes or remedial programs like math camps during summer breaks for students facing cognitive challenges or learning difficulties. These targeted interventions can help improve their learning outcomes.

Long-Term:

Livelihood

- Create industrial corridors, clusters, and open public sector manufacturing and service units to utilize the potential of the youth.
- Integrate MSME clusters with higher value chains by connecting them with large industrial units through backward and forward supply linkages.
- Establish high-quality educational institutions and research facilities to promote academic excellence and research in the region.

Health

- As a measure to better incentivize AWWs and improve their performance, link a part of their honorarium to their performance-based evaluations.
- Undertake a massive expansion of hospitals and community health centres in the district to achieve a patient-to-bed ratio closer to the state average of around 2800 patients per bed, from the current high ratio of 3386.
- Upgrade the district hospital of Kurukshetra to meet the Indian Public Health Standard (IPHS) of 3.3 beds per 1000 population, to improve healthcare facilities.
- Strengthen the network of AWCs as a long-term solution to eradicate the issue of anaemia by improving access to healthcare and nutrition services

Education

- Construct new school buildings or upgrade existing primary schools (classes 1-5) to include higher levels of education like middle (classes 6-8), secondary (classes 9-10), and higher secondary (classes 11-12) to ensure universal access.
- Ensure that every child has access to a primary school within a 1 km radius and a secondary/higher secondary school within a 3 km radius, as per the Right to Education Act.
- Employ more specialized teachers with higher education degrees in subjects like sciences and mathematics to strengthen the teaching of these crucial subjects and improve students' proficiency.
- Implement long-term bridge courses and focused interventions at the school and child level to enhance students' learning outcomes and employability after completing their schooling.








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