


# Participation of scheduled caste youth in achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs) in Tamil Nadu: a critical analysis

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## Abstract

For achieving the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) it is very much called for the meaningful participation of the youth. The young population in India is sizable, diversified, and affected by a wide range of problems. Due to their social status and caste rigidity, youth from Scheduled Castes (SC) are vulnerable. Despite numerous laws and programs, Tamil Nadu's programs for SC youth have a lower-than-average active participation rate. Their transition and social development are negatively impacted by poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, discrimination, and the lack of opportunities. Numerous empirical studies have examined the status of SCs in terms of their involvement in work and education, but none have yet studied their participation in accomplishing the SDGs. This paper examines how SC youth in Tamil Nadu participated in the SDGs. Subsequently, it offers an inclusive strategy to increase SC youth participation in accomplishing the SDGs.

**Keywords** SDGs · Youth participation · Marginalization · Inclusive participation · Development · Social exclusion

## 1 Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN adopted in 2015 focus on major problems like poverty, education, gender equality, and climate change. To address prevailing global issues and challenges, the UN adopted 17 goals with 164 indicators which should be achieved by the year 2030. India is also committed to these global goals to promote the social and economic condition of its people [1]. The SDGs are a policy framework in India that is being implemented in the form of national policies, programs, and schemes by the NITI Aayog. The goals can be achieved by the country through the cooperation and coordination of all the stakeholders. Youth as one of the stakeholders carries crucial responsibilities to attain the SDGs. Youth are defined as persons between the age of 15 to 24 according to the UN. However, youth are defined in India, as persons between the age of 15 to 29 years [2].

Biologically, youth is a transition period from childhood to adulthood [3] (where the adolescent undergoes social, physical, intellectual, and psychological growth. Young people are the innovators, creators, builders, and leaders of the future. Youths are a major force for sustainable development and key agents for social change, economic growth, and technological innovation. However, without access to food, health, education, sports, and employment, youth potential can't be achieved. India is considered the youngest and second largest country in the world with 371.4 million young

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people by 2021 [4]. However, India as a fast-growing economy is not utilizing the full potential of the youth group as an added advantage for the growth of the country. For youth, to fulfill their basic needs; education and employment are fundamental and should be provided to them without discrimination [5]. Consonantly, Goals 4 and 8 are also insisting on the importance of quality education and decent work for all. Youth plays a crucial role in the development of the nation. They are considered a valuable segment of the population. Therefore, the participation of youth in SDGs is basic to access education and employment for their livelihood.

### 1.1 Participation of youth in education and employment of youth in India

India as the youngest country with the highest youth population of 34.8% has established various policies and programs for the Youth as they face various problems and multiple discriminations [6]. The lack of access to resources and opportunities affects the comprehensive development of the youth [7]. Furthermore, due to a lack of awareness among the youth resist their active participation in government programs and schemes. Illiteracy and unemployment are the two major issues for youth in India that combat them to fulfill their basic need and attain their development needs [8]. Education is considered as one of the important factors for human growth and development. It also accented as one of the Fundamental rights according to the provision enshrined in Article-21 A of the Constitution of India. Nevertheless, there are various forms of discrimination in the functional system of society, such as caste, gender, and social status. Due to this inequality, many important factors for human growth, such as education, health, and employment, haven't been equally applied to all.

Further, since today's youth transitions are complicated, it is a herculean challenge for the younger generation to find employment in the present Indian labor market. As per the periodic labor force survey, during the April-June quarter of 2021, 25.5% was the youth unemployment rate in urban India, which rose around 3% compared to the January-March quarter of 2021 [9]. According to Census 2011, more than two-thirds (about 68.8%) of the total population in India is located in rural areas. In 2022, the unemployment rate in rural areas rose to 8.3% from 6.62% [10]. It was observed that the unemployment rate is higher in rural areas based on the labor force participation of the youth. The labor force participation rate (LFPR) of India manifested that 38.1% of rural youth were employed whereas, in urban areas, it was 38.7% in 2019 [11].

In education, compared to the total population of youth (371.4 million), 37.4 million youth had been enrolled in higher education in Indian educational institutions [12]. It is furthermore concerning that the unemployment rate of educated youth in India is 13% [13]. The reasons like lack of inculcation of skills, high competition due to high population, prejudices and cultural restrictions over career choices, and the unequal accessibility of resources are the causes for unemployment among the educated youth in India.

Mere education degrees without inculcation of skills are not helping the youth to get employment [14]. Therefore, creating education and employment opportunities for the youth must be the top priority of both the state and union governments. Consequences of the high population lead to complexities of problems and demand for adjoining administrative inferences. Furthermore, the persistence of social and economic inequality in terms of access to basic services such as access to education, access to basic health care services, access to basic amenities (drinking water and sanitation), access to credit and financial facilities, and access to justice (through public institutions of Law Enforcement) across states is another major problem in India [15]. The social stratification in India based on caste, class, and gender is also creating hurdles for marginalized youth to participate in education and employment as the resources are distributed to the people with power instead of people with need.

### 1.2 Social stratification in India: negation of education and employment

The term 'people with power' in the Indian context indicates the people from the upper caste. Caste is a social division of people originating from the Hindu religion. The term 'scheduled caste' indicates a group of people who were previously considered 'untouchables' as they are placed in the very lowest position in the Hindu social structure.

They are being isolated from society and denied to participate in common social, economic, political, and cultural activities [16]. Especially, the marginalized environment and structural barriers deprive social interactions [17]. Therefore, the SC youth in India are facing intersectionality of discrimination to even fulfill their basic needs; because their fundamental rights and necessities have been violated by oppressive actions. The primary action taken by the Indian government to combat caste discrimination is political changes built on the principles of the Constitution. Schemes and policies are hence the 'rights' granted to the SC.

### 1.3 SC youth participation in education and employment

In India, the Scheduled Castes are forced by socio-economic constraints to remain at the bottom of the social order, and as a result, they deal with social exclusion daily. Despite completing higher education, the SC youth continue to be unemployed or work as casual or day labourers as a consequence of their historical marginalization [18]. Under Article 45 of the Constitution of India, education is free and compulsory for all children below the age of 14 years. Under Article 46, education is to be promoted for the educational and economic interest of the Scheduled Castes with special attention to the interests of the Scheduled Classes. However, young people face difficulties in getting scholarships and exemption from paying the tuition fee that they are eligible for. It prevents them from participating in higher education [19]. The caste system in India is socially accepted and deeply rooted and used to marginalize individuals and determine their social and economic standing. It denies the people of lower caste such as the SC to access the public resources and resources available [13]. It is viewed as the high percentage of illiteracy among the SC youth even though it is one of the fundamental rights of Indian Citizens [20]. However, the institutions and mechanisms of society still practice this kind of prejudice. Consequently, the SC community is directly impacted by the initiatives created by the current system [21, 22]. Particularly marginalized youth such as SC youth are vulnerable in terms of their lack of accessibility to the available resources.

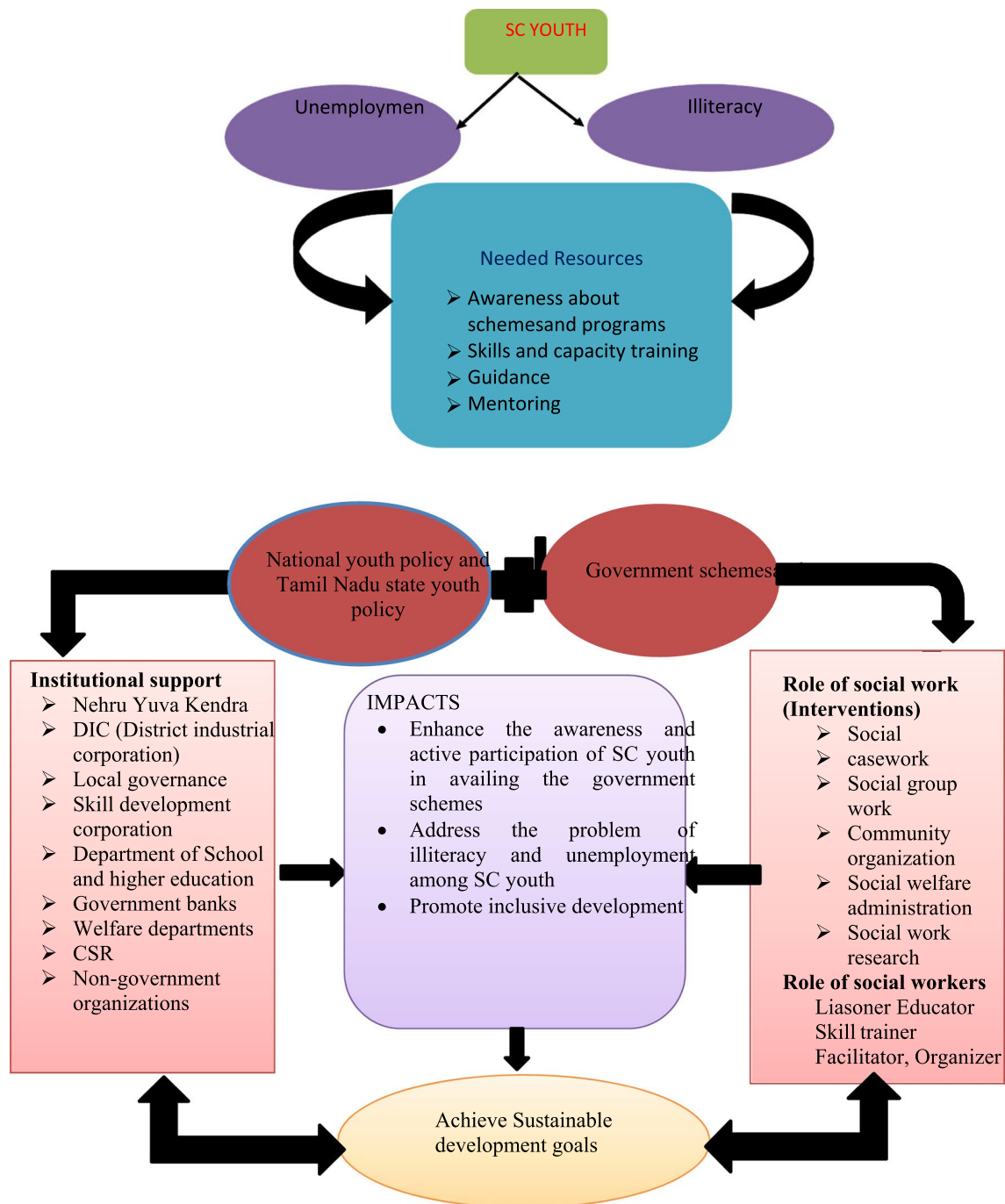
The Government of India has special schemes to enable access to opportunities including scholarships for education, financial support, and skill building for setting up enterprises, reservations in jobs, and special courts to address instances of atrocities and violence [23]. However, Narwana et al. [23] argues that despite of provision of affirmative actions like providing scholarships to increase the educational status of SCs, the lack of accessibility of such schemes is due to poor governance and mechanism implemented by the government [23]. So, the gap between the schemes and people should be addressed for impactful implementation of the policies and programs.

Based on the National Sample Survey [24] quinquennial survey of employment and unemployment shows that there were about 12% of total youth in India remained illiterate in 2009-10 [24]. Alarming, one-third of the total illiterate youth, 123 million, in the world is located in India [25]. Thus, it is inferred that educational levels, literacy skills, and vocational skills among the youth in India seem to be very low. By social groups, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes respectively account for 16.6% and 8.6% of the total population in India. The unemployment problem of the youth is still another major issue that needs to be addressed. It is estimated that 96.8 percent of all young workers in developing countries are in the informal economy [26]. During 2018–2019 unemployment rate for SC youth in the 15–29 years age bracket moderated but remained high at 17.3 percent, as against 20.6 percent a year ago [27].

In India, the SDGs have been implemented through various programs, schemes, and policies. But, the active participation of the youth in the schemes and programs determines their participation in the SDGs. Thus, the paper focuses on education and employment as both factors are crucial in the transition period of youth contributing to their intellectual and independent development. Therefore, the authors attempted the study to examine whether SC youth use the programs and policies. It was observed that the low level of participation of youth from SC in education and work indicates that they are less likely to participate in government programs and policies that support Sustainable Development Goals 4 and 8 respectively.

### 1.4 Theoretical framework

Youth is an integral part of society and their participation in social development is viewed as critical. However, youth in India face many hurdles to their participation in development programs due to social, economic, political, and cultural factors. Particularly, SC youth participation is found less in the government schemes and programs that are designed specifically for them due to a lack of access to opportunities and resources. The lack of awareness leads to a lack of participation of SC youth and that can be set right through the institutional mechanisms and inclusive approaches. The concept of institutionalism indicates that government organizations as institutions that have the legitimacy to enforce, determine, and implement schemes, policies, and programs for the people of the nation. However, paradoxically the gaps in the institutional mechanism as it does not provide the specific framework for the effective implementation of the schemes and programs and for creating an impact on the target population. It is the role of the government institution to reach out to the target population through decentralized governance particularly anything that concerns the marginalized i.e. SC youth. Figure 1 depicts the conceptual framework for enhancing youth participation in achieving the SDGs.



**Fig. 1** Conceptual framework for enhancing youth participation in achieving the SDGs

Thus the pragmatic role of government institutions is essential to ensure the participation of SC youth. It is also a fact that the systems associated with the SC youth also affect their level of awareness and participation in government schemes. Emile Durkheim viewed society complex system of interrelated and interdependent parts working together. He emphasized that values, customs, and religious beliefs are the dictators of society [28]. Caste as an ascribed type of socially accepted status determines the development of individuals based on the caste they belong instead of their capacity. It is a traditional and religious notion that is deep-rooted in the minds of the people. The caste as the authoritative power marginalizes the individuals and denies them to access resources. To eliminate such kind of discrimination imposed over people, schemes, and policies are being established by the State and Central Governments. But due to

lack of awareness of schemes decreases the participation of SC youth in the schemes, particularly those schemes that are specifically designed for them.

## 1.5 Problem statement

The Agenda 2030 views youth as critical change agents in the SDGs and stresses the importance of strengthening the partnership between youth and other stakeholders. There are 17 Sustainable Goals and of them, Goal 4 (Quality Education) and Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) are more significant in the sense it is directly related to the social and economic development of a country. The 2011 Census reveals that the population of Scheduled Caste is 20% in Tamil Nadu. Although numerous Central Government and State sponsored schemes and programs have been implemented in the State, however, the participation of SC in Tamil Nadu is significantly less in certain districts due to poverty, and lack of access to information are major obstacles, the problems of SC youth in Tamil Nadu are similar to those across the country. That's the reason the National Institution for Transforming India; Commission (NITI, AAYOG) identified Ramanathapuram and Viruthunagar as Aspirational Districts of Tamil Nadu. Furthermore, the State Government of Tamil Nadu has identified Dharmapuri district to be given due consideration owing to its backwardness in social development. Besides the densely SC-populated districts such as Chennai, Thiruvallur, Kancheepuram and Vilupuram districts have also been taken considered for the study. The primary objective of the study is to identify the factors that hinder the participation of SC youth in the Central Government and state-sponsored schemes and programs that are in line with the SDGs.

## 2 Materials and methods

The data manifested in this paper is retrieved from the published research project, titled "Social Reality of Scheduled Caste Youth in Tamil Nadu Concerning Sustainable Development Goals". For the study, the descriptive research design was adopted to describe the status and participation of SC youth in SDG 4 and 8. A structured interview schedule was used to collect data from the Scheduled Caste youth from seven districts of Tamil Nadu, Viz, Ramanathapuram, Dharmapuri, Viruthunagar, Villupuram, Tiruvallur, Kancheepuram, and Chennai. A total, of 90 respondents participated in the study and the multi-stage sampling technique was used to select the respondents. Informed consent was obtained from all the respondents. Ethical clearance was obtained from the respective institute. Besides the empirical data, the paper also congregates secondary data to support the argument of the researchers and to expound the essence of the primary data. Content analysis of secondary data was administered to contemplate and strengthen the findings of the study. The secondary data were obtained from the sources viz., the Indian Labor Organization, Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation of India, All India Survey on Higher Education, Periodic Labor Force Survey of India, and other related Government publications, journals, articles, and newspapers were being used to understand the participation of Scheduled caste youth in education and employment.

## 3 Results and analysis

### a. Socio-economic profile of the respondents

It is observed from Table 1 that male respondents are more than female respondents, which indicates less participation of female youth in the Youth club activities due to gender disparity in family and community. It is revealed from the study that most of the respondents hail from rural areas and it has to be noted that SC communities live in rural areas live separately and are neglected whereas all caste communities coexist in urban and semi-urban areas. While, 35.5% of respondents engaged in employment paid every month, and a sizeable (20%) are daily wage earners whereas 6.8% are paid every week. However, 37.7% of respondents are under the category of students or unemployed. This indicates the lower socioeconomic status of the SC youth in the selected districts of Tamil Nadu.

### b. Awareness participation of SC youth in government schemes and programmes

Table 2 depicts the results of the Mann–Whitney U Test and it revealed that there is no significant difference in the Awareness level between the Aspirational districts and other districts in terms of Goal 4 since the hypothesis of the above sample test is rejected as the p-value is greater ( $p > 0.05$ ) than the significant value. On the other hand, it has to be noted that there is a significant difference ( $p < 0.05$ ) in the level of awareness among the respondents between the Aspirational districts and other districts concerning Goal 8. The Aspirational districts (Ramanathapuram and Viruthu-

**Table 1** Socio-economic profile

S. No	Sex	Frequency	Percentage %
1	Male	75	83.3
2	Female	15	16.7
	Total	90	100
S. No	Community	Frequency	Percentage %
1	Rural	71	78.9
2	Semi-urban	4	4.4
3	City	15	16.7
	Total	90	100.0
S. No	Income	Frequency	Percentage %
1	Monthly salary	32	35.5
2	Daily wage	18	20.0
3	Weekly wage	6	6.8
4	Not applicable	37	37.7
Total		90	100.0

**Table 2** Mann–Whitney U Test for awareness level of schemes and programs of the respondents concerning SDGs between the Aspirational districts and other districts

SDG goals	Districts	N	Mean rank	Sum of ranks	Mann–Whitney U	Sig	Result
Goal 4	Aspirational districts	28	50.21	1406.00	736.000	0.196	Not significant
	Other districts	62	43.37	2689.00			
Goal 8	Aspirational districts	28	53.63	1501.50	640.500	0.028	Significant
	Other Districts	62	41.83	2593.50			

P value = 0.000 ( $p < 0.05$ )

P-value <  $\alpha$ —The differences between the mean ranks are statistically significant concerning Goal 8

nagar) have scored higher than the other districts which reveals that the awareness level in the aspirational districts is higher than the other districts in Goal 8.

Table 3 shows the results of Kruskal–Wallis Test for the participation of Schemes and programmes by the respondents between the Aspirational Districts and Other districts. Since the p-value of the test is greater than the significant value, the hypothesis of the above sample test is rejected. Thus, it indicates that there is a difference in the level of participation among the respondents across the seven districts. Particularly, Ramanathapuram (72.63), Dharmapuri (56.13), and Viruthunagar (53.21) have scored higher than the other districts. It has to be noted that Chennai scored less which indicates the low level of participation of the respondents in the State and Central government schemes.

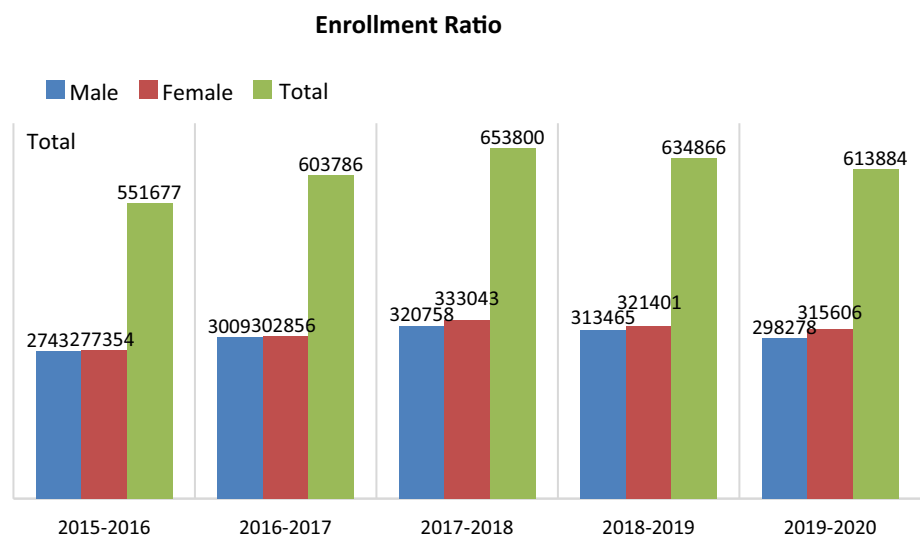
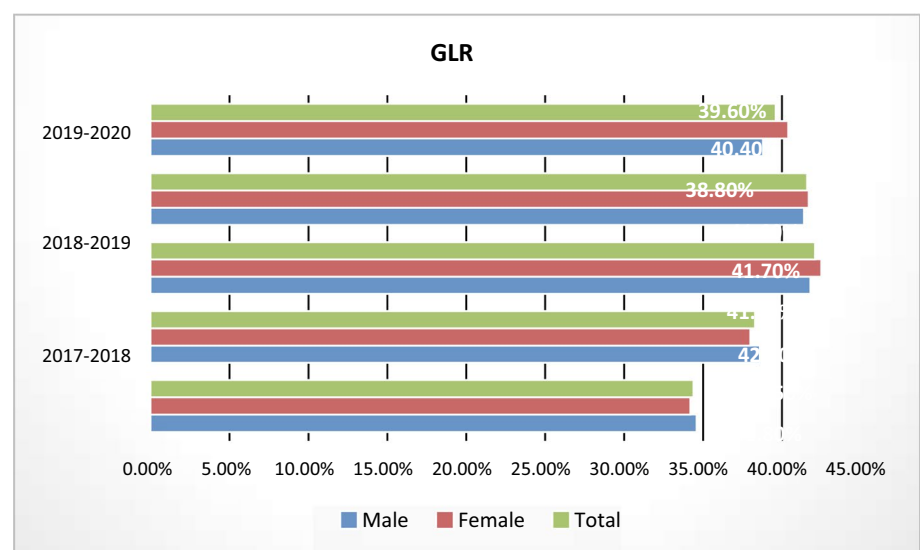
### c. Sustainable development goal number 4—quality education

In India, the overall gross enrollment ratio in higher education is 27.10% between the age group of 18–23 years [29]. The overall male enrollment is 26.90% in which the enrollment of SC males is 22.8%. Similarly, the female enrollment ratio level is 27.3% whereas for the SC female, it is 24.1%. The Enrollment status of Tamil Nadu youth and SC youth has been depicted in Figs. 1, 2. It shows the rise in education enrollment between 2015 and 2019.

The rate of enrolment decreases between 2019 and 2020 year. Many empirical studies stated the low enrolment rate between 2019 and 2020 was due to COVID-19. Education is the biggest sector adversely affected by the Pandemic [30]. Figures 2, 3 show a gradual increase in enrolment during the years 2015 to 2018 and started gradual decrease in the following years 2019 and 2021. The reservation system in India is a right for inclusive participation among all social groups in which the reservation for SC is 15% [31]. Both the empirical data and the secondary data analyzed the gradual decrease in participation of the SC population in education. To promote inclusive education, the Indian government as well as the Tamil Nadu government offer various scholarships and schemes. The post-matric scholar-

**Table 3** Kruskal–Wallis test for participation of schemes and programs by the respondents between the Aspirational districts and other districts

District	N	Mean rank	Rank order	Kruskal–Wallis H	Df	Sig	Result
Aspirational districts							
Ramanathapuram	16	72.63	1	51.59	6	0.000	Significant
Viruthunagar	12	53.21	2				
Group Mean		62.92					
Other districts							
Dharmapuri	8	56.13	1	51.59	6	0.000	Significant
Thiruvallur	11	50.91	2				
Villupuram	13	49.42	3				
Kancheepuram	15	32.40	4				
Chennai	15	10.47	5				
Group Mean		38.86					
Total	90						

P value = 0.000 ( $p < 0.05$ )P-value <  $\alpha$ —The differences between the mean ranks are statistically significant**Fig. 2** Enrollment ratio of SC population from last 5 year.  
Source: AISHE, [29]**Fig. 3** Gross level Ratio (GLR) of education among SC.  
Source: AISHE, [29]



**Table 4** Educational qualification of the respondents

S. No	Education	Frequency	Percentage %
1	Higher education	57	63.40
2	Secondary level and diploma	22	24.40
3	High school level	9	10.00
4	Not willing to answer	2	2.20
Total		90	100.00

**Table 5** Kruskal–Wallis test for awareness of schemes and programs among the respondents in the Aspirational districts and other districts concerning sustainable goal no.4

S. No	Total awareness	Districts	N	Mean rank	Rank order
Aspirational district					
1	Goal No.4 (Quality education)	Ramanathapuram	16	65.72	1
2		Viruthunagar	12	29.54	2
		Group Mean		47.63	
Other districts					
1		Kancheepuram	15	48.00	1
1		Chennai	15	48.00	1
2		Dharmapuri	8	42.88	2
3		Villupuram	13	38.00	3
4		Tiruvallur	11	37.45	4
		Group Mean		42.86	
		Total	90		
Test statistics					
Test	Variable				
Chi-square	20.863				
Df	6				
Asymp.sig	0.002				

P value = 0.002 (p < 0.05)

P-value <  $\alpha$ —The differences between the mean ranks are statistically significant

ships, tuition fee exemptions, educational incentives, and free laptops [32] cycle schemes are provided for the SC youth to promote their educational status by the Government of Tamil Nadu [33].

According to the Sustainable Development Goals Report (2030), SDG–4 foresees to ‘ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all [34]. One of the targets of Goal 4 (Goal 4.4) is by 2030, countries substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs, and entrepreneurship. Similarly, countries target by 2030 to ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy (Target 4.6).

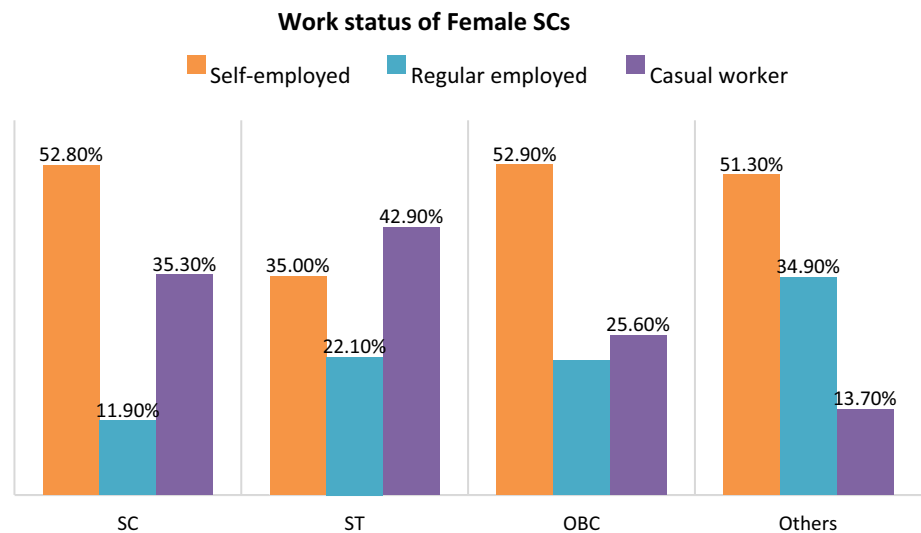
The Table 4 shows the educational qualification of the respondents and it indicates that the maximum number of SC youth (63.40%) had access to higher education (the under graduation and post-graduation). But on the contrary, it is a serious concern that 24.40% and 10.00% have not even completed their higher secondary education. Similarly, the interfered secondary data also reveals the decrease in educational participation of SC from 2018 to 2020 (Figures 2, 3). Since the p-value of the test is lesser than the significant value (0.05), the null hypothesis of the sample test is rejected and the awareness level about goal number 4 is not equal across the 7 districts as shown in Table 5 above. Ramanathapuram district has more (65.72) awareness about various educational schemes of state and central government comes under Goal no-4 (quality education). Viruthunagar<sup>1</sup> an Aspirational district, holds the last with a 29.54 median

<sup>1</sup> The Nodal Officer for Virudhunagar Aspirational District and Niti Ayog had identified Virudhunagar as one of the 112 backward districts across the country in 2018. Hence special attention has been given in these districts in the areas of Health and Nutrition, Education, Agriculture and Water Resources, Financial Inclusion and Skill Development and Basic Infrastructure. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Madurai/virudhunagar-district-ranked-9th-among-112-aspirational-districts/article38057713.ece>.



**Table 6** Age and occupation—cross tabulation

S. No	Age	Occupation					Total
		Employed	Unemployed	Self-employed	Student	Others	
1	15–20	8	0	1	14	3	26 (28.9%)
2	20–25	22	3	6	13	2	46 (51.1%)
3	25–29	8	1	4	3	2	18 (20%)
	Total	38 (42.2%)	4 (4.4%)	11 (12.2%)	30 (33.3%)	7 (7.7%)	90 (100%)

**Fig. 4** Work status of Females belonging to Scheduled caste. Source: Periodic Labor Force Survey, 2017–2018

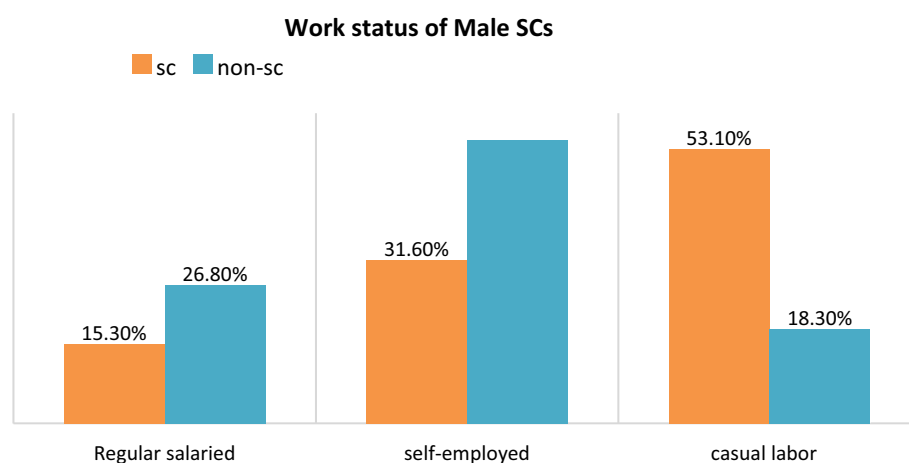
rank with low awareness about educational schemes and policies. This suggests that the district needs to develop its educational system.

#### **d. Sustainable development goal number 8—decent work (employment)**

Goal 8 guides countries to promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment, and decent work for all [35]. One of the targets of Goal 8 is to achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value by 2030 (target 8.5). The other target focusing on youth is to substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education, or training by 2020. In addition, by 2020, countries to develop and operationalize a global strategy for youth employment and implement the Global Jobs Pact of the International Labor Organization. The lower education levels of SCs make most of the population unskilled and the majority of the SC population are working in the informal sectors [36].

The discrimination in the labor market that exists in both the formal and informal sectors shows that employment opportunities have not been provided solely based on education qualification but consider the social category of the individual. The youth unemployment rate has been increasing over the years. The SC youth is the one who has been deprived of opportunities and resources and becoming vulnerable and struggling to establish a basic livelihood. SC has the highest unemployment rate in India since the 1990s [37]. Table 6 shows the employment status of youth in correlation with their age. A maximum number of respondents who participated in the study were employed. However, it was also investigated that most of the SC youth who participated were underemployed. The lack of opportunities and participation prevents the SC youth from accessing appropriate employment based on their education qualification. It is further evinced from Figures 4, 5 that the Percentage of the workforce of non-SC is high in the area of regular salary and self-employment compared to the SC population; whereas, the majority percentage were involved in casual labor. While labor force participation of the youth (15–29) during January–March 2020 was 39.5%, it decreased by nearly one percent (38.4%) during January–March 2021. The unemployment rate increased to 22.9% during January–March 2021 than in January–March 2020 which was 21.2%. In Tamil Nadu, the labor force participation of the youth (15–29) in January–March 2020 was at 44.5 but decreased in January–March 2021 by 0.2%. The unemployment rate in January–March 2020 was 19.9 increased in January–March 2021 to 23.9% [38]. Figures 4, 5 manifest the type of employment

**Fig. 5** Work status of the Male population belongs to the Scheduled caste. Source: NSSO, 2009-2010



status of women and men from SC with Non-SC social categories. Both the pictures show that compared to other caste groups, the SC males and females are majorly involved in casual work which does not have any security or employment guarantee.

### 3.1 Hypothesis

There is no significant difference in awareness level between Aspirational districts and Other districts concerning SDG.8.

The hypothesis of the above sample test is rejected since the p-value of the test is greater than the significant value. Table 7 shows that the Ramanathapuram district has high awareness about schemes related to decent work and Tiruvallur ranks low among the seven districts.

## 4 Discussion

Although the study reveals that 63.40% of SC youth have reached the higher education level (the under graduation and post-graduation), it has to be noted that a sizeable population of the SC youth (24.40% and 10.00%) did not complete their higher secondary. This finding corroborates with the secondary data obtained from AISHE [29] as it indicates that there was a decline in the participation of SC youth in higher education from 2018 to 2020. It has to be noted that the lack of opportunities and participation prevent the SC youth from accessing appropriate employment based on their education qualification. Similarly, the study reveals that although 42.2% of the SC youth were found employed they remained underemployed. Furthermore, 4.4% of the SC youth were observed unemployed. Thus, it seems that underemployment and unemployment are common among the SC youth in Tamil Nadu. The study findings substantiated with the secondary data obtained from Periodic Labor Force Survey, [38] that the unemployment rate increased from 19.9 to 23.9%. Thus, lack of opportunities and participation resist the SC youth to access appropriate employment based on their education qualification. The Percentage of the workforce of non-SC is high in the area of regulated salary and self-employment compared to the SC population who are majorly involved in casual labor. Their engagement in the unorganized sector and short-term jobs increases their vulnerability to poverty. Hence their participation in the organized sector must be encouraged so that they would be protected with the legislated benefits [39, 40]. The Kruskal Wallis test revealed there is a significant difference ( $0.000 p < 0.05$ ) between educational status and awareness of schemes and programs among the respondents across the selected districts. Therefore education plays a crucial role in enhancing the participation of SC youth in the SDGs. The Kruskal Wallis Test revealed that there is a significant difference between awareness of SC youth across the seven districts and the programs and schemes related to Goal No.4 Quality Education ( $0.002 p < 0.05$ ) and Goal No.8 Decent Work ( $0.006 p < 0.05$ ).

Hence the Government of Tamil Nadu must ensure that these goals are achieved by the SC youth through legal enforcement and Context-specific approaches and welfare measures. The participation of SC youth in the schemes and programs between the Aspirational Districts and other districts tested by the Mann–Whitney U test reveals that there is

**Table 7** Kruskal–Wallis test for awareness of schemes and programmes among the respondents in the Aspirational districts and other districts concerning sustainable goal no.8

S. No	Total awareness	Districts	N	Mean rank	Rank order
Aspirational Districts					
1	Goal No.8 (Decent work)	Ramanathapuram	16	61.97	1
2		Viruthunagar	12	42.50	2
		Group Mean		52.23	
Other Districts					
1		Chennai	15	50.90	1
2		Kancheepuram	15	48.23	2
3		Villupuram	13	39.92	3
4		Dharmapuri	8	37.50	4
5		Tiruvallur	11	26.14	5
		Group Mean		40.53	
		Total	90		
Test statistics					
Test	Variable				
Chi-square	17.968				
Df	6				
Asymp.sig	0.006				

P value = 0.006 ( $p < 0.05$ )

P-value  $\leq \alpha$ —The differences between some of the mean ranks are statistically significant

a significant difference at 0.005 level ( $P < 0.05$ ). Thus, it indicates the effective Governance in the Aspirational districts in terms of participation in the schemes and programs of State and Central Governments.

Availability of schemes along with the awareness and accessibility of the schemes is important. The lack of awareness among the SC youth about the available schemes and policies and the lack of administrative and organizational resources to provide awareness and educate the SC youth about the schemes and policies are the reasons for the lack of participation of SC youth in the education and employment sectors. Thus, the conceptual framework manifested in the study can be used as an integrative approach that emphasizes the application of National and state youth policy through the integrative functioning of the Government and non-government organizations along with the micro, mezzo, and macro inferences of social work methods to enhance the participation of SC youth in education and employment schemes in line with the Sustainable development goal number four and eight. The accessibility and increased educational and employment participation primarily help the SC youth to fulfill their basic needs and it is also a tool to liberate themselves from the state of marginalization. The ultimate purpose of education should elevate the conscientization among the Scheduled Caste youth about the perpetual persecution faced by them and should give them the power to unleash their tyrannical social structure. Therefore, the achievement of sustainable development goals ultimately promotes equality and justice.

#### 4.1 Implication of the study

The article critically examined how Scheduled Caste youth participated in SDGs 4—Quality Education and 8—Decent Work. Increased engagement of SC in school is a result of several years of ongoing social reforms. The amount of SC youths enrolling in higher education is, however, very small. In terms of employment, underemployment overtakes unemployment as the main concern for young people in the Scheduled Caste.

In this study, the difficulties SC youths have in obtaining a quality education and decent employment were studied and mainstreamed. It provides policy and program planners with the ground-level reality they need to develop proactive inclusive and equity policies that will raise the standard of living for SC youth. The study's findings will be very helpful in creating targeted programs and interventions that will improve the involvement of SC youth in the SDGs through

government schemes and initiatives. The NYKS needs to take a proactive approach at district levels to ensure the participation and development of SC youth by recognizing their social contexts.

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**Data availability** The datasets generated during and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

## Declarations

**Informed consent** Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

**Competing interests** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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