

Youth Development Challenges in Pakistan: Need for Youth Empowerment

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Abstract

This paper discusses challenges related to youth development in Pakistan. Youth bulge is an ever increasing global threat and Pakistan's majority of population is youth. No doubt, youth is a resource but if left unutilized and ignored, it can be a challenge for a country. Youth in Pakistan is facing multiple challenges that hinder their endeavor for their own development as well country's wellbeing. This paper suggests creating and implementing effective youth policies with equal participation of young people as stakeholders. It is also recommended to create coordination among provinces of the country for the purpose of improving youth wellbeing. This paper puts forth assumption that developed youth make a developed country, so youth development must be taken as priority task by the policymakers and legislators of Pakistan.

Keywords: Youth Development, Youth Empowerment, Youth Policy, Pakistan

1.0 Introduction

Youth make up the larger portion of global population. They are considered as the critical and crucial agents for social change and progress especially in the developing countries. Therefore, it is important to prepare better policies to engage Youth in the right direction and to prepare them for playing their due role in the society by empowering them with due skills and capabilities. This research aims to find out the current status of young people living in Pakistan, their socio-politico-economic issues, the challenges in being engaged and empowered and the level of their participation in policymaking processes. The exuberant population growth around the world has also gifted Pakistan with youth bulge, which according to recent research findings is about to reach the peak of its own record. In this scenario, where the youth population is large in number, most of them being inactive and out of marketplace, it poses serious challenges for the government also which alone with limited resources cannot handle the problem. Therefore, this paper assumes youth as partners of public-private venture to develop the society at large.

2.0 Youth

There are multiple definitions and age brackets for elaborating the term Youth. Some organizations consider people 15-24 years of age as youth (UN), others including USAID youth policy reports (USAID, 2012) assume 10-29 years as Youth while according to Pakistan's officials people from 15-29 years of age are considered as lying in the category of Youth. (National Youth Policy, 2012)

2.1 Youth in developing countries

The youth population in the developing countries has witnessed the largest size in the history, moreover, some South Asian countries tend to see continuum in such increase and reach peak of youth population till 2030. (David L. 2007) The changing demographics of Youth in developing countries, with exploding youth population, have put forth numerous socio-politico-economic challenges for the policy makers. Such rampant rise in the youth cohort gives and will continue to give boost to Youth related issues, like, health, education and employment challenges.(David L. 2007)

2.2 Youth in Pakistan

As per estimations, the population of Youth in Pakistan is around 55.7 million, which constitutes more than 30% of the whole population of the country (Annual Plan, 2013). According to World Bank Report (2007), Pakistan' youth population will reach its peak in year 2039, with average annual growth rate of 1.3% till 2015 and .9% from 2025 to 2035 as predicted by United Nations Medium Variant Projections.

Like Youth around the world, Pakistani youth also face numerous issues and challenges. Ali S. (2005) in his book asserts that Economic situation, primary education, health, higher education, extremism and lack of political empowerment are the major problems faced by Pakistani Youth. There is limited engagement of young people at grass root level of politics and community development, especially in the endangered traditional tribal areas. There is need of new vision for youth activism which may lead to self-sustainable peace building. (Fahim, 2010)

In a fragile democracy like Pakistan, where the political system is in swinging mood, the youth political participation is also a great challenge. Moreover, Youth being the representative of the whole population indicate helplessness and powerlessness. Youth attitude towards political system is visible through

less number of young voters. Focused and well-designed policies are essentially required to bring back the Pakistani youth in the mainstream civic process and to encourage youth participation. Due to low participation of Youth in the power structure of the country, youth representation is minimal. The decline in public investment for youth is also a threat to the wellbeing of the society (Civic health of Pakistan, 2008)

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) indirectly measure the wellbeing of youth in the countries. These goals set by UN check the availability of standard resources and facilities to the young people, including good health, gender equality, free primary education and employment. (Richard C. 2004) But unfortunately, Pakistan has miserably failed to achieve its MDG goals, especially the poor health facilities, poverty in shape of youth unemployment and large number of children out of school, highlight the abysmal condition of youth in Pakistan.

2.3 Need for Youth Research

According to Tommi H. and Leena S. (2005), youth administrators need to fill the information gap by relying on more youth-centric and youth-oriented research, not only on the research organizations which usually do not properly inculcate the youth voice and many times are politically inclined and trapped. They suggest youth-oriented research studies which may relate to socio-political aspects of youth while making youth policy. In order to get more accurate results and understand youth problems in real sense, it is most important for the Youth Policymakers to bring some changes in their research styles. Instead of focusing only on structured and formal research methods, they should respond to every day, local and meaningful youth participation. It means, more accurate findings can be drawn from informal youth forums, social networking sites for example. (Ariadne V. and Philippa C. 2010)

Julia R. and Harry S. (2009) through their research in Australia stated with evidence that most of the Youth Policymakers consider youth as matter of future concern, thus they fall prey to short-sightedness and focus only on few "At-risk" aspects neglecting the broader youth development goals. They remain stuck to certain youth issues following the preventive approach instead of promoting the positive attributes and traits of youth at large. As Cooper D. and Scott H. (2007) claim that there has been abundance of research conducted on importance of Youth Empowerment, but less work has been done to find out the impact of engaging youth in local policy making process.

Faizunnisa A. and Ikram A. (2003) truly spot the need for research regarding youth in Pakistan due to unavailability of information. It is also a fact that population census of Pakistan was conducted long time ago back in 1998, thus to make sure the real statistics are collected to find out the real situation and condition of the people, there is immediate need of countrywide surveys and researches. It is difficult and nearly impossible to find out the actual problems lying with the people in the midst of inappropriate or incomplete information.

3.0 Youth and development

Development acceleration can be achieved when majority of youth of a country engage and contribute in socio-politico-economic activities (USAID 2012). Community Youth Development is a new mantra according to which youth are involved and included in the development of community and society (Hughes, & Curnan; 2000) No doubt, Youth being the dynamic members of the society and active citizens can share much to the development and progress of the country. That is the reason many scholars including Perkins et al. (2001) advocate the Community Youth development model which promotes youth engagement and partnership in Community development.

3.1 Youth Development

Stephen S. and Marina M. (2004) emphasize upon adopting positive youth development approach that takes into consideration the positive attributes and strengths of youth instead of their weaknesses. This type of orientation can better help in planning and executing youth development programs that provide support to young people in fixing their own issues and problems with the help of their strengths. In order to measure the level of youth development, Faizunnisa A. and Ikram A. (2003) have suggested Youth Development Index (YDI), which is based upon some variables including education, schooling, employment, health, recreation etc. This index measures the scale of wellbeing and condition of youth development and ultimately suggests most important factors in the life of young people.

3.2 Youth Engagement

According to Murray P. (2007) civic and political knowledge imparted to students at schools, through formal and informal curriculum, can encourage better youth engagement and participation in democratic society. Daniel A. and Reuben J. (2006) in their research found that young people affiliated with clubs and social organizations as volunteers have greater probability of engaging in political activities and civic services in their adulthood. Cooper D. and Scott H. (2007) argue that though it is commonly acclaimed that youth empowerment is

important for public relations and society, but there is no much evidence of the support to make youth understand their environment, its stakeholders, resources and issues, which may help them to advocate for any local policy.

Recently published Youth Wellbeing Index puts much emphasis upon active youth citizen participation as one of the indicators of youth wellbeing in the particular country. Moreover, the active citizen participation further is characterized by existence of youth policy, frequency of volunteerism and youth's feelings being considered and honored by the government. Nicole G. (2014)

3.3 Youth Empowerment

According to Search Institute's Development Model (Benson, 1997) Youth Empowerment and social competence are two of seven most important factors that lead to the sustainable Youth development. When youth representatives are involved in the public policy process of need identification, research and decision making, it leads to sustainable change and youth empowerment (Cooper D. and Scott H., 2007). Ali S. (2005) has elaborated empowerment as having power to act with others for promoting change, not having power to influence others.

4.0 Challenges to Youth engagement and Empowerment in Pakistan

Reviewing the issues of youth political participation in Pakistan, Marie Lall (2014) argues that though Pakistani Youth crave for change and as per the research findings they also are aware of the political activities in the country, but when it comes to talk of active participation in politics, they are far behind the expected level. Due to lack of Political literacy, most of the youth consider politics as passive form of activity, by watching TV. Mohsin B. and Qazilbash A. (2004) in their research found strong relationship of poverty, unemployment and development issues with increasing trend of Youth suicides in Pakistan. They call for immediate formation and implementation of effective youth policy to address major youth issues and suggest public-private partnership to curb socio-economic issues that affect youth at large. Uneducated, untrained and unemployed youth make up the larger portion of the Pakistani youth. Most of them quit the studies and enter the job market with no or less skills, including women, there according to an estimate more than 32% unskilled youth in Pakistan. (Sana Z. and Hira H. 2011)

Pakistani youth is very much energetic and ready to do something for the development of the country. They are optimistic about their role in bringing peace and prosperity in the society (Sadaf, 2012). But the main challenge lies with the government and its institutional partners to design such programs and policies that may offer these willing youth an opportunity to work for the society and bring change.

Pakistani youth, rural and urban, male and female, face great number of issues and challenges at different levels. Policymakers need to design long term plans to address the demographic implications. By and large young people are getting frustrated with the empty promises of the government and no much progress in implementation of youth related development policies. This gives impetus to increased public-private efforts to take practical steps for improving youth condition in the country. Meanwhile, youth in this whole process have a central active role to play. (The Next Generation, 2013)

Political detachment and disengagement is another big challenge to motivate youth of Pakistan to indulge in the socio-political activities. Most of the young people consider politics as dirty game and thus choose to remain away. This way, the role of youth in the political sphere is minimal. Though, the political parties in their manifestos have now started to inculcate the role of youth, but it is not sufficient enough. There is need of assigning major and key positions to the youth in the political parties. Reintegrating and reengaging youth in the political activities of the country is a bigger challenge. (Rumi R. and Nauman Q., 2013)

5.0 Youth Policies in Pakistan

Youth polices are formulated to carve out strategies for youth development. These policies aim at finding pathways to solve youth related issues and design action plan to achieve youth development. National youth policy is a government's pledge to provide youth with good environment and opportunities for better living conditions (Finn Yrjar D., 2009). Pakistan adopted its National Youth Policy in 2009 but after 18th amendment of constitution, all provinces were given right to make their own youth polices instead of central youth policy. But till now, not all the provinces have successfully adopted or implemented their youth polices.

5.1 National Youth Policy of Pakistan

National Youth Policy asserts the inculcation of sense of pride and national integration among youth and aims to provide them mentoring for identifying and utilizing their potential overcoming the hurdles and challenges. (National Youth Policy, 2009) National Youth Policy of Pakistan was introduced in 2009, winning over long debates and bureaucratic interruptions. But the problem still persists that is the top-down approach of policymaking has been followed which neglects the real issues at the bottom, the common youth of the country.

Moreover, there is need of proper action plan which can be achieved with public-private partnership. (Salman A. 2010)

5.2 Punjab Youth Policy

Punjab Youth Policy-2012 has tried to point out the youth related problems in the province. According to the policy, youth of the province need to be empowered with required skills and knowledge to cope with main three challenges i.e. social, economic and political. Youth bulge and demographic transition is also given due importance in the policy. This policy also focuses on “Skilled” knowledge workers. (Punjab Youth Policy, 2012) This report has mentioned many objectives to be achieved, but again it lacks proper action plan with any timeline or agenda. Moreover, it has missed the proper elaboration of political empowerment of youth in the democratic system of the country.

5.3 Sindh Youth Policy

Sindh Youth Policy was also made public in 2012, with emergence of 18th amendment of the constitution of the country which delegated some ministries, including youth affairs department, to the provinces. Sindh Youth Policy considers socio-politico-economic challenges as critical issues of the young people. It suggests both long term and short term strategies to cope with these challenges. Sindh Youth development commission is assigned to manoeuvre the policy. The policy suggests a macro level youth development planning by synergizing the resources and efforts of different stakeholders and departments. (Sindh Youth Policy, 2012) The main problem with the policy is that it was prepared by an organization outsourced by the government of Sindh. Therefore, it does not include the real issues of the youth which were not part of this policymaking. Thus, this policy is merely a document of normative narrative instead of action plan to dig out the youth issues and solve them. There is need of much realistic and goal oriented policy which may be made with maximum voice and participation by the youth of the province.

6.0 Conclusion:

Keeping in view the rising youth bulge and lack of resources for youth development, it is very much challenging task for the government and policy makers to come up with an effective and practicable youth policy and strategy for Pakistan. Even if there is no more national youth policy, still there is need of a federal or central supervision to monitor the provincial youth policy making and implementation with coordination among the provinces. Moreover, policymakers must realize that youth empowerment can be achieved by engaging youth in civil decision making process and considering them stakeholders while making youth related policies. Government should no more consider youth as future, but as the present of the nation and must prioritize youth empowerment by increasing share of budget spent for youth development activities. Besides, further research is suggested to discover more issues and challenges related to youth and their development in Pakistan. There is also need of conducting research to find out innovative ways to engage young people in a way that also leads to social development at large.

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