

State of the Urban Youth India 2012: Employment, Livelihoods, Skills

Executive Summary

Every third person in urban India is a youth. In less than a decade from now, India, with a median age of 29 years will be the youngest nation in the world. India's demographic transformation is creating an opportunity for the demographic burden of the past to be converted to a dividend for the future. For this to happen the country needs to adopt a three-pronged policy that will address the issues of employment, livelihoods and the skill status of youth.

The ***State of the Urban Youth India 2012: Employment, Livelihoods, Skills*** developed and produced by IRIS Knowledge Foundation, Mumbai on a commission from the UN-HABITAT Global Urban Youth Research Network of which it is part, is a first attempt to pull together a data and knowledge base on and of youth in urban India. With a number of commissioned chapters from a well-known scholars, the focus of the Report is youth employment and livelihoods in urban India. Through a three-city survey the Report incorporates a youth perspective on the situation of urban youth that is revealed by data and literature. It does not aspire to make recommendations, but only to suggest broadly the need for a paradigm shift in addressing the issue of the urban young.

In developing the Report the attempt has been to include youth voice and contribution. Of the illustrations in the volume, seven photographs were winning contributions in a youth contest specially organized to generate photographs for the volume, 'Urban Shutter'.*

India has had a long history of urban youth activism in the shape of student movements that have grown into wider based political actions. Besides, India's policy makers have been conscious of the need to integrated youth in the programme of national development. However, the need for a specific youth agenda today in policy and programmes has not quite been accepted. The solution, Padma Prakash (IRIS Knowledge Foundation, Mumbai) points out in the Introductory chapter, lies in shifting the perspective from development *for* youth to development planning *by* youth.

The first section presents the setting, in terms of demographics, health status, existing legislation and policies that impinge on youth especially with respect to employment and livelihoods. Anuja Jayaraman (SNEHA, Mumbai) describes the demographics of urban youth showing the

* **The youth photographers are: Rahul Manav (pp. 29 and 43) ; Jitu Mohan (p. 79); Jini Nikita (pp. 91 and 119); Himanshu (p. 113) and Akshath (p. 133)**

numbers and their distribution. She presents numbers and proportions that show in no uncertain times that urban youth population in the country is rising. Youth populations are rising from 353 million in 2001 to 453 million in 2011 and then to 464 million in 2021 after which it will decline to 458 million, showing the ‘youth bulge’. Sidharth David (Centre for Enquiry into Health and Allied Themes, CEHAT, Mumbai), gathering literature from a number of sources in the absence of age-wise data on health, shows that the lack of perception of health as a youth right might be at the centre of the lack of attention to youth-specific health conditions and the absence of a youth-centred perspective on health care.

Against the background of a narrative of youth rights and legislation, is an evidence based report of the nature and extent of political awareness among youth. Sanjay Kumar (Centre for Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), New Delhi) comes up with surprising elements of youth perception of politics and political engagement on the basis of a youth survey on the subject.

Lakshmi Priya and Aarti Salve Telang (IRIS Knowledge Foundation, Mumbai) document the fact that India has consistently recognised the need for youth development and the importance of addressing the needs of youth in policies and programmes. The chapter enumerates and describes the youth policies that a number of states have evolved. In the last chapter in this section Asha Bajpai (Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai) sets out the laws and legislation affecting youth and the state of their implementation.

The second section reports the findings of a three-city youth survey (conducted by Trupti Shah in Vadodara, Anita Srinivasan and Abhijit Surya in Mumbai and Pratibha Kamble in Latur) that provides a youth insight on the data and knowledge base assembled by a set of scholars working on different areas impinging on the state of youth in urban India. The findings amply demonstrate that youth can not only discern developmental issues but may even be capable of suggesting innovative solutions to deep problems of development and growth. Of paramount importance is access to education and opportunities for acquiring skills. Young people can well recognise the constraints to acquiring skills: inefficient systems, corruption, denial of access because of various factors including economic class, community and gender. They are also quite clear about what makes a city safe and secure for the pursuit of occupations and livelihoods and what kind of an urban space they need to achieve prosperity in the context of sustainable urban development.

The third section, the core of the volume, looks more closely at the employment, livelihoods and state of skills among young people in urban India contextualised within the urban reality of sharpening disparity. Poornima Dore (Sir Dorabji Tata and Allied Trusts (SDTT)) succinctly points to the yawning resource gap emerging in urban India and disproportionately affecting the young both in terms of missed opportunities and because they give rise to high aspirations that resources available to them cannot meet.

More than 110 million young are on the move across the country but most of them do not travel far, moving within the state. Tracking the trajectories of the migrants, from large datasets S Chandrashekar and Ajay Sharma of the Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research, Mumbai produce an understanding of the pattern of resources and opportunities that attracts the young. Young people, men and women in equal numbers, in the age group 15-32 migrate from their places of origin for employment and education. The movement shows that there is an internal brain drain from the states with poor education and employment opportunities that in turn keeps these states from developing their potentials.

The mass of young people coming to towns and cities do find jobs, but not necessarily stable, secure jobs. Jobs are being created not in the larger more established sectors, but in the unstable informal sector. Bino Paul and Krishna M of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai and Hyderabad respectively have extracted from national data sets an alarming picture of the youth labour market. Only a miniscule share of the jobs available to youth are formal carrying entitlements like social security while the vast opportunities for youth are informal in nature. Contrarily more and more youth are enrolling in higher education. Most significantly there is a perceptible discrimination against young women in the labour market with a huge proportion of them engaged in domestic duties.

Charu Sudan Kasturi (Hindustan Times, New Delhi) illustrates this data in an essay on the widening gap between education and employment. While more young Indians are acquiring an education, the employment scenario is not throwing up jobs that match their skill sets. A large number of the educated are either unemployed or are underemployed. At another level, the quality of higher education has not only remained static but appears to be deteriorating. The young are being short-changed in several ways. Can India afford to invest in training young people in skills that will not be productive? Is this the way to realize the demographic dividend?

Even after three decades of the women's movement and the growth of women's research emerging as a major discipline and influence in policy making women still have to battle it out for the right to live to work. Vibhuti Patel (SNDT University, Mumbai) and Nandita Mondal (Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai) echo Paul and Krishna's findings that women are most visible in the lowest paying, low skill jobs that are also often tedious, risky and hazardous. Women are forced into domestic labour and sex work due to an absence of other opportunities. Safety and security are important issues in assuring women's opportunities for work.

Not surprisingly the informal sector attracts a huge chunk of the youth population in urban centres. Vaijayanta Anand (Nirmala Niketan, Mumbai) discusses nature of jobs in the informal sector and underlines how the expansion of jobs in this sector is not the best option for absorbing or utilising youth power. She also points out that the six states of southern and western India, states that have better training opportunities (and more industry and enterprise) form a

continuous zone accounting for 63 per cent of all formally trained people. These are also the states with more industry, higher levels of education, and training opportunities.

In sum, most of the jobs that the young are employed in are dangerous in insecure workplaces that have high risks associated. Jagdish Patel, labour and health activist assembles a telling picture of the abysmal work conditions in small and middle level industrial units and the poor attention being paid to worker safety. Regulations are many, but who is to ensure that they are implemented? With the waning of the labour movement, workers have neither voice nor a platform where they may seek redressal. This has resulted in sporadic, spontaneous and violent worker responses to such incidents as deaths that only serve to mitigate chances of long-term reform.

These are typically dubbed as youth violence. Given the situations and the unpromising futures that youth face it is inevitable that sporadic and spontaneous violence will occur more frequently. While youth revolt in the face of authoritarianism, corruption and divisive and sectarian policies and actions of the state must indeed be applauded, spontaneous mob violence is not conducive to progress, development and indeed to securing stable future for youth.

The last section sets out an agenda for change, with a lead chapter on the challenge of mainstreaming the agency of youth for sustainable cities. Two young scholars, Sangeeta Nandi and Kadambari Anatharam (independent researchers), describe the sustainability challenge to urban development and locate the key barriers to realising the youth potential. They advocate youth-led development that places youth at the centre of change. The way forward is clearly to recognise that young people may have a better chance of benefiting from development if they can have a say in the planning of their urban futures.

The coming decades are critical for India if the demographic dividend is to be realised. India must address the needs of the young and provide them the opportunity to realise their potential. A paradigm shift that involves the incorporation of youth experiences, issues and skills in the conceptual policy framework and programme implementation is clearly indicated.

The full Report may be accessed at:

<http://www.esocialsciences.org/Articles/showArticle.aspx?acat=Recent+Articles&aid=5305>

and at

http://www.globalyouthdesk.org:8080/index.php?option=com_php&Itemid=57

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