

Indian Youth at the Crossroads

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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. In an economy that is not growing as it ought, inequitable distribution of income and resources and a society stressed by forces of a new wave of modernization and divisive forces youth are often the worst sufferers. Livelihood opportunities shrink, skill upgradation does not take place and an entire generation misses out the vital experience of early employment. 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.

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The events of Arab spring showed that the youth can be a powerful social force. Recently, the UN HABITAT published two extremely important reports: *State of the Urban Youth Report 2012-2013-Youth in the Prosperity of the Cities: Overview and Summary of Findings* and *State of the Urban Youth in India, 2012: Employment, Livelihoods and Skills*, anchored by Dr. Padma Prakash, Director Research Wing of Iris Knowledge Foundation, and Editor of the web portal, *esocialsciences*, in which a team of 40 scholars, researchers, activists and students made a valuable contribution in terms of a rich database and analytical rigour.

These reports make efforts to answer the following mind-boggling questions:

- How are the youth coping with the strains and stresses of drastic changes in the economy and society due to the advent of globalization in the twenty-first century?
- What are the opportunities they have for livelihood promotion and acquisition of skills that would ensure secure and safe employment for them in the years to come? What determines these opportunities?
- Are the governments in the state and at the Centre aware of these issues?
- Have there been any policy changes in the areas of industrial growth, employment, skill upgradation and livelihoods to address the challenges faced by the youth?

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- Do young people have a relevant say in the plans and policies that are determining their urban futures?
- What can be done to assure comfortable livelihoods and secure and sustainable urban futures for today's youth?
- What can be done to ensure that the youth are the ones who would determine and design these futures? What combination of policies works best for the youth?
- What lessons can be learnt from developments in other countries?
- What are specifically the Indian initiatives for ensuring sustainable urban futures for youth that may be replicable elsewhere?
- What role can and do bodies like the UN and its agencies play without interfering with the natural and grounded development processes in India?

The first of the reports mentioned above looked closely at the condition of the major urban centres in the four developing countries, that is, Accra (Ghana); Sao Paulo (Brazil); Bangalore (India); and Cairo (Egypt), which have reported the fastest growing numbers of youth unemployment. Young people in various surveys stated that they want equity and equal opportunities for better shared prosperity for both themselves and the cities they inhabit.

DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND

Since the 1980s, the growth of India's labour force by about 2 per cent per annum can be attributed to the growing working age population. The youth population in the age group of 15-34 years was expected to increase from 353 million in 2001 to 430 million in 2011, and then to continue to increase to 464 million in 2021, and finally to decline to 458 million in 2026 (Government of India, 2012a). India is undergoing a demographic transition and it is gaining economically from the changing age structure, with the southern and western states being the first to experience this gain while the lagging states are expected to catch up soon. The youth population (aged 15-32 years) comprises 35 per cent of the urban population and 32 per cent of the rural population (Aiyar and Mody, 2011). In urban areas, the youth belonging to the 'Others' category are the most numerous, followed by the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and Scheduled Castes (SCs) across age groups. In rural areas, the highest proportion of the youth are belong to the OBCs (ranging between 41 and 42 per cent), followed by Others (ranging between 24 and 25 per cent), and SCs (ranging between 22 and 23 per cent) (Government of India, 2010b; 2012c). Overall three-fourths of the young urban men and women are educated up to the middle and secondary levels of schooling, though there are variations across states. India can take advantage of the 'demographic dividend' resulting from this demographic transition over this decade wherein the large working age population could potentially contribute to

economic growth if the demographic investment in terms of education, skills and employment is guaranteed (Government of India, 2013).

YOUTH AND EMPLOYMENT

Employment is one of the most important factors in the urban world as it helps in the eradication of poverty. The Report of Global Employment Trends for Youth (2012) calls for attention to a major youth employment crisis, which is a result of the global economic slowdown, and recommends that high priority be accorded to youth employment policies. The report stated that global unemployment rates would range between 5.4 per cent and 6.1 per cent in 2012. Within this, the youth unemployment rate, which is more than double of the adult unemployment rate ranged between 11.6 per cent in 2007 and 12.7 per cent in 2012, respectively. The youth unemployment rate has remained stagnant at 12.6–12.7 per cent after 2009. Between 2000 and 2016, the projected youth unemployment rates are expected to range between 13.5 per cent and 16 per cent for the developed economies and the European Union. In East Asia, South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, there would not be much of a change, with the figures being 9.3 per cent in 2000 and 9.8 per cent in 2016 (projected) for East Asia, 10.1 per cent in 2000 and 9.8 per cent in 2016 (projected) for South Asia, and 12.9 per cent in 2000 and 11.4 per cent in 2016 (projected) for sub-Saharan Africa). Even in India, the unemployment rates are rising. This can largely be attributed to a failure of the agriculture sector that forces workers to migrate and be part of the unorganized sector (Kundu, 2006).

Employment opportunities in the manufacturing and service sectors are not growing. In India, young people are withdrawing from the labour force for the sake of acquiring higher education. The population projections from the 2001 Census show that between 2001 and 2026, the population of those aged 0-14 years is going to fall from 35 per cent to 23 per cent, while the population of aged 15-59 years is going to increase from 58 per cent to 64 per cent, and the population of those over 60 years of age is also going to increase from 7 per cent to 12 per cent over the corresponding period. The working age population forms a substantial and crucial proportion of the total population, but in the next 14 years, this population can be expected to increase by only 1.7 per cent (62.6 per cent in 2011 to 64.3 per cent in 2026). The fewer numbers of children in the age groups of 0-6 years and 0-14 years indicate that the window of opportunity for India to benefit from the 'youth bulge' may be fast shrinking (Government of India, 2012c).

The National Sample Survey Organization's (NSSO) survey on employment and unemployment conducted in 2009-10 focused on the characteristics of the youth in India and provided a brief description of how the youth are distributed across place of residence, social groups, household types, marital status, and level of education. By place of residence, the youth population (15-32 years) comprises 35 per cent of the urban population and 32 per cent of the rural population, and there are greater

rural–urban differences among those aged 0–14 years. This youngest age cohort constitutes 32 per cent of the rural and 26 per cent of the urban population. The youth population characteristics by social groups divide the youth into three categories: 15–17 years, 18–24 years, and 25–32 years). In urban areas, 40–43.7 per cent of the youth belong to the ‘Others’ category, followed by the OBCs and SCs across age groups. In rural areas, the highest proportion of the youth are those belonging to the OBCs (ranging between 41 and 42 per cent), followed by ‘Others’ (ranging between 24 and 25 per cent) and SCs (ranging between 22 and 23 per cent).

The NSSO data (66th Round) characterizes households on the basis of the means of livelihood of a household during the 365 days preceding the survey, for which the net household income from economic activities is taken into account (Government of India, 2011b). In urban areas, the households could be of self-employed, earning regular wages/ salaries, comprising casual labourers, and others. In rural areas, the households could be self-employed in non-agriculture, comprising agricultural labourers, other labourers, self-employed in agriculture, and others. It thus becomes ever so important for policy-makers to ensure that policies have a youth focus and that employment opportunities are made available to this group. The Eleventh Five Year Plan aims to enhance the productivity of the agricultural sector, to increase non-farm employment, and to encourage the private sector to create jobs in the organized sector, especially for the educated youth (Government of India, 2008). In addition, investments in schooling, healthcare and other infrastructure should be determined by the age structure of the population. Such investments have implications for the ability of the nation to reap the demographic dividend.

YOUTH AND UNEMPLOYMENT: A GLOBAL SCENARIO

Employment is a source of the eradication of poverty and a very important step towards achieving social integration. It has been seen that the youth population increases faster than the rate of youth unemployment. In countries like UK, Japan, Netherlands and the USA, 60 per cent of the unemployment is concentrated in urban areas. And the same is applicable in the developing countries. According to 52 per cent of the respondents, the pattern of economic growth in their city has generated youth unemployment. Various large infrastructure projects with good transport networks have been put into place or are underway; as for education and healthcare, these countries were approaching or surpassing their national and urban Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). However, communities in the Upper Nile, or the Libyan and Tunisian countryside were worse off than their urban counterparts.

While urban areas have been found to be relatively prosperous, this Report also finds that youth employment poses a special challenge in cities around the world because of their youth-biased demographic structures. The global economic crisis has exposed the particular vulnerability of young people in the labour market. The youth who fail to become integrated into the world of work after leaving school risk

long-term exclusion from productive engagement. Young people are also more likely than adults to be among the working poor in informal jobs. An unemployed youth represents a colossal waste of resource, a social hazard, and a burden on families or the government social support schemes, where any are being implemented. Being forced into precarious livelihoods by intense poverty and the lack of social protection is a lost opportunity, since these young people might otherwise attend school or college and acquire the skills and abilities that could raise their future productivity and earnings.

A well-developed city provides the whole population with adequate housing and decent basic services, irrespective of race, ethnicity, gender or socio-economic status, thereby facilitating equal access to social amenities, public goods and sound environmental conditions. The phrase 'quality of life' broadly defines the overall well-being of individuals or communities. The concept has been applied several times, and particularly in the context of international development, as for instance, in the case of the Human Development Index (HDI) and more recently, the Multi-dimensional Poverty Index (MPI), which have been jointly developed by scholars, politicians and policy-makers. The term 'quality of life' is qualitatively different from 'standard of living', which derives largely from income; the measure of quality of life includes proxy statistics for wealth, employment, the built environment, physical and mental health, education, recreation and leisure time, and a sense of social belonging. Both objective and subjective measures are now broadly used in the context of development by various decision-makers, practitioners and policy-makers in a bid to address the challenges they face. For instance, politicians and economists have used quality of life measures to assess the livability of a specific city or nation. The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) and Mercer's Quality of Living Reports combine both subjective and objective proxies as the determinants of quality of life. For the purposes of this Report, the pursuit of quality of life is considered as one of the essential factors responsible for urban prosperity. The main variables in this regard include access to education, health-care and employment.

On top of these defining features comes a non-discriminatory social environment, that is, one wherein every citizen feels welcome and safe. Young people, or particular groups thereof, may be discriminated against. Personal attributes such as ethnicity, gender, religion and place of residence may feature in the employers' decisions about recruitment, promotion and retention. Specifically, personal characteristics may affect the employers' decisions in various spheres. Different surveys have shown that equity does not only enhance economic efficiency, which is needed to raise the general well-being in the city, but that it also creates conditions for people to improve their capacities to represent themselves and to participate in a more inclusive manner in a city's cultural and political life. In the State of the World's Cities 2010/11 Report, UN-Habitat laid down a series of practical steps to help cities become more inclusive from equity.

The human development perspective is informed by the following four steps: providing universal public services; social protection; targeted action for underprivileged

groups; and mechanisms for wealth redistribution. In the surveys, the views of the young people were also sought (on a 'Yes/No' basis) on the extent to which economic prosperity is equitably distributed (Sen, 1999).

URBAN YOUTH IN HEALTH AND ILLNESS

The dominant discourse on the health of the youth, which is also the basis for most policies related to health, is a utilitarian view. Since the youth constitute a major portion of the country's working group population, their good health is seen to enhance the human resources and social capital to improve the political, economic and social well-being of a country as a "demographic dividend". This perspective restricts the concept of the health of youth only to achieving targets such as in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), without considering young people as a group with special needs. Reflecting the global trends, the picture of Indian youth with respect to health has been changing rapidly, especially during the last few years. Along with the spread of infectious diseases, maternal mortality and HIV/AIDS, suicides and motor accidents are slowly becoming serious concerns among the youth. Specifically in the context of urban India, the rise in the age of marriage, increasing education levels, exposure to media, increased migration, rapid urbanization and globalization, together with changing lifestyles, have affected mortality and morbidity trends. Poverty is another factor that determines access to health-care, informed choices, adequate nourishment, and access to safe water and sanitation, all of which influence health outcomes. With one-fifth of the Indian urban population living under a dollar a day, the access and choices to achieving good health and well-being are limited for a large section of the youth. Apart from education and literacy, income, gender, the availability of healthcare services, risk perception, social networks, cultural practices and physical environments, all affect the overall health status. Livelihood plays a key role in determining the health outcomes, as it is directly connected with many of the socio-economic conditions (Farrington, *et al.*, 2002).

POLICY PERSPECTIVES

India has a long history of recognizing the potential of youth in the task of nation-building. Youth issues have consistently been incorporated in policies. However, programmatic content has been lacking. Encouraging voluntarism as a means of connecting the youth to community development too has been incorporated in several schemes, notably the National Service Scheme (NSS), which has, to date, attracted over 3.2 million youth to community service and development. It is thus imperative to encourage the evolution of the youth development index. This would not only enable the monitoring of various programmes and their impact, but also throw up new

directions for the involvement of youth in development. While some states have youth policies, others need to develop such policies and put them into action. These would address the state-specific challenges to youth development. Such policies are even more necessary in states with lower youth populations, as it is here that the issues concerning the youth are the most neglected. There are various policies which support the youth like Japan's Youth Policy, the Bhutan Youth Policy, and the Afghanistan Youth Policy (Government of India, 2010a).

NATIONAL YOUTH POLICY, 1988-1992

In 1985, the International Year of the Youth, the Department of Youth Affairs and Sports, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, initiated an effort to formulate a National Youth Policy. This policy was tabled in the two houses of Parliament in late 1988. It recognized that "the most important component of the youth programme" has to be the "removal of unemployment, rural and urban, educated and non-educated". The policy of 1988 stipulated that the youth in the country must have access to full education and training. The policy stated that the youth should get 'their due share'. However, the policy did not have a programmatic structure. Nor did it designate an authority to oversee its implementation. The policy was all but forgotten with a few of the programmers such as the India Youth Hostels and the National Social National Programmer for Youth and Adolescent Development (NPYAD) and the Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (RGSEAG).

MIGRATION FOR EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT AMONG YOUTH

More than 110 million youth, comprising men and women in equal numbers, in the age group of 15-32 years, migrate from their places of origin for a number of reasons. A major parts of the migration takes place within a state and 84 per cent of all rural-to-urban migration occurs either within a district or among the districts of the state. Some 17 per cent of the migration for education is across states (GoI, 2012 b). Typically, Delhi, Maharashtra and Karnataka are the top states attracting migrants from the other states, whereas the states of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal and Rajasthan are the main source states of migrants. Karnataka attracts a sizable proportion of migrants who have completed higher secondary and diploma or graduate and above level of education, while the states of Punjab and Haryana attract those who have not completed primary school level of education. In a large measure, this indicates the relative development of educational opportunities in these states. Unlike the case of migration for education, which is primarily an intra-state phenomenon, 45.6 per cent of the individuals migrate to work in other states. Moreover, 72.9 per cent of these migrant workers moved from rural areas. The states of Delhi, Gujarat,

Maharashtra and Karnataka receive 64 per cent of the intra-state migrant workers in the age group of 15-32 years, whereas the states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh account for 59 per cent of the migrant workers (Government of India, 2010a).

YOUNG WOMEN IN THE WORKFORCE

There has been a long history of social movements addressing the issue of girls' education. And yet the progress in achieving full coverage of education for girls has been slow. The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of boys is 44.26 per cent as against 35.05 per cent for girls, with the difference between the two being 9.2 percentage points. The GER for students belonging to SCs is 34.55 per cent while that belonging to STs is even lower 27.68 per cent, with the lowest GER being at 21.95 per cent for ST girls. As per the Planning Commission's report of the Working Group on Secondary and Vocational Education for the Eleventh Five Year Plan, the GER for classes IX-XII in 2004-05 was 39.91 per cent. The data for classes IX-X was 51.65 per cent whereas that for classes XI-XII was 27.82 per cent. Women in the developing countries constitute a 'flexible' labour force. Their cheap labour forms the basis for the induction of women into export industries such as electronics, garments, sports goods, food processing, toys, and agro industries, among others. They are forced to work uncomplainingly at any allotted task, however dull, laborious, physically harmful or poorly paid it may be. A large number of poor adolescent girls looking for work within the narrow confines of a socially imposed, inequitable demand for labour have become ideal workers in the international division of labour. The relationship between the formal sector and the decentralized sector is a dependent relationship. The formal sector has control over capital and markets, and the 'informal' sector works as an ancillary. In India, more than 90 per cent of the girls and women work in the decentralized sector, which has a high degree of labour redundancy and obsolescence. They have almost no control over their work and no chance for upward mobility because of the temporary and repetitive nature of the work. Another dead-end occupation that has absorbed the highest number of adolescent girls is domestic work in an extremely vulnerable, precarious and hazardous condition, reminding us of wage slavery. The shift from a stable/organized labour force to a flexible workforce has meant hiring women part-time, and the substitution of better-paid male labour by cheap female labour. The new economic policies provide State support to corporate houses that are closing down their big city units and using ancillaries that employ women and girls on a piece-rate basis. Home-based work by women and girls gets legitimized in the context of increasing insecurity in the community due to a growth in crime, riots, displacement and relocation. Sub-contracting, home-based production, and the family labour system, all have become the norm. This is being called an increase in 'efficiency' and 'productivity'. The casual employment of urban working class girls and women in the manufacturing industry has forced thousands of women to eke out subsistence through parallel petty trading activities (known

as 'informal' sector occupations). Adolescent working class girls are also seen to be multi-tasking.

SOCIAL EQUITY

A substantial majority of the respondents, who were distributed across the social segments of youth in each of the four sampled cities, found that economic prosperity is not evenly distributed across social segments of young people. Less than 40 per cent of the youths in all the cities are of the opinion that there is even distribution, except in Cairo, where less than 1 per cent of the youth believe that there is an even distribution of economic prosperity. In other words, a substantial percentage of youths were of the opinion that economic prosperity is not evenly distributed among all groups of youth, irrespective of whether they are educated, rich or poor. This is a significant uniformity of opinion among the various groups in the society.

URBAN INFRASTRUCTURE: POLICIES AND INSTITUTIONS

Infrastructure is one of primary factors for ensuring a healthy life, and access to water, sanitation, electricity, roads and telecommunication facilities, including digital technology, all of which constitute the physical assets of the city. The availability of these facilities, in fact, shows the degree of prosperity of a city; at the same time, they make a major contribution to the productivity or prosperity of urban areas. This Report also examines the extent to which the provision of urban infrastructure is linked to urbanization— higher levels of urbanization should imply more infrastructures. Broader provision of trunk infrastructure for water, sanitation, power and mobility would prevent the formation of slums, which are characterized by the lack of such services. Investment in infrastructure can deliver major benefits in terms of economic growth, prosperity, poverty alleviation, environmental sustainability, and healthcare. The 'competitive cities' or cities that have been most successful in attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) are those that have vastly improved the range and quality of their infrastructure. Various benefits of infrastructure development were considered in the survey and opinions were sought on a five-point scale, ranging from 'Not contributing' to 'Fully contributing'. One of the important outcomes of a city's superior infrastructure is improved productivity. Young people in the four-city sample were asked as to what they thought was the main impediment to youth productivity in their respective cities. Six such factors were considered in the survey. It was found that 42 per cent of the respondents feel that corruption and lack of good governance were the major impediments while 25 per cent claimed that it was the lack of appropriate knowledge and skill development that caused impediments to productivity (McKinsey and Company, 2010; 2012).

Across the four developing regions, the UN-Habitat Youth Survey (2012) shows that corruption is the most insidious impediment to equity. Young people in cities in sub-Saharan Africa and the Arab States rank corrupt practices as the greatest hindrances to equality. Corruption is also a very significant factor in Asia and Latin America, though having lesser consequences as compared to the other regions. Next to corruption, 'inefficient and ineffective government' is seen as the other major factor responsible for urban youth inequities. These two factors taken together are perceived as being more significant in Latin America and Africa as compared to Asia and the Arab States.

An active civil society and effective public institutions also play significant roles in favour of more equitable cities. On a more negative side, discriminatory practices, lack of democracy and the vested interests of ruling elites also show various degrees of relevance. That is why young people believe that committed, efficient, effective, and non-corrupt political institutions and equity are long-term complements in the pursuit of urban prosperity. Markets are not always the most equitable or most efficient means of resource allocation, since they tend to be systematically skewed to the detriment of young people from underprivileged backgrounds, regardless of their potential. The functionalities of government, legal systems, regulatory agencies or, indeed, all the institutions that assign and enforce property rights and mediate conflicts among citizens, can be distorted by the distribution of political power (influence, or 'voice'). Inefficiency and asymmetry of access to these institutions perpetuate institutional structures that protect the interests of the more powerful, with scant regard for the rights or even property of the vast majority of the population. A majority of the youths hold the view that their respective cities are 'committed' to infrastructure development, and 'somewhat committed' to productivity, but a substantial proportion find that their cities are 'not committed' to the quality of life (Government of India, 2011).

In all the four cities, policies promoting prosperity are neither ranked 'poor' nor considered 'good', but none of the policies is rated as 'very good' or 'excellent' by the young respondents of the four cities. When all the results were combined, it was seen that young people perceive their cities as promoting infrastructure and productivity more than equitable development or quality of life, which points to a misbalanced equity in the city.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

It is imperative to foster the evolution of the youth development index. This would not only facilitate the monitoring of various programmes and their impact but also throw up new directions for the involvement of youth in development. Each state needs to develop and put into action a youth-oriented policy. These measures would address the state-specific challenges to youth development. Such policies are even more neces-

sary in states with lower proportions of youth since it is here that the issues concerning the youth are most neglected (UN, 2012).

CONCLUSION

Mainstreaming the challenges and agency of youth is an essential underpinning of the Habitat Agenda for sustainable cities. This calls for strategies that integrate youth concerns and experiences into the conceptual framework, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, projects and programmes as well as youth-led development at the grassroots level. The policy gap on youth in India's urban transition is perhaps strongly indicated by a lack of consistent youth-differentiated data on key urban development indicators. Fast-tracking data efforts for the construction of composite indexes on youth development for urban and rural areas, as proposed in the Draft National Youth Policy 2012 (Government of India, 2012c), would motivate the greater inclusion of youth in public policy and in India's ongoing urban transition.

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