
RECOGNIZING YOUTH IDENTITY: NEED FOR NATIONAL YOUTH POLICY

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I Why Youth Policy?

Why should a country have a youth policy? Is there really a need for it?

Questions such as these have acquired a new relevance in the present context. Youth are becoming clamorous in all parts of the world; they are unwilling to conform to the pattern of behaviour set for them by the older generation; in increasing numbers they are resorting to escapes such as consumption of drugs; and they take to thoughtless violence with an ease unthinkable in the past. The traditionally held assumption that they should devote most of their early youth in institutions of formal education and enter the world of work immediately after conclusion of their studies is no more valid - because the formal system of education does not satisfy young men and women and the employment opportunities are just not enough.

Most governments are not able to handle this situation. In disparate situations and in distant countries, youth power is shaking the traditional systems of government and social relationships - in Thailand, in France, in Japan, and in a number of provinces in India, particularly Gujarat and Bihar. The common element in all these situations is a dissatisfaction among youth with a given situation, political, educational and socio-economic. In most cases the youth do not have the answers; they seldom have the patience to look for them, try and test them. But they are convinced that what exists is not satisfactory, that there has to be a change.

It is true that this situation mainly reflects the urban milieu - as it exists in the campuses and in the metropolitan areas. It is the restive youth in the urban areas, by precipitating the need for recognition of youth identity, who have forced the issue of the need for formulating a youth policy. Not very far from this urban situation is the other reality - the vast majority of the youth living in the rural areas, and working long hours in arduous occupations. They have had little formal education and they exist at a subsistence level, often below that. This sharper reality cannot be lost sight of. And the whole question of recognition of youth identity has to be viewed in this context in each country. When such a view is taken, there would be some fundamental reasons calling for recognition of youth identity.

Recognizing youth identity

(a) The demographic tilt

The foremost reason which calls attention to youth is the demographic balance in their favour. In practically all developing countries, due to improved health care and lack of success of population control programmes, the population is much younger than before. And there is a continuing tilt in this direction.

Another aspect of the demographic tilt is that owing to an increase in life expectancy and improved nutrition and health-care the vitality associated with youth lasts much longer. (It is perhaps for this reason that the wide age range of 15-33 is now almost universally recognized as the period of youth).

The phenomenal increase in population in this age group is causing deficiencies and shortages in a number of critical areas. These include

- educational facilities, which results in dissatisfaction with the present system
- employment opportunities, causing bitterness and wide-spread disillusionment.
- health services, causing an increase in morbidity and debility, and
- recreational and sports facilities, depriving youth of healthy outlets

In addition, youth in rural areas face a number of other additional deprivations, including housing, malnutrition and other basic needs.

(b) Organized assertion

The second reason which calls attention to youth identity is that youth now have much greater opportunity for organized assertion. As a result of expansion of the system of formal education, the student body in practically every developing country has increased enormously. To take the Indian example again, the increase of students in the relevant age group is as follows :

(figures in millions)

Year	Enrolment in secondary classes	Enrolment at the university level
1951	1.22	0.42
1961	2.89	1.09
1971	6.58	3.50
1977*	8.77	4.70

* Figures in millions are provisional

While education provides an opportunity to the youth for articulation, it also provides the opportunity for association and unionization. As a result, youth in institutions of formal education have a power quite disproportionate to their numbers vis-a-vis the total number of youth in the corresponding age group.

In addition to the increase in the number of youth in institutions of formal education, spread of trade union movements and youth wings of political parties have also contributed to increasing assertiveness among the youth. Practically every political party of consequence in all countries has a powerful youth wing. Although often led by a senior political leadership, these youth wings have their own identity and they influence the working of the political system. Membership of trade unions and women's organizations is also often predominantly of the younger sections. Whatever the political system, youth exert considerable influence through their organizations as well as through the organizations of workers and peasants, men and women.

Another factor which has increased articulation and organized assertion by youth is expansion in the communication network. Even in technologically underdeveloped societies, the isolation of communities has been reduced as a result of improvement in transportation and communication. Mass media, not only the printed word, but particularly radio and TV, are facilitating the emergence of youth power as a factor in national development. Information regarding happenings in one university, agitation in one industrial unit, reaches the length and breadth of the country within hours, cementing distant groups and giving them a power which would have been unthinkable before the contemporary communication revolution.

(c) New development strategies

Most developing countries have a colonial past, which has influenced their economy, the educational system and even the social relationships. Hence they tended to emphasize the increase in GNP and per capita income without squarely facing the problems of social justice. However, in recent years, there is an increasing awareness of this fact and the approach to the computation of GNP is radically changing in almost all developing countries. Greater emphasis is being laid on rural development, improvement of the lives of the people in villages, fostering of small scale and cottage industries. Almost all countries are emphasizing the importance of reduction in inequalities and sharing of resources, and the emphasis has shifted to human resource development rather than on the ends.

The implications of this strategy of development for youth are obvious. The emphasis on human resource

development must lead to widening of educational opportunity, including organization of non-formal education courses for school drop-outs and illiterate youth. Expansion of health services and improved nutrition are also a corollary of the emphasis on human resource development. Undertaking of employment oriented policies and organization of large programmes of small and cottage industries must necessitate the establishment of facilities for technical and entrepreneurial training. Systematic programmes of rural development are difficult to implement without creating dynamic organizations of youth.

II Present Policies and Programmes

It is not as if an awareness about the importance of youth, their needs and their potentialities, is emerging with suddenness. Within an undefined policy frame, youth programmes have been organized in practically all developing countries. Before delineation of an outline of youth policy it would be useful to undertake an appraisal of the significant youth programmes, their objectives and the present status. While each country has its own programmes and each country must undertake its own appraisal, an attempt is being made here to briefly describe some significant programmes in India.

(a) Non-formal Education

The growing emphasis on education of the out-of-school youth is a recognition of the limitations of the formal school system. It is also an acknowledgement that those who have remained excluded from that system also have an important role to play in the country's development. In India, extensive non-formal education programmes are being organized for school drop-outs up to 14 years of age. Part-time education programmes with relevant curriculum, with an assurance that they would not be required to dissociate themselves from their daily work, are to be provided for 16 million children within the next five years. These children would have the opportunity to re-enter the formal system of education, should they so desire. It is hoped that within about five years it should be possible to universalise elementary education, through expansion of the formal school system and through the non-formal education programmes.

In April 1977, the Indian Education Minister made a pronouncement that in addition to elementary education, the Government would give the highest priority in educational planning to adult education. A Policy Statement on Adult Education was formulated after extensive consultations and the National Adult Education Programme (NAEP) was launched throughout the country on 2 October 1978, the birthday of Mahatma Gandhi. It is estimated that there are approximately 100 million

illiterate persons in the 15-35 age group and NAEP aims at extension of educational facilities to this entire population within the next five years. Special attention is to be paid in NAEP to women and to the poorer sections, particularly those living in the rural areas. The year 1978-79 has been treated as the year of intensive preparations and necessary arrangements have been made for training, preparation of teaching and learning materials, appointment of staff, etc.

NAEP is based on a number of assumptions, which have been clearly spelt out in the Policy Statement. These assumptions are :

- (i) that illiteracy is a serious impediment to an individual's growth and to the country's socio-economic progress
- (ii) that education is not co-terminus with schooling but takes place in most work and life situations
- (iii) that learning, working and living are inseparable and each acquires a meaning only when correlated with others
- (iv) that the means by which people are involved in the process of development are at least as important as the ends; and
- (v) that the illiterate and the poor can rise to their own liberation through literacy, dialogue and action

NAEP is visualized as a means to bring about a fundamental change in the process of socio-economic development; from a situation in which the poor remain passive spectators at the fringe of the development activity to being enabled to be at its centre, and as active participants. The learning process involves emphasis on literacy, but not that alone; it also stresses the importance of functional up-grading and of raising the level of awareness regarding their predicament being poor and illiterate.

NAEP is to be implemented through voluntary agencies, institutions of formal education as well as through government agencies. The implementation strategy envisages taking up of compact projects closely linked with the local developmental administration. The total expenditure on NAEP would be approximately Rs. 1,000 million. The Government has declared its firm determination not only to provide necessary funds but also to use all available resources to make this programme a success.

Being a youth programme par excellence, NAEP visualizes that an adult education centre would also be a youth

organization where sports, recreation and cultural activities would find their rightful place. Besides, there is emphasis on organization of post-literacy and follow-up programmes. These programmes would not be confined to provision of library and reading room facilities; functional training, group action, radio and television viewing, etc. would form an essential part of it.

(b) Programmes for the rural youth - Nehru Yuvak Kendras

In India a distinction is made between student youth and non-student youth. As is obvious from the term, student youth are young persons over 15 years of age who are studying in institutions of formal education. The phrase non-student youth is generally used for persons who did not pursue education beyond the primary level, or who remained altogether excluded from formal education. A nationwide programme for non-student youth was launched in 1972, with the establishment of Nehru Yuvak Kendras (Nehru Youth Centres - NYK) in a few districts. More than 50 per cent of the total of 400 districts in the country now have a NYK.

An NYK is expected to co-ordinate the work of the various agencies working for development of non-student youth and to fill in the gaps. The main objective of this programme is to involve youth in developmental activities through their education and organization. The NYKs organize programmes of adult education, youth leadership training, work camps, games and sports and cultural and recreational activities. An effort is being made to link NYK activities with NAEP. The new learning and awareness centre to be organized by an NYK would provide facilities to young persons to participate in programmes of non-recreation and cultural activities.

In a large number of villages we have youth clubs and women's clubs established as a part of rural development programmes. These clubs organize vocational and recreational programmes for youth and women. The NYKs are expected to work closely with these clubs.

(c) National and Social Service - Student Youth Activities

As in several other developing countries, the need to provide national and social service activities for students had engaged the attention for the Central and State Governments in India also. Soon after independence there were proposals to make such services compulsory for all students. However, this advice was not accepted and it was decided to start the National Service Scheme for students of degree classes on a voluntary basis. Started in 1969 with a coverage of about 40,000 students, the programme has now increased and its coverage is 400,000 students. It now extends to all States in India.

Over the years, NSS has attracted considerable attention, sympathy and support of the community. It has also succeeded in generating among young students, enthusiasm and the urge for social service. Social service activities of students and teachers have been of a wide variety like intensive work for social uplift in villages, carrying out of socio-medical and health surveys, setting up of medical centres, imparting training to rural women in crafts (such as sewing, knitting and embroidery), propagating improved agricultural practices, promoting kitchen gardening, etc. Social service in urban areas has included work in slum areas, mass immunization, sanitation drive, and participation in campaigns for blood donation, family welfare, etc. Social service has also been rendered in the form of help to patients in hospitals, inmates of orphanages and other welfare institutions. NSS Units have also rendered assistance to the local authorities and communities in relief and rehabilitation work in the wake of natural calamities like cyclones, floods, earthquakes, fire, etc. As part of the constructive involvement of the youth during their vacation periods, a few large-scale camping programmes were organized. Involvement of NSS in such camps have enabled the students to work side by side with local non-student youth.

(d) Programmes of Discipline and Adventure - Scouting and Guiding and National Cadet Corps

One of the oldest youth activities in India, as indeed in several other countries, is Scouting and Guiding. Scouting and Guiding starts very early in schools and continues throughout the school period. There are at present approximately 800,000 children participating in this programme. However, this programme does not extend to post-secondary stage and also does not serve the non-student youth.

The National Cadet Corps (NCC) was started in 1948. It was a compulsory activity for all students at the university stage between 1963-67, whereafter it was again made voluntary. The programme aims at development of leadership, building of character and discipline, and training of youth to face a national emergency. NCC activities are organized at secondary as well as graduate stage, the strength at these stages being 400,000 and 700,000 respectively.

Emphasis on drill, weapon training and other conventional subjects is being reduced and those aspects of training which develop leadership, comradeship and the spirit of sportmanship and the ideal of service are being encouraged. Adventure training and social service are being progressively emphasized in training. More and more cadets are taking to mountaineering, hiking and trekking, para-jumping and gliding, cycling and sailing. Selected NCC officers and cadets are also being attached with regular Army, Navy and Air units, for purposes of training

The new feature recently introduced in NCC is involving Cadets in social service activities like helping in flood and famine relief operations, blood donation, cleanliness of slums and roads, traffic control, planting of trees and propagation of family welfare and improved health programmes.

(e) Engagement of youth in rural development

One of the perceptible recent developments in the youth programmes is the involvement, on a voluntary basis, of a large number of youth in various programmes of rural development. A large number of youth have felt disillusioned with the fast and materialistic life in the cities. They explore avenues of service to their disadvantaged brethren, particularly those living in the rural areas.

The Central Government has a scheme under which financial assistance is provided to youth groups desirous of taking up such activities. Although the scheme has just been started and the number of youth groups benefiting from it is small, there is a pointer that an increasing number of youth groups would want to live and work in the rural areas. These groups range from highly trained professionals, engineers and scientists to educated youth of rural areas who wish to systematically work for rural development programmes. The common element among all of them is a commitment to work for rural upliftment, particularly of the weakest sections of society, and a spirit of service. They shun government employment, the comparatively hectic life of the cities and adopt a rural way of life.

III Policy Perspectives

An analysis of the existing programmes will highlight the need for a National Youth Policy. The programmes outlined in the foregoing pages bring out the following :

- (a) The programmes have been organized without any well-defined overall objectives having been kept in view. Naturally, the programmes do not subserve any pre-determined objectives. They are sporadic and isolated from each other.
- (b) Although seen separately the programmes seem impressive enough, they suffer from serious imbalances. For example, there is no rationale in allocation of funds between programmes meant for a comparatively small number of student youth and those for the non-student youth who number several times more. Among student youth, as is often argued, the funds allocated for one programme are disproportionately higher than others.

- (c) The role of various agencies remains nebulous. For example, while some provincial governments have been taking up large and effective youth programmes, most of them have paid scant attention to it. There is an obvious need to spell-out more clearly the role and responsibilities of the Central Government, provincial governments, institutions of formal education, voluntary agencies, etc. Effective machinery has also to be established for co-ordination.
- (d) A common weakness of practically all programmes is the lack of systematic in-built evaluation. It is true that periodic evaluations have been undertaken in the past, but they are seldom thorough and generally take the place five years after the programme has been in operation.

Parameters of youth policy

It has been possible to give only the bare outline of some of the programmes meant for youth. It would be necessary for every country to undertake a thorough appraisal of their programmes before the parameters of a policy frame can emerge. The policy itself would generally have four components :

- (1) acknowledgement of youth identity
- (2) the content
- (3) the priorities, and
- (4) administration and co-ordination

Acknowledgement of youth identity means an acceptance of priority in favour of the youth. The critical role of youth in development is self-evident, but emphasis should equally be on youth identity being viewed in the country's historical and cultural context, as well as in the perspective of the nationally held objectives e.g. in the Indian situation secularism, faith in democratic institutions and in equality of status and opportunity.

The content is the substance of the policy. With reference to the situation obtaining in most developing countries, the main areas of content would be :

- (i) Adequate and relevant educational system - In countries which have clearly spelt out educational policy, guideline indicators of the educational system would find a place in that policy statement. No youth policy would, however, be complete without a reiteration about a relevant and adequate educational system.
- (ii) Work opportunities - Seen as a basic need of man, as well as the means for subsistence, work opportunities must be viewed as the second most significant parameter of youth policy.

- (iii) Health services - Facilities of minimum essential health-care including family life education, must form the third element of a youth policy. Health-care has to include not only relief in sickness and with family planning, but extend to nutrition, mental health, overcoming drug addiction, etc.
- (iv) Recreational and cultural activities - These would include the facilities for joyful living, sports and games, adventure programmes, participation in cultural activities and access to the mass media.
- (v) Participation in decision making - This is a matter of content as well as the process of implementation of youth policy. It is necessary to emphasize the desirability of participation of youth in decision making at all levels of formulation, implementation and evaluation of the various programmes which affect them.

The priority without doubt must be given to the disadvantaged youth. All types of disadvantages and deprivations get accentuated in the case of women and therefore, they who account for approximately 50 per cent of the youth have to be given the main priority. In addition, other identifiable disadvantaged sections (for example, persons belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in India) should receive due priority. Generally speaking, poor and illiterate young persons in the rural areas have to be provided special programmes of education, functional improvement and creation of an awareness among them of their rights and responsibilities. It needs to be underscored that unless the priorities are kept constantly in view, youth programmes may tend to neglect the under-privileged groups.

An important element in administration of youth programmes is the agencies through whom the programmes are to be implemented. It is necessary to be clear not only about the role of various agencies, but also about the nature of their inter se relationships. Government, educational institutions and voluntary agencies are the obvious agencies through whom the various programmes are to be implemented. Youth development cannot be the concern of only one Ministry or Department - its parameters are so wide that practically every aspect of government activity is touched by it. This realization must pervade all agencies. Multiplicity of agencies, and their mutual interdependence call for effective co-ordination. This has to be established at all levels - national, provincial, district and the field.

IV Commonwealth Co-operation

The importance of formulating of National Youth Policy has been made clear, it is well to acknowledge that the experience and expertise in this regard vary widely from country to country. There are countries which already have a youth

policy, others who have well developed youth programmes and a discernible outline of a youth policy, others who have rudimentary programmes and still others who have neither programmes nor any clear view of policy. Yet there is an unreserved commitment to development of youth among all countries of the Commonwealth, and most of them are also exploring means to arrive at a youth policy.

In this situation the Commonwealth ought to identify its role. The role can comprise one or more of the following activities:

(a) Securing the services of experts to assist in formulation of youth programmes and policy

This should be undertaken discriminatingly and only on the basis of explicit request from the member country concerned. It should be recognized that youth development is an extremely sensitive area and it is most desirable that countries develop endogenous capability. Selection of experts should be from countries with relevant experiences and as far as possible the member country wishing to have experts should have the choice to select suitable personnel.

(b) Exchange of ideas

The Meeting on Youth Policy should be followed up by regional and sub-regional seminars and workshops for discussion among policy level as well as field personnel. At these seminars intensive analysis should be undertaken of the various issues connected with this subject.

(c) Clearing-house services

There is rather insufficient information among the member countries about the programmes and policies of other members of the Commonwealth. This situation can be overcome through necessary effort. CYP Regional Centres can play an important role in this. Effort should be made not to confine clearing-house services in respect of information pertaining to countries who are members of the Commonwealth, but about other countries as well.