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*The April edition of the Newsletter continues to highlight activities in the various regions where the ICSW is working.*

*This time it covers South Asia - home to millions of people, a complex region with a proud history, rich culture and formidable development challenges.*

*The feature article, written by the ICSW President for South Asia Prof. P.K. Shajahan, deals with youth development issues in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals.*

The Editor

# Promoting Positive Youth Development for Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals: Some Perspectives from South Asia

### By: P.K.Shajahan

## Introduction

Young people are an asset to any society and active drivers of change in local communities. While economic development in past decades resulted in somewhat lower fertility in the region, the younger cohorts of the population are very prominent in South Asia and cannot be ignored when development programmes are conceived and conceptualized. Tapping the energies and skills of youth is one of the best ways to achieve significant development outcomes in society. An informed, educated, and responsible youth is indispensable for making the new 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda a success. Young people are the leaders of tomorrow and pivotal players in tackling the global development challenges of today. Their engagement and inclusion, as well as their playing a key role in decision-making processes, at all levels of society are important for social cohesion and socio-economic progress.

The vision of young people as drivers of positive change is a clear departure from harmful stereotypes depicting youth as a social threat or exclusively as victims of marginalisation. In this light youth development is an essential element in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Youth development can be described as a



Regional President - South Asia, International Council on Social Welfare and Professor and Chairperson of the Centre for Community Organisation and Development Practice, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, India: pkshajahan@icsw.org

process that prepares young people for healthy and productive adulthood. Aimed at strengthening the process of their social engagement, youth development programmes are generally conceived as a combination of strengthening the opportunities of their self-development along with social inclusion. Social engagements for their growth and fulfillment, along with productive activities, play an important role in youth development processes.

In the context of social engagements, scholars mention two kinds of issues; one being the fact that youth are subjected to the wider relations of social division and social control within which they are situated[i] and secondly, the capacity of youth to confront questions of social inequality[ii]. Given that youth form a representative subset of society, the social divisions within society get reflected directly among the youth as well. Hence, while considering youth as a substantive positive force for social and

political transformation, there is also a danger that the social divisions and tensions thereof get reinforced unless there is a conscious effort to analyse and engage with this reality within youth development approaches. Further, as suggested earlier, the current youth development approaches that either try to engage youth through positive engagements (so as not to get drawn into the negative processes of crime, delinquency, addiction, etc.) or enhance the asset dimension of the youth through skills-training and empowerment will have limited political power to challenge the existing inequality in the society, which poses a significant threat to social advance in society at large. Thus, current youth development models are limited by an inability to examine the complex social, economic, and political forces that bear on the lives of (urban) youth[iii] as well as the significant contribution to the social, political and economic transformation envisaged in the Sustainable Development Goals. A regional asset mapping study titled "Innovations in Civic Participation", conducted in four South Asian countries, namely, Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan, reveals three transitions that are almost simultaneous: demographic, economic, and political, each of which provides a unique window of opportunity to harness the energy of young people in order to reap a demographic dividend and advance social, economic, and human development on a massive scale (Refer Box 1). All of these signal the need for an innovative approach whereby young people will have the agency to negotiate, contest and challenge the institutionalised process of social division and social inequality and thereby accelerate the social, economic and political transition required to steer equitable growth. This article tries to explore the scope and challenges of a critical praxis model based on the Positive Youth Development (PYD) approach, which could provide a framework for engaging youth in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, as seen through some select contexts and experiments in South Asia.

**Box 1: Innovations in Civic Participation (ICP) - Mapping Assets for Youth Civic Engagement in South Asia**

Considering the unique confluence of factors in South Asia and the importance of engaging young people in the social, economic and political development of the region, ICP launched a multi-year regional programme to study and support youth civic engagement in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Pakistan. ICP began a South Asia regional initiative with an "asset mapping" exercise culminating in a comprehensive report. Asset mapping is a process of inquiry that provides an overview of existing conditions, highlighting strengths and revealing gaps. This mapping research aimed at creating a picture of which youth civic engagement programmes and initiatives exist, the policy and legislative environment in which they operate, how they are implemented and what kind of impact they may have, so as to make recommendations about how youth civic engagement opportunities can be strengthened. The aim of ICP's regional initiative is to enhance the number and quality of opportunities for youth civic engagement by raising awareness about its impact on positive youth development, increasing investment in such programmes, and fostering a community of practice that can work to implement these programmes.

The four countries surveyed in the South Asia asset mapping survey lucidly illustrate the demographic, economic and political dividends that youth in the region hold. However, in order to reap the benefits of this dividend, the current generation of young people must be equipped with the skills and abilities – the human and social capital – to become responsible, active citizens and productive employees. Youth civic engagement provides a unique opportunity to help young people acquire the human and

social capital they need to make the transition to adulthood and advance the progress of their societies.

Based on this research and the assets identified in the four countries, ICP put forwarded the following broad recommendations for scaling up youth civic engagement in South Asia.

1.  Regional Engagement and Innovation in the Promotion of Volunteerism

2.  Review and implement National Youth Policies and other opportunities for youth civic engagement

3.  Invest in developing policies and frameworks that promote youth civic engagement and ensure good governance for effective implementation

4. Increase information availability and resource accessibility for young people

5. Facilitate additional youth civic engagement opportunities.

*Source: Youth Development through Civic Engagement: Mapping Assets in South Asia (2010): A report of the research on Innovations in Civic Participation*

Today, 60 percent of all young people live in Asia, 15 percent in Africa, 10 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean, and 15 percent in developed regions. By the year 2020, it is expected that 87 percent of young people will be living in developing countries[iv]. Young people in South Asia make up approximately 30 percent of youth in developing countries, creating unprecedented and significant opportunities and challenges[v]. India alone has some 200 million young people in the age group 15-24. This is the largest number of young people ever to transition into adulthood, both in South Asia and in the world as a whole. Perhaps nowhere in the world has the recent emphasis on youth been more widely embraced in the field of development than in this demographically young, economically vibrant region that is

still developing[vi]. In sum, the convergence of demographic, economic and political trends in the region makes investment in youth development—and youth civic engagement in particular—a logical choice for governments, international organizations, aid agencies and NGOs seeking to support development throughout South Asia[vii].

**Positive Youth Development (PYD)**

Positive youth development aims to combine the asset dimensions of individuals with collective dimensions of the community life of young people, as well as with notions of social justice and collective outcomes. The asset dimension in youth development envisages youth with enhanced opportunities, skills and possessing high resilience to shocks and vulnerabilities. That is possible when youth have access to high quality education and employability in addition to personal life skills and the opportunity to lead a life of worth and dignity, free from all forms of exclusion. Investment in higher and professional education and measures to enhance the employability of young people are some of the strategies for achieving this. However, social alienation and the incarceration of people of certain identities and nationalities are posing a serious threat to this conception. The collective dimension in youth development essentially has two specific aspects, (i) the idea that many of the issues confronting youth are not individual issues, rather they need to be seen as a collective issue of youth as a community, however diverse it is, and (ii) youth engagement is a collective action for socio-economic and political transformation and not an action aimed at fulfilling the needs of the youth themselves.  Even if one takes the example of work participation and exclusion in the labour market, individualisation of the issue would result in a search for approaches that enhance the employability, i.e. skill training as a solution. However, exclusion in labour market has much larger dimensions, such as the impact of the larger economic

policies in force as well as social exclusion on the basis of identities, both of which are collective forces operating on youth as a social and economic category rather than deficiencies in individuals that make them less fit for joining the highly competitive labour market. In this light, the tendency among youth development stakeholders to focus only on individual behaviour obscures the collective dimension of the development process[viii].



In the context of the discussion on youth development among African Americans, Ginwright (2006)[ix] suggests that youth development could be considered as a response to social and racial marginalisation. This conception of youth development presents a strong transformatory potential, emphasising that youth do not constitute a social segment that is full of problems that need to be addressed for their benefit, and has high significance in changing the face of the context itself in which they live and thereby contributing to social and economic development. It is through the collective dimensions of community life that notions of social justice and action on behalf of the common good arise. This understanding of the youth development process acknowledges structural constraints in communities and views youth as active participants in facilitating neighbourhoods through strong social networks.

**Box 2: Youth Action for Promoting Active Citizenship in a Split Community**

Founded in 1997, the Society for Awareness, Harmony and Equal Rights (SAHER) has been actively responding to communities by working with adolescents and youth to build life-skill competencies, create exposure to multiple realities and foster motivations for discovering the active citizen within each one in order to initiate meaningful change in the world around. SAHER's key concern is the lack of social peace and the growing communal polarization between different religious communities. This stems from the socio-political environment in which young people have been growing up. SAHER's work started in an urban settlement of Jogeshwari in Mumbai, where one of the worst implications of the communal violence in 1992-93 was propelling a sense of insecurity among the minority population. This resulted in the cross-migration of people, where the minority population (from both the Hindu as well as the Muslim communities) migrated out of the places where they felt threatened. They settled in segregated spaces, where each member of the community found himself in the majority and felt secure, owing to closeness to their co-religionists. The settlement patterns, even otherwise demarcated across communal lines, were completely ghettoized after the communal violence. One of the major implications was that it affected the way of life and the social and economic relations of both the communities. The members of SAHER have realized that, as a person grows, his/her ideas about life and outlook gradually go through a process of internalization. This becomes so embedded in the person's consciousness that it becomes nearly impossible to do away with the baggage of experiences and the construction of thoughts. A continuous exposure to multiple realities and contextual situations, involving adolescents and youth, can mould their minds to recognize and respect differences

more easily.

Through positive engagement with youth, SAHER attempts to address the root causes of communal hatred by designing spaces that could bring together youth of different communities. It aims to create opportunities for learning amidst diversity, where young people interact to break barriers that inhibit them from expressing or sharing their feelings and thoughts. Sports, collective civic engagement, the celebration of festivals are all seen as integral parts of the comprehensive approach adopted. SAHER works for peace across communities, enabling youth to become agents for change through leadership and employability programmes. These young people bring about meaningful change in society, affecting a shift from social conflict to economic productiveness and leadership for social action. Its vision is to create a world where differences are recognized, accepted and appreciated. The mission of SAHER is based on the belief that young people are naturally innovative and that, with proper inspiration and support, they can positively impact society. The effort is to enable young people to think critically and reflect on their actions to foster respect for diversity and impact themselves and the society positively.

Such a broad conception of positive youth development necessitates a strong 'youth – context alignment'. This essentially means that youth issues need to be strongly embedded in social, economic and political contexts rather than replicating best practices from different contexts. Formulations of positive youth development have acknowledged the capacity of young people to change communities while simultaneously developing important life skills. The discussion on youth as community agents is another step forward to understanding how they can respond to pressing community issues[x]. This is not limited to collective action

by youth but includes their role in studying their own marginalities as well as larger social development concerns, which needs to be underscored. The case of the PUKAR[1] barefoot researchers is an illuminating example of this research-action praxis dimension of youth development. It is in this context that the role of positive youth development is discussed in achieving the SDGs.



**Box 3: Barefoot Researchers of PUKAR**

The community research initiative of PUKAR aims to democratise research by engaging urban youth in conducting social researches on issues related to urbanization and globalization. The vision of PUKAR is to create a world-class incubator for producing knowledge, ideas and innovation about inclusive and sustainable global cities through the lens of youth. It is founded on the strong belief in the value of "right to research", particularly for the marginalised urban youth, where their educational or social background does not remain as an impediment to conducting quality research on issues that confront or concern them on a day-to-day basis. This broadens their access to

1. Pukar is an independent research collective and an urban knowledge production centre based in Mumbai, India, that conducts multi-sectoral, cross-disciplinary, community-based participatory research on issues related to urbanization and globalization

knowledge and helps create a sense of agency for youth, which empowers them with research and knowledge-building capacities. They further use research as a tool for learning, advocacy for an intervention in their community and transformation of the self, the community and the city. Armed with their research data, together they design, advocate, disseminate and implement change in their communities, thereby operationalising a research-action praxis.

Barefoot Researchers (BRs) use the city itself as a learning lab to build new knowledge without the intermediary of a formal structure of learning that tends to otherwise distance them from their contexts. In this process, youth get exposed to the existing hierarchies and social, cultural and economic diversities of the world to which the learner/researcher belongs, thus enabling them to reflect better upon themselves, challenge the prevalent wisdom, make arguments about their future and become problem-solvers for the future of their cities. So far, PUKAR has trained more 3000 Barefoot Researchers and published 2 books derived from the research projects of the barefoot researchers. Such research and action engagements have been spread across more than 300 communities in the city of Mumbai and its suburbs. In the past few years, the research areas have fallen under the themes of gender and sexuality in the public sphere, the effects of the development-redevelopment on the lives of citizens, a review of education schemes and their implementation and urban governance.

**SDGs and PYD**

Not addressing the issues that young people are facing today can result in adverse economic, social and political consequences tomorrow. Thus, while discussing the Sustainable Development Goals, youth would continue to remain a significant segment of society, where policies in support of

enhancing the opportunities of young people as well as harnessing their transformatory potential are tapped to achieve the SDGs.

The post- 2015 development agenda for transforming the world by ending poverty and hunger, improving health and education, making cities more sustainable, combating climate change, and protecting oceans and forests is impossible without the active engagement of youth in all the goals and targets of the SDGs. In such a scenario, youth are the target as well as the vehicles of transformation. They need to be served better though stronger policies and institutional mechanisms, including functional national youth (development) policies. Their access to resources and opportunities can create an environment in which they can share the fruits of economic growth and lead a life of health and dignity.  The ICSW South Asia Region has joined hands with the Head Held High Foundation in some collaborative work aimed at ending poverty through the collective action of civil society organisations, corporate houses, academic institutions and social activists by initiating GAP - Global Action on Poverty. Much of the change-makers associated with GAP are young adults who have dreamt of or initiated small interventions to address some of the critical concerns surrounding poverty in their own immediate contexts. Such movements and organised efforts to bring youth to the forefront of action for addressing poverty can be equally as important as the necessary policy initiatives in this direction.

**Box 4: Global Action on Poverty (GAP)**

GAP is a movement to eradicate poverty globally through thought and action. Addressing poverty effectively has been a challenge for many nations. Social exclusion and inequality emanating from varied dimensions of the social, economic and political domains of life has made poverty a complex multifaceted phenomenon, thereby

demanding a nuanced approach to address the same. While a state-centric approach to poverty though various poverty eradication programmes have brought limited and unsustainable results world over, micro initiatives at local levels do not offer the scale and proportion to make significant improvement in the conditions leading to poverty. Global Action on Poverty (GAP) is an initiative aiming at bringing civil society, corporate entities and academic institutions into designing, developing and scaling up ideas of addressing poverty with the necessary impetus required for the same. When potential change-makers, many of whom are young adults, who have ideated and experimented with micro-initiatives, are brought together and provided the necessary support for converting their ideas into sustainable initiatives for reducing poverty and its manifestations, and are helped to scale it up to a level where it can impact larger sections of the society, the changes could be unimaginably interesting. Annual GAP summits enable the change-makers to connect up with catalysts, mentors and potential funders for operationalising their ideas into actions. The summits also provide an opportunity for making successful models available around the globe in similar or comparable contexts, thereby avoiding the need for reinventing the wheel and accelerating the process of eradication of poverty.

GAP 2015 brought together 100 change-makers (those who are working on the ground in various aspects of poverty eradication) and about 70 catalysts (people and organisations who support change-makers through resources, connections, funds and advice). They were guided by eminent personalities in the field of social development and change, including Nobel Laureate Professor Mohammad Yunus, social activist Aruna Roy, academician Jean Dreze etc., who are mentors with GAP. GAP 2016 again brought another set of young change-makers where the concrete plans of action of each of the change-makers were drawn up and the necessary resource and knowledge supports worked out for each of the change-makers.

**Conclusion**

The discussion above highlights the importance of harnessing the transformatory potential of youth in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGS). The role of youth is being analysed from the perspective of positive youth development (PYD) and is being explicated with the examples presented here. Scholars on positive youth development view all young people as having the potential for contributing to positive developmental change, and regard youth as a resource to be developed rather than a problem to be solved. Thus, PYD represents a strength-based conception of development rather than a deficit-reduction approach[xi]. Researchers have suggested that youth are more likely to experience PYD when organized programmes involve opportunities for community involvement, skill-building activities, personal recognition, and positive relationships with adults[xii]. Thus while adopting PYD as an approach for making the contributions of youth towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, specific strategies and institutional mechanisms geared towards

operationalising PYD becomes important. Some examples presented here provide some direction in which thought, analysis and action can be directed for productively engaging youth in social development, change and transformation.

Notes:

[I] Mokewna 1998 and White 1997, as cited in Ginwright, S., & Cammarota, J. (2002). New Terrain of Youth Development: The Promise of the Social Justice Approach. *Social Justice* , 82-95.

[ii] Ginwright, S. (2006). Racial Justice through Resistance: Important Dimensions of Youth Development for African Americans. *National Civic Review* , 41-46.

[iii] Ginwright, S., & Cammarota, J. (2002). New Terrain of Youth Development: The Promise of the Social Justice Approach. *Social Justice* , 82-95.

[iv] Rustam, M. A. (2004). *Youth and Globalism: A Perspective.* Malacca: World Assembly of Youth.

[v] The World Bank. (2007). *World Development Report: Development and the Next Generation.* Washington: The World Bank.
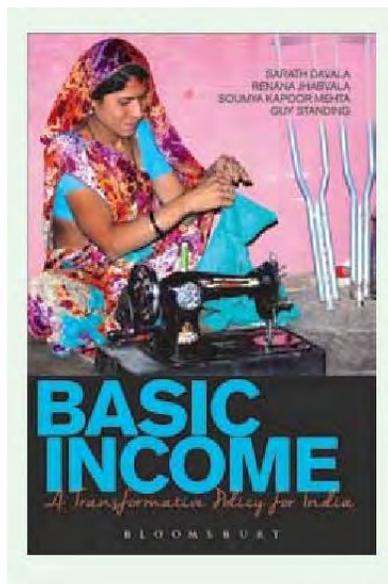
[vi] Etra, A. (2010). *Youth Development through Civic Engagement: Mapping Assets in South Asia.* Washington: Innovations in Civic Participation.

[vii] Etra, A. (2010). *Youth Development through Civic Engagement: Mapping Assets in South Asia.* Washington: Innovations in Civic Participation.

[viii] Ginwright, S. (2006). Racial Justice through Resistance: Important Dimensions of Youth Development for African Americans. *National Civic Review* , 41-46.

[ix] Ginwright, S. (2006). Racial Justice through Resistance: Important Dimensions of Youth Development for African Americans. *National Civic Review* , 41-46.

[x] Ginwright, S. (2006). Racial Justice through Resistance: Important Dimensions of Youth Development for African Americans. *National Civic Review* , 41-46.

[xi] Lerner, R. M. (2005). *Promoting Positive Youth Development: Theoretical and Empirical Bases.* Massachusetts: Tufts University.

[xii] Roth, J. L., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2003). Youth Development Programmes and Healthy Development. In D. Romer, *Reducing Adolescent Risk: Toward an Integrated Approach* (pp. 355-365). Thousand Oaks: Sage

# Securing basic income: innovative project in India

Quite recently the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh (MP) has been the site of a remarkable and innovative experiment—to test the potential of unconditional cash transfers for addressing vulnerabilities faced by low-income people. To get credible evidence and appraise the project's potential UNICEF and the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) joined their efforts to establish a pilot project where 'basic income' of  the poorest  living in rural areas of the above state was set as a goal. The central design premise of the pilot—which did not impose any conditionalities-- was that the basic income was paid every month to all individuals in the village. For between a year and 17 months, over 6,000 individuals received small unconditional monthly cash transfers ('basic income'). While universal basic income schemes are being debated as one of policy options in a number of countries, including highly developed countries like Switzerland, this was the first time that it was explicitly tested in a real-life situation for the highly vulnerable tribal and general villages in India.

The key findings of the project demonstrate that basic living conditions in the respective villages improved, starting with improvement in sanitation and better access to drinking water. The tribal villages participating in the project, which were much poorer than the general villages, recorded significant increases in the ownership of household assets, particularly those that would give them more income rather than more comfort. The level of food sufficiency also increased. Basic income payments facilitated a more rational response to illness, through more regular medication and better choice in the type of health service to use, (even though the period of the pilots was too short to expect any observable longer-term effect on health).

The receipt of basic income also facilitated an increase in school spending on some necessary items as books,  shoes and uniforms, and had an impact on enrollment levels, particularly that of girls.
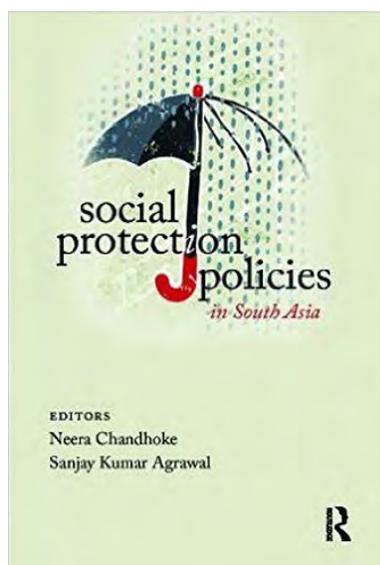
One of the most important findings was regarding the growth of productive work in both general and tribal villages, leading to its sustained increase. The project also had significant gender impact and appeared to have made household decision-making more equitable, giving women a "voice" in allocating their basic income and increasing their empowerment.

As confirmed by the findings from the quantitative study combined with the qualitative case studies and the focus-group discussions analyzed in the book, unconditional basic income payments has been an important means of social protection, with the benefits often building on each other, having in the words of the authors of the study "a truly emancipatory effect on households".

For more details please check:
http://sewabharat.org/resources/report-on-unconditional-cash-transfers/

# The useful resources and links – the find of the month
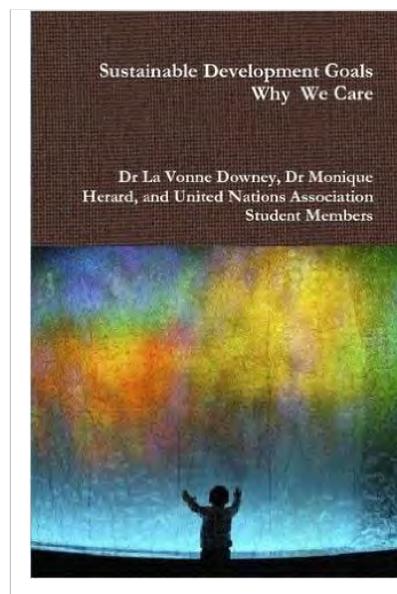
## Social Protection Policies in South Asia

Neera Chandhoke, Sanjay Kumar Agrawal, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016

This book offers a comparative analysis of social protection policies in five countries of South Asia -- India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh -- where economic transformation impelled by globalisation and liberalisation has, on the one hand, caused an unprecedented expansion in the informal sector, and heightened the vulnerabilities of its workers on the other. It examines the multiple vulnerabilities of workers, who continue to work and live in abysmal conditions, with persistent cutbacks in social security budgets.

This book will be useful to scholars, students and researchers of development studies, economics, politics and labour law. It would also interest those in voluntary sector organisations, non-governmental organisations, policy makers, journalists and think tanks.

## The Sustainable Development Goals - Why we care

By Dr. LaVonne Downey, Mary Lorraine Andoh, Kenia Marreros, Sharon Darrow, Monique Herard, Rachel Dalton, David Combs, Amanda Hong, Yamna Oussir, Oras Azeez, Derrick Griffin, Mitchell Cunningham,

AJDM Publishing, Chicago IL 2016

History and explanation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and why they matter.