



The Urgency of Placing Young People at the Centre of Pakistan’s Post-COVID Development Agenda

In collaboration with Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF)

Pakistan is among the youngest countries in the world. Around 64% of its population is younger than 30, and around one-third of its population is youth between the ages of 15 and 29 (Ahmad 2018). This makes it the largest youth population Pakistan has ever had. However, the youth unemployment rate is 8.5% – one of the highest in the region (United Nations 2021). Nearly 65 million people in Pakistan are between the ages 10 and 24. Each year, 1.2 million more are added to this age demography (UNICEF 2020). Yet, almost half of the country’s young people are currently neither educated, employed, nor trained. The historically largest youth demography of Pakistan faces the risk of becoming increasingly disenfranchised and will be unable to contribute sustainably to the country’s socioeconomic growth if their potential remains critically underutilized.

Social impacts of the COVID-19 health emergency have disrupted nearly all aspects of life and affected all age groups. For young people, however, and especially for vulnerable youth, the crisis poses serious risks to education, health (mental and physical), employment, and disposable income as they have their families depending on them. Moreover, the young population is expected to manage the social and economic consequences of this crisis in the long-term. However, this may lead to the deterioration of their mental health in the short-term as they have constant pressure to carry the economic and equity concerns of their households single-handedly. In a COVID-impacted world, it is more critical now than ever before, to address youth’s multidimensional needs by creating sustainable growth opportunities.

To avoid worsening these generational inequalities and to involve young people in building societal resilience, governments need to align their short-term emergency responses with investments into long-term economic, social, health, education, and environmental objectives which will ensure well-being of Pakistan’s young people. Simultaneously, it is also important to design inclusive programmes which encourage learning, development, and innovation to increase youth’s employability and entrepreneurial capacities. This, however, cannot be achieved without placing young people at the front and centre of policy and development discourse.

The ‘Punjab Youth Policy’ (Youth Affairs, Sports, Tourism and Archaeology Department 2012) and ‘Sindh Youth Policy’ (Department of Sports & Youth Affairs 2018) propose ‘mechanisms for economic, social, and political empowerment of young people by facilitating, grooming and guiding them to live in peace and harmony, promoting attitudes, skills and knowledge to prepare them to shoulder responsibilities in the new millennium.’ However, in the context of COVID-19, it is pertinent for governance frameworks to train young people how to respond to crisis situations, build safety nets, and advance their digital literacy by providing them with the right resources. For this, it is important to create and update systems



that enable young people to determine and communicate their needs at an ideal pace to inform and shape policies.

To address the challenges Pakistan's youth is facing today, this session will look for urgent answers to the following pressing and time-sensitive questions:

- How can public policy and governance styles be rethought to address youth-specific policy and development challenges that have emerged during COVID-19?
- How can social protection and poverty reduction programmes design skills-specific safety net components to generate youth-led livelihoods for the poorest households in remote districts?
- For a shift away from traditional livelihood approaches, and into ICT-centric enterprises, what skills do young people require? What are the challenges of accessibility to training programmes for these skills?

References

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