

TITLE: YOUTH BULGE: ASSET OR LIABILITY?

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Pakistan stands at a demographic crossroads. With the fifth largest population, its youthful composition is a defining feature of its demographic mosaic.

Around 63 percent of the country comprises of youth aged 15 to 33. This striking concentration of young people is considered a major economic driver for growth and progress. However, beyond these world

statistics lies a bleak reality. Pakistan has been unable to harness the power of

its youth^{bulge}. Ineffective planning and policy

failures have landed its ^{young population} into

a labyrinth of challenges. The country's

future rests upon the meticulous

management and nurturing of its youth

bulge, for only then can this demographic

surge be transformed into an asset.

The youth bulge presents an extraordinary resource for human capital and workforce

potential. It promises energy, vitality

and fresh perspectives for the job market.

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Silicon valley in the United States is a prime example. It's work culture favours a higher concentration of young people. Steve Jobs founded Apple when he was 21. Similarly, Larry Page established Google at 25. The high technology cluster is rife with young individuals. Resultantly, the Silicon startup culture accounts for one third of all venture capital investment in the United States, helping it become an ecosystem of innovation and wealth.

The large youth cohort can fuel ^{significant} economic growth and ^{demographic} dividend.

The World Bank posits that younger populations can make significant economic strides. This is made possible by reducing the "dependency ratio".

The working age population significantly outnumbers the dependent population.

This leads to increased savings which inturn attracts more investment into

the country.

China and South Korea serve as compelling examples of countries which have capitalized on their youth bulge. China's multifarious endeavours have effectively integrated youth into the economy. Initiatives like the "Thousands Talent Program", "National Key Research and Development Program", promotion of STEM education etc have ensured that the youth is well prepared as agents of economic prowess. Likewise, South Korea's programs have effectively channeled the potential of their youth. Saemaul Undong; a project for community development, Hagwon regulation; accessible tutoring for all and various industry development plans have helped the country's human resource gain a global competitive advantage.

On the contrary, Pakistan's youth is ensnared in a web of challenges.

It is pestered with a myriad of issues, reflecting failure on part of both policy makers and the state.

One of the foremost challenges plaguing our youth is the issue of unemployment.

The state's role has been feckless with regards to aligning job creation with the booming population. Our country's already feeble infrastructure fails to accommodate a gargantuan workforce actively seeking jobs. Consequently, Pakistan's youth unemployment stands at a staggering 8.5 percent. This has created a situation where substantial amounts of young people remain idle, falling prey to disillusionment and frustration.

Another daunting challenge is the gap between skills development and job market requirements. An overwhelming

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segment of the youth lags behind in acquiring technical knowledge and soft skills demanded in an ever-evolving professional landscape. "Pakistan Education Statistics" underpins that the educational sector grapples with sub-par teachers and a curricula that lacks integration of contemporary skillsets. Resultantly, the mismatch between the youth's knowledge and the job market ^{Leads to} one million individuals expelled from market economy every year.

The phenomena of youth bulge underpins social and political implications. A burgeoning youth is susceptible to get entangled in militant ideologies. A report by ^{the} "Institute of strategic studies Islamabad" effectively illustrates this correlation. When a large portion of the population feels disenfranchised and forsaken by the state, it might diffuse into violent ^{segments of the society}. Radical groups

are channels to express abomination and frustration against government failures. ^{consequently,} significant threats are posed to national security and integrity.

The country's human resource potential is further ^{stark} maligned by gender disparity. According to "Global Gender Gap" report, Pakistan ranks 145 out of 146 countries in respect of economic opportunity and participation, empowerment and survival.

This underpinning paints a dismal picture of our overall female participation in the workforce. A meagre 21 percent of women are employed, working in sub-human, despicable conditions.

Building on the above discussion, it is important to acknowledge that Pakistani youth encompasses huge potential which is being squandered due to misdirection. ^{Consequently,} the government is striving.

atone for its negligence by devising
to [↑] solutions for capitalization
of this invaluable asset.

"National Innovation Award" is a government initiative to foster startup culture and eco-innovation. The "Prime-Minister's Ba-Ikhtiyar Naujawan Internship" with investment of over four billion Rupees promises paid internships to over 40,000 students for six months.

In parallel, the "PM Youth Business and Agriculture Loan Scheme" promotes entrepreneurship with low mark-up rates. As of March 2023, it has disbursed six billion rupees to 15,000 plus beneficiaries.

Moreover, the government is in gear to cater ^{for} skills development issue among youth. Programs like "Matric TECH Pathways", "Polytechnic institutes", and "PM's Hunarmand Skills for ALL program" are intricately designed

to provide training to young individuals and impart them with required job market finesse.

Several steps have been undertaken to empower women and espouse gender development. All of the aforementioned programs have a compulsory 25 percent female quota. Moreover, the government has introduced various projects and platforms to facilitate all stakeholders. "Gender Unit", "National Mechanism for Reporting and Follow-up" and "Human Resource Information Systems" are notable mentions in this regard.

However, most youth initiatives, despite their promises, eventually peter out. This is because grave miscalculations underpin most policy programs. A comparative analysis with India and Bangladesh might yield valuable insights in this regard.

In comparison of Pakistan's Policy Frameworks with the Bangladeshi model, many grave errors are manifested on part of Pakistan.

The Bengal model directly addressed the root cause of a humongous youthful population segment. It aptly recognized the "youth bulge" as a symptom of all the problems in the first place. Consequently, it mobilized the religious clergy to advocate the usage of contraceptives and bring down birth rates. As a result, the average Bengal woman now has only two children, compared to seven in the 1980s. On the contrary, the Pakistani government is consistently reluctant to address six million children added to its population every year.

Bangladesh has also effectively capitalized on the World Bank Model for a country's natural endowment. It built on every

opportunity to utilize its very apparent resource - a youthful population.

The government has developed adequate infrastructure and enabled innumerable joint ventures, partnerships and establishment of manufacturing units.

Moreover, it has actively incentivised women to work in Multi-national subsidiaries. Bangladesh prudently dealt with both youth bulge and gender disparity, killing two birds with one stone.

Indian government goes one step ahead in utilization of ^{its} youth bulge. Apart from capitalizing on its natural endowment, it believes in perfectly moulding its individuals to fit in the international job market.

It's "Skill India" initiative alone

trains over 400 individuals in one

year for international opportunities.

India's Union cabinet approved

"Mera Yuva Bharat" as part of its National Youth Policy to develop leadership skills among youth. Another feather in India's cap is the robust development of "Indian Silicon Valley" in Bangalore.

It is the global hub of technology outsourcing and emerging startups.

The government has made special arrangements to enforce low mark-up loans for entrepreneurs and connections with Silicon Valley Bank in San Francisco.

Resultantly, more than 700+ individuals have startups valued at 30 billion dollars each.

Conversely, Pakistan exhibits a shallow understanding of its internal dynamics and demography. Its initiatives

to curb population growth are limited to mere conferences and hollow policy frameworks. Moreover, it has undermined the role of foreign policy and diplomats to deal with the youth bulge. Foreign

office can play a substantial role in integrating youth in countries with labour shortage, but this viable option remains unexplored. Furthermore, capitalizing on national endowment structure and infrastructure development are turning into pipedreams.

To conclude, Pakistan's youth bulge boasts a lot of potential and is replete with dreams and ambition. However, their mental and physical faculties are being criminally wasted due to futile policy frameworks and half-hearted initiatives. The government needs to revisit its national programs and borrow useful insights from Indian and Bangladeshi models. There is a pressing need to iron out feasible solutions to truly harness the power of ^{our} youth bulge.