



WORKSHOP #1
21ST SEPTEMBER 2021

Co-Creating Effective Strategies for Youth Engagement & Participation

Insights from a Design Thinking Workshop convened by the NITI Aayog
Sub-Committee on Youth Engagement



Contents

Executive Summary

Overview

**Using Design Thinking as an Approach to
Co-create Strategies for Youth Engagement**

Summary of Insights from Workshop #1

Way Forward

Annexures

Executive Summary

India is home to more than 600 million youth - over half of India's population is below the age of 25 years

While this presents itself as an opportunity for greater development, a large population with limited resources and high demands also poses a challenge. A large population of the youth continue to suffer from limited access to health, education, livelihoods and safety, and this has been further exacerbated by the challenge and opportunity of a pandemic.

This presents India with a demographic dividend that would only be realised through focussed and sustained efforts to engage with youth meaningfully. Therefore, it is imperative that youth voices are heard and amplified in this domain where decisions pertaining to them are being made.

Taking into account the potential India's youth present in contributing to sustainable nation building, the NITI Aayog Sub-Committee on Youth Engagement decided to bring together different stakeholders - government, civil society and funders - to help pave the way for greater, more sustainable and meaningful platforms to help enable greater youth engagement and participation. This exercise would be conducted using the approach of design thinking, through a series of collaborative workshops. The Sub-Committee recognises that for youth-focussed solutions to be effective, youth must be engaged in programme design, implementation and evaluation. Further, there must be convergence across different interventions by various stakeholders - both government and non-government.

This report aims to capture the insights shared by participants from the first in this series of workshops, which was an attempt to kick-off the effort of landscaping and streamline youth engagement initiatives being undertaken by different stakeholders and identify best practices and experience, to leverage each other's strengths and areas of expertise.

This report will help provide an overview of the first workshop hosted on 21st September, 2021 - its objectives, purpose and approach; the insights shared by participants on key priority areas of action and challenges faced by young people; and the next steps from this engagement.

At the end of the workshop series, the Sub-Committee aims to create a compendium of best practices and co-create an assessment framework which will help all stakeholders - government, civil society and funders - better plan their interventions with aspects of youth participation and engagement.

Overview

“Young people should be at the forefront of global change and innovation. Empowered, they can be key agents for development and peace. If, however, they are left on society’s margins all of us will be impoverished. Let us ensure that all young people have every opportunity to participate fully in the lives of their societies”

- Kofi Annan

India is home to more than 600 million youth, implying that over half of India’s population is below the age of 35 years. This presents India with a unique demographic dividend that would be advantageous only if there are focussed and sustained efforts to engage with the youth.

Even though they constitute a significant proportion of the population, India’s youth continue to grapple with access to quality education, health, livelihoods and safety. There have been limited formal structures and civil society coordination to support them.

This workshop is the first in a series of workshops, under the aegis of NITI Aayog Sub Committee on Youth Engagement. It is set to address challenges in youth engagement and provide a common platform for government, civil society and funders to discuss and learn from each other’s experiences. The workshop forms the basis of a way forward for youth engagement and participation in the country. This underlies the assumption that in the future the youth themselves would be included in the framing of their engagement and participation.

Current status of youth in India and the need for greater youth engagement

India is currently home to one of the fastest-growing youth populations in the world. This population has the ability to not only impact their generation, but the next few generations to come. Therefore, investing in them, building their capacities and including them to play a pivotal role in their own development is of utmost importance.

Over the last few years there has been a commendable effort by different stakeholders to listen to and respond to the needs of the youth. While these efforts are a shift in the right direction, the inability to view this population as a diverse and heterogenous one that is fully aware of its own needs and aspirations has impeded their ability to claim a seat at the table in planning their own development agenda. Moreover, most of the initiatives by different stakeholders have been carried out in a siloed manner, often leading to duplication of effort. This has led to youth-focused initiatives and programmes failing to achieve their intended goal as very few have been relevant, representative or inclusive of young people’s lived realities and needs.

Mandate of the NITI Aayog Sub Committee on Youth Engagement

The NITI Aayog set up the Sub-Committee on Youth Engagement on 7th August, 2020 to help provide a common platform for civil society organisations (CSOs), government and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) to engage on the following areas:

- Suggest improvements in programs, plans and policies of the government
- Deepen the work in the aspirational districts, with a focus on Jammu and Kashmir
- Identify best practices from CSOs which can be scaled and contribute to the flagship programmes of the government

Objective of the Design Thinking Workshop Series

This workshop series convened by the NITI Aayog Sub Committee on Youth Engagement and supported by the School of Design Thinking, Chennai and the 10to19: Dasra Adolescents Collaborative aims to find areas of convergence and complementarity between civil society organisations (CSOs, government and non-governmental organisations) NGOs to develop a nuanced and shared understanding of youth engagement and participation in India, and chart the way forward.

The broad objectives of this workshop series are to:

- 1** To identify current stakeholders, platforms and networks for youth engagement
- 2** To ascertain gaps and blind spots across existing modalities of youth engagement
- 3** To identify and design more efficient and effective youth-centric models of engagement and participation

The first workshop was focused on setting the above agenda for the workshop series, and was hosted online in a virtual format.

The entire workshop series is intended to culminate in the creation of a compendium of best practices for youth engagement and participation across different stakeholders and an assessment framework to measure youth engagement and participation across all key stakeholders.

Agenda and Flow of the First Workshop

AGENDA

Introduction and Context Setting

Welcome Note

Insights and Perspectives on Youth Engagement

Youth Engagement Survey Highlights

Introduction to Design Thinking

Engagement with Different Youth Groups

Next Steps and Closing

FACILITATOR

- **Mr. Jagadananda** (Coordinator, NITI Aayog Sub-Committee on Youth Engagement; Co-Founder, CYSD)

- **Mr. Rama Kamaraju** (Head of Voluntary Action Cell, NITI Aayog)

- **Dr. Vivek Kumar** (Professor at Indian Institute of Technology; Delhi National Coordinator, Unnat Bharat Abhiyan)

- **Ms. Shailja Mehta** (Director, Dasra)

- **Dr. Rajesh Tandon** (Founder-President, PRIA)

- **Mr. Ram Pappu** (Programme Director, Mission Samriddhi)

- **Mr. Arun Jain** (Founder, Polaris Foundation; Chairperson and Managing Director Intellect Design Area)

Breakout rooms facilitated by the School of Design Thinking Team

- **Mr. Ram Pappu** (Programme Director, Mission Samriddhi)

- **Mr. Arun Jain** (Founder, Polaris Foundation; Chairperson and Managing Director, Intellect Design Area)

- **Mr. Anbu Rathinavel** (Head, School of Design Thinking)

- **Mr. Ramakrishnan V** (Design Thinking Coach and Mentor, School of Design Thinking)

- **Mr. Jagadananda** (Coordinator, NITI Aayog Sub-Committee on Youth Engagement; Co-Founder, CYSD)



57

participants in total, including representation from government ministries, international organisations, donor organisations and foundations, civil society organisations, and national youth networks

Participant List ●●●●●

GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES/AGENCIES/ ALIGNED BODIES

- Ministry of Health and Family Welfare
- Ministry of Human Resource Development
- Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports
- Rajiv Gandhi National Institute of Youth Development
- Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan
- National Service Scheme
- Bharat Scouts and Guides
- Indian Red Cross Society

INTERNATIONAL NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS

- United Nations Development Programme
- United Nations Children's Fund
- World Health Organization

DONORS/FOUNDATIONS

- Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
- Children's Investment Fund Foundation
- David and Lucile Packard Foundation

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

- Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA)
- Child in Need Institute (CINI)
- Anubhuti Trust
- Quest Alliance
- Milaan Foundation
- Pravah
- Praxis
- REAP Benefit
- Dasra Adolescents Collaborative
- Yuva
- EngenderHealth
- Hidden Pockets
- Purpose
- J&K Yateem Trust
- Connecting Dreams Foundation
- Swami Vivekanand Youth Movement
- Mission Samriddhi
- Centre For Youth & Social Development
- Gandhi Fellowship
- Youth For Seva
- National Youth Project



Using Design Thinking as an Approach to Co-create Strategies for Youth Engagement

The concept of design thinking aligns multiple variables to solve a problem with the most practical approach. In the case of youth engagement, there are multiple stakeholders such as CSOs, government bodies and funders coming together to invest in sectors such as health, education and skilling. This concept can help reach a feasible outcome for youth engagement, which avoids duplication of resources and effort, and reduces complexity.

The cartographic view shared in the workshop highlighted the current reality of many stakeholders carrying out disjointed initiatives to facilitate and enable greater youth engagement. Aligning these stakeholders would allow them to leverage their resources and multiply their impact, leading to greater opportunities to replicate successful models, rather than duplicate effort.

Youth voices are not often heard on a sustained basis at all stages of design and implementation. Young people, especially the marginalized, have fewer opportunities and structures for engagement. This workshop series hopes to solve for that, by providing a 360° approach to youth engagement where voices of young people are heard via conversations with youth-serving organisations, funders and government agencies.



Summary of Insights from Workshop #1

The first design thinking workshop in the series was organised with the aim of convening key stakeholders, setting the agenda for the series and kicking off what is hoped to be a long-term engagement between the participants

Process: In the first workshop, participants were divided into four breakout rooms to be able to discuss at length the needs and challenges of the youth in a heterogeneous manner. The sessions were designed to understand aspirations of youth, key insights from participants basis their experience in enabling greater youth engagement and learnings they would like to take back with them from this workshop. The groups discussed the varied concerns of four categories of youth - urban youth, rural youth, youth in tier 2 and 3 cities and youth belonging to tribal communities. This was an initial segmentation to get the group's thinking started, and in no way a comprehensive representation of all youth groups in India. These categories will be further considered going forward

The detailed notes from the session are available [here](#). This section summarised some of the top-level insights collated from the group on the topic of designing more efficient models of youth engagement and participation.

Key priority actions which should be kept in mind when designing effective models for youth engagement and participation:

- A key first step in engaging with youth is to recognise their heterogeneity as a population as well as the intersectionality which influences their lived experiences and vulnerability. Accordingly, agencies should stay away from blanket solutions.
- There is great power in collective action, and the vast mandate of youth engagement and participation in the country required all key actors to come together
- It is important to identify, understand and analyze critical interventions and fast-track their replication instead of following the traditional approach of studying/ building a model for 5 years and then scaling it as required.
- To address what youth really want and need, programmes need to be flexible by serving them in places where they feel comfortable – not necessarily only in communities or schools.
- It is crucial for young people to have role models from their communities. This helps their aspirations seem less impossible.
- It is important to give young people a platform in their own community where their engagement and participation can begin.
- Many agencies have tried to engage youth through social media platforms – it is important for interventions to meet youth where at platforms where the youth already is, and currently a large number of them are on social media platforms.

- The information shared with youth is often jargonized and cannot be understood easily. This may prevent the youth from participating fully as they may doubt their knowledge and understanding of social issues. It is essential to use appropriate use of language and design to make youth feel comfortable and engaged.
- Skill development and creation of job opportunities should be looked at as an imperative tool to enable young people to become employable and self-reliant. When discussing youth skill building, youth from marginalized and underrepresented sections of society, including tribal youth, must be considered, as the nature of challenges they face are compounded by a variety of other external factors. Opportunities for employment also need to be created outside cities, especially considering migration that has happened during COVID.

A key aspect to help ensure greater youth engagement and participation at a larger scale is to ensure youth are at the centre of decision-making processes.

Conversations throughout the workshop emphasized on the need to allow youth to directly input on youth-focused policies, as both research and practitioner experience has shown that policies which are relevant and representative of young people's lived realities and needs are more successful. Participants shared the following insights:

- When provided with the right platforms, resources, and an ecosystem that encourages engagement young people can help identify and bring to light challenges that directly impact them
- When young people are seen as equals and active participants in planning their own development, policies directed at them are more effective
- Youth need deliberate investments in equipping them with skills and resources to be able to effectively engage, including services like mentorship, leadership training etc.
- Channels for participation and safe spaces for their engagement is a key way to make the aspiration of an active youth population a reality

Some key challenges in youth engagement and participation brought on by COVID-19 are listed below

It was noted, that while discussing any kind of youth engagement and participation, it is essential to acknowledge the challenges that young people are facing in current times

- **EDUCATION:** Owing to the pandemic, several young people have been left out of school. This has given rise to concerns over what this break in their education will mean for their future. This has led to an increasing rate of school dropouts, lowering school retention. Lack of peer engagement, too, have had an impact on learning opportunities, physical activity, and mental health.
- **EMPLOYMENT:** A sudden loss of employment and source of livelihood has left them with meagre or no earnings
- **MIGRATION:** With the numerous nation-wide lockdowns, several young people were left stranded, with no option of returning to their native villages or homes. In many cases this issue was compounded by problems such as the loss of employment, inability to pay for housing etc.
- **ACCESS TO RATIONS:** The loss of employment and shelter led to many youth with little or no access to food and rations, directly impacting their health.
- **SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH:** The nationwide lockdown severely impacted young people's access to sexual and reproductive health products, resulting in many resorting to unsafe and unsanitary methods.
- **MENTAL HEALTH:** Uncertainty about the future, coupled with economic and educational instability, has led to increasing rates of anxiety and depression among young people, which is further aggravated by a lack of availability and access to quality mental health and wellbeing services.
- **CHILD MARRIAGE/SAFETY:** Stay-at-home orders and quarantine measures have increased the exposure of women and girls to sexual, physical, psychological and emotional violence from family members and intimate partners. At the same time, the closure of schools leaves young people vulnerable to early marriage and trafficking.



Way Forward



The intended outcomes from the workshop series are to:

1 Create a compendium of best practices to enable greater youth engagement - leveraging the experience of government and CSO stakeholders.

2 Develop an assessment framework to assess youth engagement and participation across all key stakeholders – CSOs, Funders and Government

Through this first workshop, some common learnings and insights came up on the importance of carving out a way forward for the group as practitioners and government officials, while ensuring a stringent lens of viewing the youth as equal partners and not beneficiaries; and acknowledging that they know their needs and demands best.

This point was further emphasized on by others within the group, acknowledging that youth are a heterogeneous group with different needs and aspirations and therefore there is a need to ensure that young people themselves are involved in and are leading the process of solutions being designed for them.

It is extremely crucial to ensure that solutions for youth engagement are sustainable so that engagement is meaningful for young people as well. To this end, we look forward to convening as a group through this series of workshops, to continue this effort towards charting out sustainable and effective youth engagement and development solutions.

Over the next few months, this group will be meeting in a series of workshops where there will also be an effort to include youth representatives to take these discussions forward.

Annexures

Annexure I

ORGANISING TEAM

This workshop was organised by Shri Jagadananda, Coordinator, NITI Aayog Sub-Committee on Youth Engagement, and Co-Founder, Centre for Youth and Social Development, and Shri Arun Jain, Member, Sub-Committee on Youth Engagement.

The design thinking support was provided by the School of Design Thinking and the 10to19: Dasra Adolescents Collaborative provided support on youth-facing multi-stakeholder participation and engagement.

Annexure II

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

ORGANISATION	PARTICIPANT
GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES/AGENCIES/ALIGNED BODIES	
Ministry of Health & Family Welfare	Dr. Zoya Ali Rizvi -Deputy Commissioner (Adolescent Health)
	Ms. Rupali Roy -Elderly Care Department
	Dr. (Flt Lt) M.A. Balasubramanya - Advisor
	Ms. Amita Chauhan -Senior Consultant
	Ms. Bhanu Priya Sharma -Senior Consultant
Ministry of Education	Ms. Agrima Raina -Consultant
	Professor Vivek Kumar -Professor (IIT)
	Dr. Divya Khatter -Post Doc Researcher
Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports	Dr. Madan Kumar -Post Doc Researcher
	Mr Dipak Kumar
Rajiv Gandhi National Institute for Youth Development	Dr. Vasanthi Rajendran -Professor
Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan	Mr. Nabin Kumar Naik -Regional Director
National Service Scheme	Mr. Samuel Chelliah – Regional Director
Bharat Scouts and Guides	Ms. Amar B Chettri -Jt. Director of Scouts
Indian Red Cross Society	Mr. Bindu Aggarwal -National Society Project Manager
INTERNATIONAL NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS	
UNICEF (United Nations Children’s Fund)	Ms.
UNDP (United Nations Development Programme)	Mr. Anandmayee Singh -Youth Engagement Lead
WHO (World Health Organisation)	Ms. Sneha Pathak -Youth Engagement Lead
	Ms. Bhavya Durgesh Nandini -PMNCH
FUNDER ORGANIZATIONS	
Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation	Ms. Medha Gandhi -Country Lead -Family Planning Policy
Children’s Investment Fund Foundation	Ms. Nikita Srivastav -Manager, SEC, Rajasthan Focus
	Mr. Sahil Chopra
The David and Lucile Packard Foundation	Mr. Sahil Tandon

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS	
PRIA	Dr. Rajesh Tandon - Founder & President
Child in Need Institute (CINI)	Mr. Santwana Adhikari - Program Manager, Adolescents Resource Centre
	Ms. Indrani Bhattacharyya - CEO
Anubhuti Trust	Ms. Deepa Pawar - Founder
	Ms. Amrita De - Fundraising In-charge
	Ms. Anu Salelkar - Trustee
Quest Alliance	Ms. Tanvi Rastogi - Senior Program Officer
	Mr. Sushant Pathak - Program Manager
Milaan Foundation	Ms. Tina Kapoor - Associate Director
Pravah	Ms. Neha Buch - Director
Praxis	Ms. Anusha Chandrasekharan - Senior Program Manager
REAP Benefit	Mr. Gautam Prakash - Co-founder
J&K Yateem Trust	Mr. Ghulam Mustafa - Founder
10to19: Dasra Adolescents Collaborative	Ms. Shailja Mehta - Director
Yuvaa	Ms. Shruti Jani - Editorial Associate
EngenderHealth	Dr. Ajay Khara - Country Representative
	Dr. Priyanka Kochar - Senior Program Manager
Hidden Pockets	Ms. Aisha George
Purpose	Ms. Gurpriya Singh - Campaigner
	Ms. Harpreet Bagga - Senior Director
Connecting Dreams Foundation	Ms. Sheetal Shetty - Associate Director, Youth Engagement
	Dr. Simi Mishra - Director, Program Advocacy & Communication
Swami Vivekanand Youth Movement	Mr. Kumar GS - CEO
	Mr. Ramesh Venkataraman - Head, Leadership Institute
Centre For Youth & Social Development	Ms. Swati Das
	Ms. Niladri Sahoo
	Mr. Prafulla Kumar Sahoo
Gandhi Fellowship	Ms. Neelima Pandey - Core Team Member, Gandhi Fellowship
Youth For Seva	Mr. Sateesh Metri - District Coordinator
National Youth Project	Mr. Madhusudan Das
Individuals	Ms. Prathibha
	Mr. Prabhat Kumar
	Mr. Prakash Vaidya
	Ms. Hema Narayanan
	Dr. Shikha Anand

Annexure III

Presentation on the Design Thinking Process (Shared by Mr. Arun Jain during the workshop)