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

India's youth present a huge potential towards contributing to the sustainable development of the country. Therefore, it is essential for the voices of young people to be incorporated and amplified when programmes are being designed for them.

The NITI Aayog Sub-Committee on Youth Engagement is empowered 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. To do this, the Sub-Committee is convening a series of collaborative workshops on the topic of youth engagement and participation using the design thinking approach.
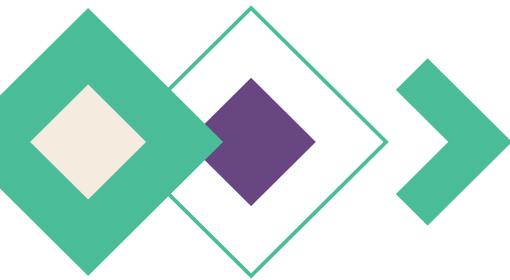
The Sub-Committee recognises that for youth-focussed solutions to be effective, youth themselves must be engaged in programme design, implementation and evaluation. Further, there must be convergence across different interventions by various stakeholders – both government and non-government. In an effort to meaningfully involve young people in this process, 30 youth interviews were conducted covering 18 different archetypes that were identified across various zones from urban to rural to tribal along with an online survey with approximately 2000 young people.

The first workshop in this series, held on 21st September 2021, was set up with the aim of convening key stakeholders and kicking off a long-term engagement with participants on youth engagement. The group was able to discuss and share their perspective on the various needs and challenges faced by young people, keeping in mind the implications of the heterogeneity of the population. The second workshop, held on 14th December 2021, was structured to carry forward the discussion on youth engagement and arrive at an initial set of possible solutions and methods towards engaging youth meaningfully.
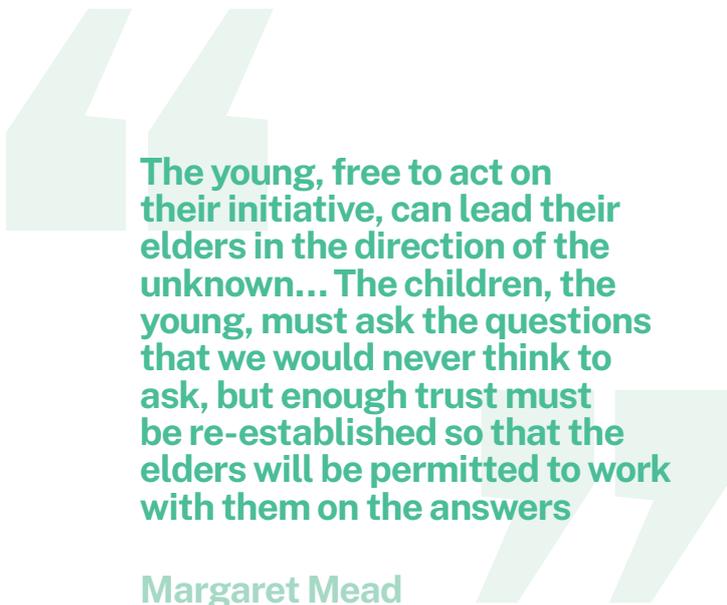
This report intends to capture the insights shared by participants from the second in this series of workshops, which was an attempt to continue the effort of identifying and leveraging the best practices and experiences of different stakeholders by landscaping and streamlining various youth engagement initiatives being undertaken.

This report will help provide an overview of the second workshop hosted on 14th December, 2021 - its objectives, purpose, approach, insights shared by participants on key priority areas of action and possible potential solutions, and next steps from this engagement.

Following the second workshop, participants were also encouraged to carry out bilateral conversations in an effort to have greater convergence across the sector. At the end of this 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

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The young, free to act on their initiative, can lead their elders in the direction of the unknown… The children, the young, must ask the questions that we would never think to ask, but enough trust must be re-established so that the elders will be permitted to work with them on the answers

Margaret Mead
"

With a population of close to 600 million young people, over half of India's population is below the age of 25 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.

Owing to the limited formal structures and civil society coordination to support them, India's youth continue to grapple with access to quality education, health, livelihoods and safety. This implies that more than half of the population is in need of these basic resources.

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, government agencies and funders to develop a nuanced and shared understanding of youth engagement and participation in India and chart the way forward.

Mandate of the NITI Aayog Sub Committee on Youth Engagement

The NITI Aayog set up the Sub-Committee on Youth Engagement under the NITI CSO Standing Committee of Civil Society Organisations and Other Development Partners 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:
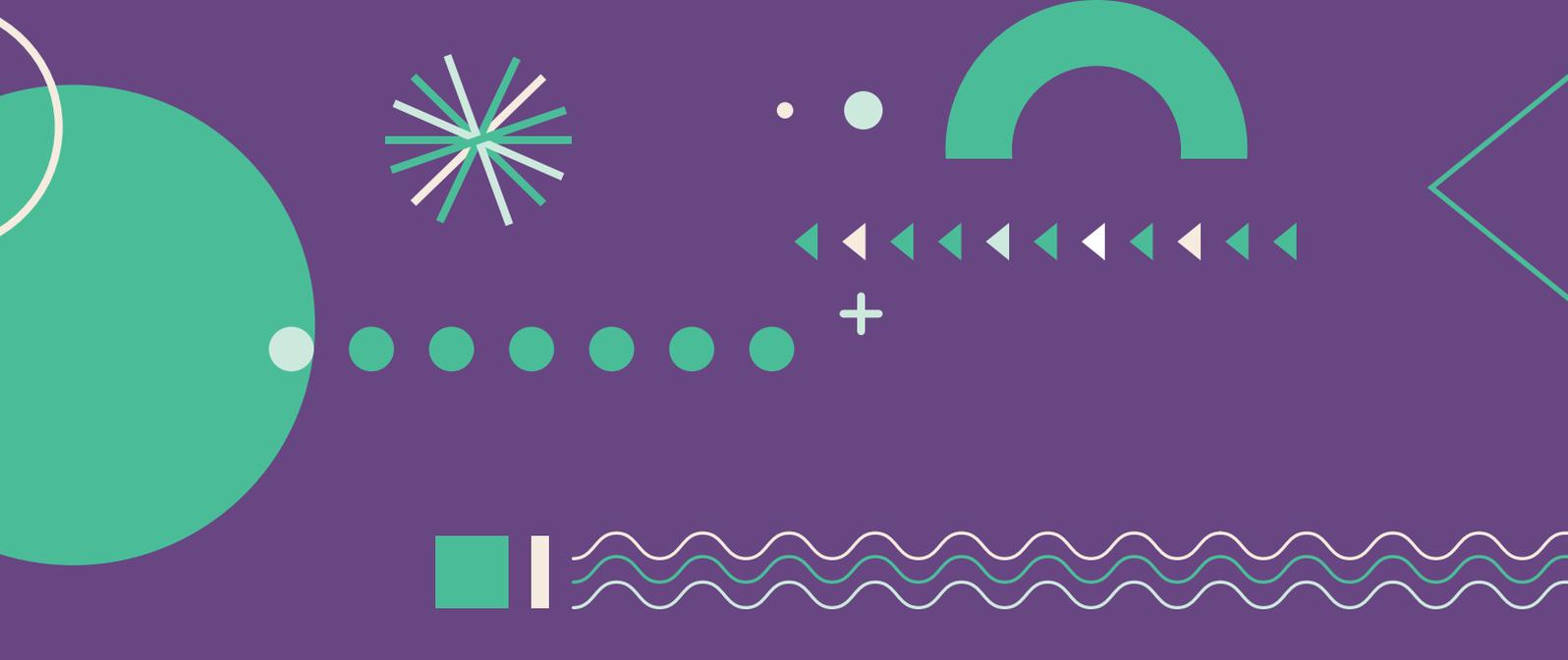
- Suggest improvements in programs, plans and policies of the government

- 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

Recap of the First Workshop

The first session in this series of workshops brought together several key stakeholders in the sector and posed an opportunity to hear from some of the largest and most influential youth programmes and networks. The discussion highlighted the need to ensure that the youth are engaged as people who are aware of their needs and are viewed as equal partners rather than just beneficiaries of programmes. Hearing from a diverse range of stakeholders like civil society organizations, funders, youth networks,and government bodies contributed to a very enriching conversation on youth engagement and the way forward. The first workshop served as a great starting point to initiate a dialogue on youth engagement and participation which ultimately supported in the creation of a mapped view of existing interventions aimed at young people. Please find the report on the first session *here.*

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.

Agenda and Flow of the Second Workshop

CONDUCTED ON 14TH DECEMBER 2021

AGENDA

Introduction and Context Setting

Key Findings of Youth Engagement Survey and Interviews

Levers of Potential Change

Principles of Youth Engagement

Discussion on six idea frames–

- Rural Economic Zone
- District Opportunity Center
- Technology Platform
- Engagement with School and College Youth Networks
- Youth Entrepreneurship
- Youth Engagement in Governance

Next Steps and Closing

FACILITATOR

- **Mr. Jagadananda** (Coordinator, NITI Aayog Sub-Committee on Youth Engagement; Co-Founder, Centre for Youth Social Development)

- **Mr. Arun Jain** (Founder, Polaris Foundation; Chairperson and Managing Director, Intellect Design)
- **Mr. Ram Pappu** (Programme Director, Mission Samriddhi)
- **Mr. Anbu Rathinavel** (Head, School of Design Thinking)

- **Dr. Rajesh Tandon** (Founder-President, Participatory Research in Asia)

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. Ramakrishnan V** (Design Thinking Coach and Mentor, School of Design Thinking)
- **Mr. Anbu Rathinavel** (Head, School of Design Thinking)
- **Mr. Jagadananda** (Coordinator, NITI Aayog Sub-Committee on Youth Engagement; Co-Founder, Centre for Youth and Social Development)
- **Mr. Anand Mohan** (Program Manager, Education, Mission Samriddhi)

- **Mr. Jagadananda** (Coordinator, NITI Aayog Sub-Committee on Youth Engagement; Co-Founder, Centre for Youth Social Development)

Participant List

GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES/ AGENCIES/ALIGNED BODIES

- Ministry of Health and Family Welfare
- Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan
- National Service Scheme
- University Grants Commission

INTERNATIONAL NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS

- United Nations Development Programme
- United Nations Children's Fund
- United Nations Population Fund

DONORS/FOUNDATIONS

- David and Lucile Packard Foundation

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

- Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA)
- Child in Need Institute (CINI)
- Pravah
- Commutiny – the Youth Collective
- Praxis
- Dasra Adolescents Collaborative
- Yuvaa
- EngenderHealth
- Hidden Pockets
- Love Matters India
- Purpose
- J&K Yateem Trust
- Mission Samriddhi
- Centre For Youth & Social Development
- Piramal Foundation
- The YP Foundation
- Milaan Foundation
- Anubhuti Trust
- Swami Vivekananda Youth Movement
- Connecting Dreams Foundation
- Nagrik Foundation

Summary of Insights from Workshop #2

The second design thinking workshop in the series was organised with the aim of convening key stakeholders to brainstorm and arrive at methods to bridge the gap between the needs of young people and the plethora of organizations and interventions that exist.

Pre-Workshop Data Collection

Online Youth Survey: A dipstick survey was conducted by the School of Design Thinking on youth engagement intended to better understand the needs and aspirations of young people. Approximately 2000 youth across India from urban to rural to tribal zones were reached through this online survey where young people highlighted the need and concerns around their voices not being heard by relevant stakeholders in the decisions taken on their future.

Insights from the Online Youth Survey: There was an emphasis on the need to bring about change in their social environment especially in the areas of education, health and nutrition, and water and sanitation. Although young people shared their aspirations to serve in positions of decision making and influence, it was seen that there was still a need for greater clarity and opportunity to achieve goals in line with their ambitions. Young people reported taking inspiration from role models such as their parents and peers but also shared the need for younger and more relatable role models to guide them and share more contextual support towards achieving their dreams and aspirations. Technological interventions have served to be a great way to engage with and build various skills for the youth, but it is critical to address the challenge of inclusivity and accessibility for all – which, if not tackled, can be a great polariser.

Interviews with Youth Representatives: The youth interviews were conducted with 18 different archetypes of young people who were nominated by CSO participants* from the workshop. These interviews were conducted to hear from young people their aspirations, the challenges they face in being heard by decision makers, and the platforms and solutions they would like to see to ensure their voices and perspectives are being incorporated within interventions targeted at them.

The following are the 18 archetypes identified:

Urban	East	West	North	South	Central	Northeast
Rural	East	West	North	South	Central	Northeast
Tribal	East	West	North	South	Central	Northeast

* The young people interviewed were nominated by the following CSOs-Save The Children, Gramin Samassya Mukti Trust,Restless Development India, Milaan Foundation, Satpuda Ekikirt Gramin Vikash Santha, Banwasi Seva Ashram, Seven Sisters Development Assistance, Banwasi Seva Ashram, Mission Samriddhi ,CINI, Anubhuti Trust, REAP Benefit

Insights from the Youth Interviews:

- It was reported that young people have the intention to bring about change and be involved in decision making for their future, but are often unable to reach the right stakeholders to share their opinions. More often than not, they are ignored when they attempt to voice their opinions.

- Young people aspire to achieve ambitious goals for themselves (such as joining the civil services or the police) but they require sustained support to reach these goals and have continued access to education, and opportunities for skill-building and employment.

- Financial constraints were also highlighted as a challenge that poses an obstacle for young people to follow their ambitions as many young people are forced to drop out of school or college, rendering them unable to pursue their goals.

Process of the Second Workshop:

In the second workshop, participants were divided into six breakout rooms to discuss at length the methods that can be used in selected areas of intervention that stemmed from the discussions from the first workshop and the insights from the youth interviews and the youth survey. The sessions were designed to encourage the participants to come up with various strategies that could be used to bridge the existing gaps with respect to youth engagement in the select focus areas. The groups were urged to share actionable, bold and sustainable solutions.

Key Areas of Intervention

This section captures some of the top-level insights shared by the group on designing more efficient models of youth engagement and participation. (The detailed notes from the session can be viewed *here*)

To help facilitate this discussion, six key areas of intervention were identified, with respective idea frames created for each.

1

IDEA FRAME: RURAL ECONOMIC ZONES

Providing awareness and access to available employment opportunities

A pivotal area of intervention that was highlighted during the discussions with young people and civil society organisations was the importance of providing youth with access to available employment opportunities especially in rural areas. To help build further on this point, the idea frame of Rural Economic Zones was brought up, through which sustained economic opportunities could be created in order to activate and bolster youth participation in the workforce:

- Youth – especially in rural areas – can be economically empowered by creating various hyperlocal opportunities at the community level, through which they can gain vocational training and serve the community.

- Interventions should be created with the support of the government and civil society organisations, with both stakeholders helping seek out and curate the opportunities available.

- Such an intervention should also ensure that young people have access to adequate information to help them voice their views, build agency and become economically empowered.

2

IDEA FRAME: DISTRICT OPPORTUNITY CENTRES

Creating safe spaces for youth engagement at a local level

Through conversations with young people, discussions in the first workshop and the youth survey, a clear area that came through was the need to create safe spaces for youth engagement at a local level. In order to discuss this concept, the idea frame of a District Opportunity Centre was put forward. This was discussed as a potential solution for providing young people access to support from civil society, government, and other stakeholders at a district level, to further expand their horizons and awareness of opportunities available to them. Below are some of the key points from the discussion:

- With the pandemic forcing many young people to socially isolate and lose human connection, safe spaces at the district level could serve as spaces where youth can be inspired, and gain knowledge on opportunities available for them for their professional and personal development.

- This concept of district centres can also serve as a space for young people to express their opinions freely, and gain perspective through new experiences. These centres can be designed and run by young people, with experts coming in to share guidance on the opportunities available and share best practices that can inspire young people.

- While designing such collective spaces, it is essential to keep in mind various group dynamics and to solve for this by ensuring that these centres are inclusive of all groups of young people. Partnering with civil society organisations that are experienced in tackling challenging scenarios can help mitigate such roadblocks.

3 Increased access to information and resources for engaging youth and potential upskilling

The need for increased and easier access to information was seen as a critical area of intervention where a Technology Platform was discussed as an idea frame that could be leveraged to help young people gain information on various existing programmes, policies, and opportunities to fulfil their goals.

- It was discussed that young people feel comfortable expressing their views using online platforms, and therefore technological interventions have been a great way to ensure greater skill building among young people. It was also discussed that leveraging existing platforms (such as WhatsApp, IVRS etc.) has been more effective in reaching out to the target audience, rather than building new platforms.

- Technology can also be a polariser in terms of accessibility and affordability. It is important to understand and address the digital barriers faced, especially by girls and young women.

- While access to technology is enabled, it is crucial to have measures to ensure digital literacy, privacy, and verification of information. Therefore, it is essential to find ways to ensure that young people who do not have access to such technology are also included.

- It was discussed that the Government of India currently has many initiatives that provide blended technical learning. New modules around digital ethics, cyber security and digital fraud have also been curated. It is important now to ensure awareness & sensitisation of the same is created amongst youth through workshops, e-modules are essential. Ensuring mainstreaming of modules such as this at the school and college level is important.

4 Reaching out to and engaging with existing youth networks

The idea frame of engagement with school and college youth networks represents the need to identify and leverage platforms and areas where young people are already engaged. Spaces such as youth clubs at the school and college level, where young people are already actively involved in issues they are interested in, was discussed a potential channel to understand their needs first-hand. Following are the solutions that emerged:

- Young people often struggle with getting their voices heard and therefore the group discussed the need to leverage existing platforms where young people already engage with one another.

- While encouraging young people to participate, it is imperative to identify the different roles and degrees of involvement young people would like to take up, to ensure all young people are participating based on their capabilities and level of comfort.

- These platforms should also focus on building capacities of young people, including building 21st century skills. Providing such opportunities also helps incentivise and add value to young people's lives.

- Another point mentioned was focusing on the sustainability of such platforms, to ensure that engagement is consistent, non-tokenistic and in alignment with young people's needs and realities. Stakeholders working directly with young people would be pivotal in successfully executing this by managing and setting expectations among both young people and the actors who would be leveraging these platforms.

5 Recognising the potential of youth and promoting their entrepreneurial abilities
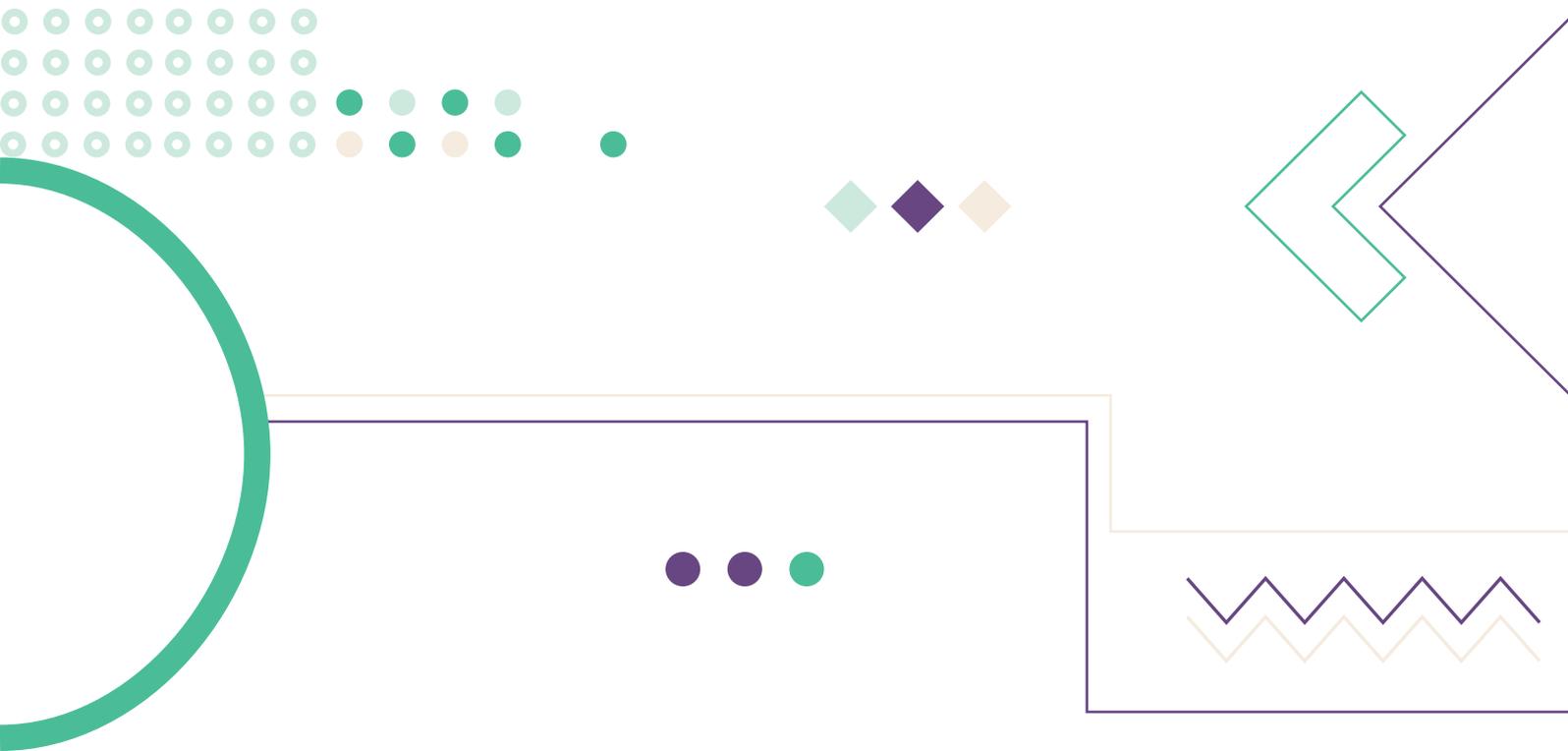
The idea frame of Youth Entrepreneurship is based on the need to recognise the potential of youth and create opportunities of entrepreneurship for them. The discussion highlighted how sharing knowledge and creating awareness on the concept of entrepreneurship is an area of intervention that can provide the much-needed exposure to upskill and inspire young people push their goals. Following are the key points of discussion:

- It is essential to create access to knowledge on the concept and ecosystem of entrepreneurship for young people. The documentation and presentation of success stories and best practices can serve as a means to motivate and inspire young people to venture into the ecosystem of entrepreneurship.

- It is seen that young people seek to gain monetary benefit, training and mentorship, and the various avenues of entrepreneurship can help them reach these goals.

- It was discussed that young people have demonstrated the need to engage with social interventions to serve their communities. Opportunities that will lead to adopting the entrepreneurial mindset can help them cater to this need whilst building their skills and gaining access to opportunities.

Incorporating the voices of young people in important decisions that impact them

6 Existing governance structures currently lack representation of diverse youth voices and therefore do not account for their perspectives on issues that concern them. Amplifying the voices of young people in decision making was highlighted as an area of intervention and how it is essential to create opportunities for greater participation of young people in platforms of decision making. Following were the key points of discussion:

- In order to strengthen the voices of young people and encourage youth participation, leveraging existing platforms through which young people can participate in local governance was discussed to a potential solution. For example, village-level Child Protection Committees, School Management Committees etc.

- To enable meaningful participation, it is key to build their capacity by creating better access to information on voting rights, policy curricula and building constitutional literacy amongst young voters. This can allow increased involvement and engagement of young people in policy making and governance.

Way Forward and Next Steps

During this workshop, the group largely discussed the six key areas of focus and the modalities through which these could be actioned. Many poignant learnings and insights came upon the importance of ensuring that the voices of the most vulnerable and inaccessible groups are accounted for.

Summary of key insights to inform the way ahead for the workshop series:

- A key first step in engaging with youth is to leverage the numerous existing systems and programmes. There need to be ways to bolster these systems to ensure effective and efficient usage of resources and to ensure there is no duplication of efforts.

- To effectively engage youth, it is essential to ensure they have enough access to information on the potential areas of opportunity and the existing systems & programmes to inspire them to and for them to be able to work towards their future aspirations.

- it is imperative to build capacities for young people to be able to achieve the various goals and milestones they set for themselves, as they gain exposure to a relatively newer set of possibilities.

- It is important to make sure that the efforts made towards engaging with young people are not universally applied, and consider the various contexts and backgrounds of the young people engaged.

- Efforts must be made across all focus areas to keep an additional lens to include sections of the most vulnerable young people and those from the underrepresented sections of society.
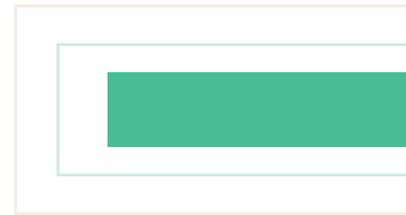
It was also highlighted that it is crucial to be accountable to a set of values and to align on the key principles driving all forms of youth engagement and participation. To this end, the values listed include -

1. **Inclusivity**
2. **Co-creation**
3. **Ecosystem Approach** (leveraging existing resources rather than working in silos)
4. **Capacity building**
5. **Sustainability**
6. **Communicating stories of change**
7. **Using technology to unite not divide**

Over the next few months, the NITI Aayog Sub-Committee on Youth Engagement will be reaching out to participants to help collate a compendium of good practices used by different stakeholders to enable youth engagement and participation. The audience of such documentation will be NITI Aayog, relevant Central Ministries and all CSO participants of the workshops.

The participants were encouraged to carry out bilateral and multilateral conversations on specific topics to continue the momentum of the workshops.

The third and final workshop will be conducted in the first quarter of 2022.

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)
	Mitakshi – Consultant
	Dr. (Flt Lt) M.A. Balasubramanya – Advisor
	Gursimran Wadhawan – Consultant
	Agrima Raina – Consultant
	Deepak Kumar – Consultant
Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan	**Prabhat Kumar** – Joint Director
University Grants Commission	**Diksha Rajput** – Deputy Secretary
National Service Scheme	**Dr. Kamal Kumar Kar** – Assistant Programme Advisor
INTERNATIONAL NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS	
UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund)	**Anandmayee Singh** – Youth Engagement Lead
	Manasa Priya Vasudevan – Adolescent & Youth Development Specialist
UNDP (United Nations Development Programme)	**Sneha Pathak** – Youth Engagement Lead
UNFPA	**Dr. Nilesh Deshpande** – State Programme Coordinator
	Ankita Singh – Programme Analyst
FUNDER ORGANISATIONS	
The David and Lucile Packard Foundation	**Jyoti Kumari** – Programme Associate

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS	
PRIA	Dr. Rajesh Tandon – Founder & President
Pravah	Neha Buch – Director
	Ritika Khunnah – Chief Executive Officer
ComMutiny - The Youth Collective	Kanika Sinha – Convener
Child in Need Institute	Indrani Bhattacharyya – CEO
Hidden Pockets Collective	Aisha George – Executive Coordinator
Purpose	Gurpriya Singh – Campaigner
	Harpreet Bagga – Senior Director
EngenderHealth	Dr. Priyanka Kochar – Manager, Programme
Love Matters India	Jahnvi Sharma – Project Manager
J&K Yateem Trust	Shoukat Ali – Section Officer
Yuvaa	Sharan Ahluwalia – Campaigns Lead
Praxis Institute of Participatory Research	Sowmyaa Bharadwaj – Director
Piramal Foundation	Sweetlana Ranjan – Programme Director
	Salman Uddin Khan – Programme Director
The YP Foundation	Manak Matiyani – CEO
	Oindrila Das – Coordinator
Polaris Foundation, Intellect Design	Arun Jain – Founder, Chairperson; Managing Director
CYSD	Jagadanada – Co-Founder
	Swati Das – Senior Programme Associate
School of Design Thinking	Sateesh Metri – District Coordinator
	Anbu Rathinavel – Head
	Ramkrishnan V – Design Thinking Coach & Mentor
Mission Samridhi	Ram Pappu – Project Director
	Sharmishta K
	Pallavi Saini – Programme Manager
10to19: Dasra Adolescents Collaborative	Suveera Venkatesh – Analyst
	Vedika Gupta – Analyst
	Aditi Gupta – Analyst
	Ada Grewal – Associate
	Nandika Kumari – Manager
Individuals	Anuradha Vemuri
	Mandira Kalaan
	Ramnath Prabhu
	Philip Matthew
	Ramakrishna R
	Sridhar Santhanam

Annexure III