

## **Empowering youths for future Challenges**

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### **Background**

Youths are back bone of a society. They play a vital role in the development of a nation. It is very important to direct the youth work towards sustainable resilient communities which will lead to a sustainable development of a country. (UNDP 2012). Youths play a vital role in the development.

### **Definition of youth**

It varies from organization to organization and country to country. It is really a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to independence of adulthood. The transition is influenced by so many factors.

<b>Entity/Instrument/ Organization</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Reference</b>
UN Secretariat/UNESCO/ILO	Youth: 15-24	UN Instruments, Statistics
UN Habitat (Youth Fund)	Youth 15-32	Agenda 21
UNICEF/WHO/UNFPA	Adolescent: 10-19, Young People: 10-24, Youth: 15-24	UNFPA
UNICEF /The Convention on Rights of the Child	Child until 18	UNICEF
The African Youth Charter	Youth: 15-35	African Union, 2006

Source: (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) 2014)

“Youth” is more of a social age than a developmental period. Youth is often referred to as a person between the ages of leaving compulsory education, and finding their first job. The United Nations, for statistical purposes, defines ‘youth’, as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years.(UNESCO 2017). This social phase might be longer or shorter depending on the context. Adolescence is a time of identity formation. (WHO 2011). It is the time when most people become sexually active, and take on more responsibilities.

### **Youth vulnerability**

Young people develop their bodies and their psychosocial engagement with the world through attending and exiting education, going to work, and beginning families of their own. The flux and change in this period certainly increases young people’s susceptibility to all kinds of risks.

There are number of interconnected contextual influences that affect youth vulnerabilities. Among the most important are impoverishment, inequality, and social exclusion. Young people see their choices

are limited by factors such as economic insecurity, technological change, political uprisings, conflict and climate change. (Arora et al. 2015)

'Vulnerability' denotes susceptibility to adversities of one form or another. (Berzin 2010).

Susceptibility to adversity is heightened during this critical period in the human life cycle. These transitions can be very difficult, and the deficits, deprivations and other risks experienced during youth. This can have debilitating emotional, political, economic and social consequences for those concerned, and their families and communities

Second, when young people fail to realize their full potential, this undermines their future capabilities as adults, thereby weakening whole communities and economies.

In the many low- and middle-income countries with exceptionally youthful populations, this results in a substantial loss of national developmental momentum. Youth should comprise a demographic dividend to society. (URDAL 2006). Ensuring their well-being, self-determination, productivity and citizenship is the best way to reap this dividend.

Third, the world has undergone significant changes in the life course of this generation of young people.

Young people everywhere are negotiating the implications of following things; economic transition, climate change, the depletion of natural resources, the rapid advance of communication and information technologies, and new forms of surveillance and control.

Though all age groups and generations are affected by these trends, young people experience some of the most profound hardships.

The 2007 World Development Report summarizes five major areas of life in which young people make significant choices on the path to adulthood: continuing to learn, starting to work, developing a healthful lifestyle, beginning a family and exercising citizenship. (WORLD BANK 2006).

The choices made in these different arenas can enable young people to realize their full potential in adulthood as citizens, household heads, workers, entrepreneurs, and leaders.

Therefore, constrained or ill-advised choices can have significant adverse implications for their human capital and future capabilities.

There are commonalities also in the challenges and hardships young people encounter globally.

Young people living in poverty in high-income countries experience very similar risks to those encountered by young people in low- and middle-income countries. (Masten 2014)

### **Common assumptions about youths**

Discourse and assumptions about youth are often based on stereotypes rather than evidence. Much media, academic and policy attention are given to youth internationally. Focus is commonly on young people who face extreme risk and deprivation such as living on the street, trafficked into hazardous work, exposed to armed conflict and forced migration. Regardless of circumstances, young people are repeatedly classified as either 'having problems' or posing 'a problem' for others. Long time, research in the United Kingdom and the United States conceptualized young people as deficient and in need of education, delinquent and in need of control, or dysfunctional and in need of therapy. (Griffin 1993). 'Having problems' tends to be associated with young people doing things that make them vulnerable to adverse outcomes through risk-taking and 'risky' behaviours, such as smoking, consuming drugs and alcohol, or engaging in unprotected sex.

Posing 'a problem' for others commonly involve their construction as vandals, vigilantes, delinquents or hoodlums, or, in other words, as simultaneously at risk and causing risk for society more broadly. (Kelly 2000).

## **Human development and wellbeing**

Human developmental domains interact each other, so that functioning in one influences functioning in others. Neurological or biological shocks can affect social, emotional and cognitive functioning, as well as physical growth and development. Youth vulnerabilities can thus manifest in numerous ways.

It includes; impaired physical growth, low levels of self-efficacy and well-being, irregularities in behavior, reduced capabilities for employment, interpersonal relationships and community membership and citizenship.

### **Causes for youth vulnerability**

Young people at this age are close to a lifelong peak of physical health, strength, and mental capacity

Rates of death by injury between ages 15 to 19 are about six times that of the rate between ages 10 and 14. Crime rates are highest among young males and rates of alcohol abuse are high relative to other ages. Even though most of the adolescents come through this transitional age it's important to understand the risk factors for behavior that can have serious consequences. Genes, childhood experience, and the environment in which a young person reaches adolescence all contribute to shape behavior. Malnutrition early in life has effects that persist into adolescence and beyond. Young people who had low height at age 8 also typically reported lower self-efficacy, self-esteem and aspirations. These effects matter in for young people's well-being, but they are also likely to influence access to later employment outcomes.

### **Reducing vulnerabilities as a route to capitalizing on the demographic dividend**

Change of age structure of Sri Lanka has taken place rapidly. Demographic dividend for Sri Lanka is from 1991 to 2017. (De Silva 2015) Sri Lanka failed to utilize the most part of the benefits of the demographic dividends.

In this context, it is essential to get right foundation to enjoy the benefits. There must be a good enabling environment to create the right foundation. Education is a key to achieve the foundation. Improving the quality of education is indispensable to ensure that the youths understand the relevance of education for their life and societal development.

Second important aspect is providing jobs and livelihoods. This is only possible by improving the capacity of the youths to meet the needs of global job market. Third key activity is that enrich the health and well-being of youths. Health care system should ensure the coverage and access of all kinds of health services for youths. Fourth important activity is converting social services as youth friendly one. It should be able to address the issues related to gender inequalities. It is crucial to introduce innovative youth programme to cater the existing needs. Finally, youths should be allowed to access the relevant information which is essential to develop them as a responsible citizen for the development of the community and nation.

### **Role of the Jaffna Science Association (JSA)**

JSA as an academic body, it is very important to expand its activities to work with youths and relevant stakeholders. It should improve membership by encouraging schools and graduate

students. Further expansion of network with the professional associations will create a common working platform and more interactions.

JSA should be able to deliver the scholar services to develop new evidences. These evidences should be applied as foundation for the policy developments. Interaction with state policy makers at various levels and work cordially with them will create a work environment to achieve the desired goals.

The organization needs to undergo transformation which is required to serve the community. Success depends on how the JSA is mobilizing the resources towards the process of transformation. I hope this is possible with your generous support. It is a challengeable task but achievable with your support.

**“You have to dream before your dreams can come true” - Dr. A. P. J. Abul Kalam**

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