

LSE talk with UNDP Pakistan
28 April 2016
TW1, 6:30-7:30pm



1. Topic

Youth bulge or bomb? Harnessing the potential of Pakistani youth

2. Purpose of the talk

Is youth engagement the key to improving human development and peace in Pakistan? The talk will explore the challenges and opportunities presented by Pakistan's youth bulge with specific focus on the role of youth engagement as a strategy to promote human development and peace. The talk can address the following themes; youth engagement as a strategy to engage young people actively within their community and nationally; increase tolerance; and to prevent conflict.

3. Background

With almost 64% of Pakistan's population below the age of 29 and 31% between 15-29 years of age, the country is posed with a significant opportunity to invest in its energetic and talented young population to bring prosperity to the national economy as they form the biggest workforce in history; and to society if conditions are set to improve their social capital.

However, Pakistan's demographic dividend will not last forever. There are also great risks inherent in a large youth population. If denied the opportunities to participate in their community or nation, attain quality education and earn a living; young people are at risk of becoming marginalized within their communities; unable to effectively contribute towards a prosperous economy and development of the country; creating spaces for intolerance due to limited exposure to individuals from diverse backgrounds; and vulnerable to joining violent groups in areas especially prone to conflict. This is why UNDP Pakistan has placed a strong emphasis on youth empowerment through the Pakistan National Human Development Report (NHDR) launching in 2016, which proposes that the youth are not a problem to be solved, but a potential to be realized if Pakistan makes an investment in young people's meaningful engagement, gainful employment and quality education.

Engaging the youth has been a low priority for the government and donor community. The NHDR has found that engagement in community life is low and almost 90% of young people do not have access to recreational facilities that includes sportsgrounds. However, we found that, 4 out of 5 young people voted in the previous election, while more than 60% of those surveyed intend to vote in the upcoming elections, despite the fact that only 24% of them trusted politicians. These results indicate that young people do indeed aspire to become active participants of the political process. Similarly, our National Consultations with youth across the country demonstrates that young people have a strong desire to engage in their communities but lack formal avenues to do so. To increase positive engagement of youth, UNDP Pakistan built community centres in Dera Ismail Khan in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province that is now used by more than 33,500 people as places for communities to gather, learn, engage with government representatives and participate in positive recreation such as sports and cultural activities.

Lack of engagement within communities also means that young people in Pakistan are not often exposed to individuals outside of their community. The NHDR finds a grave issue of intolerance, 75% of young people surveyed did not approve of non-Muslims' right to preach their faith. Despite the fact that young people primarily identify themselves as Pakistani first and Muslim after. UNDP Pakistan's strategy on youth focuses on providing basic facilities and pathways to foster youth engagement in their communities that is proving to be effective in preventing young people from violence and extremism and enabling them to fulfill their own potential by becoming active agents of change in society; and most importantly, gain control of their own futures. UNDP's experience in areas such as Dera Ismail Khan proves that engaging young people by creating spaces for them, especially in areas which have endured the fallout of violence begin to reknit fractured societies, and enabling them to become full stakeholders in peace.

4. Design of the talk

It proposed that the talk will be a panel discussion. There will be a total of three speakers, Marc-André Franche and Emrys Shoemaker with an LSE professor or expert as moderator for the discussion.

5. Speakers

Marc-André Franche, Country Director UNDP Pakistan: Previously, he was the Deputy Director of UNDP in Haiti, a position he held since 2008. In this capacity, he oversaw an extensive portfolio of projects addressing governance, rule of law reform, improvement of livelihoods and environmental protection. Between 2004 and 2008, Mr. Franche worked for UNDP in New York as Program Adviser for Conflict Prevention Initiatives in Latin America and the Caribbean. In his capacity as Program Adviser, he was part of a team supporting consensus building and dialogue in the region. Prior to that, he worked on applied research and policy initiatives in conflict prevention for UNDP in Colombia from 2001 to 2004, and poverty reduction and local governance for UNDP in Bolivia from 1999 to 2001. He holds an MSc in Development Policies from the London School of Economics, an MSc in European Studies from Lund University and a BSc in Political Science from Université de Montréal.

Emrys Shoemaker, Communications and Conflict Specialist: With extensive experience designing communications and media-based initiatives for development and peace-building purposes. Emrys is currently a PhD candidate and lead researcher at the London School of Economics, investigating media and mobiles in development. He has a particular interest in the ways that social media and mobile phones are transforming peoples' lives and the implications of mobile technology and social media for changing citizen-state relations and political processes. He gained his Masters in Peace Studies from Bradford University before spending two years in Pakistan during 2004-2006 as a media advisor for DFID, the UN and civil society organisations, where he designed, managed and advised on media and communication initiatives in the areas of governance, conflict and health, particularly HIV/AIDS. He has since conducted consultancies in Pakistan and Afghanistan exploring strategies for counter extremism and accountable government.

Professor from LSE (moderator): To be chosen by LSE