

Mapping Study of Youth in the Voluntary Sector in South Asia

Focus Group Discussion Report

Conducted by

YES Network Pakistan

In pursuance of a request of Innovations in Civic Participation (ICP) a Focus Group Discussion was held at Dheerkot, Kashmir on 2nd July, 2008 at 9.AM.

The Facilitator started proceedings by welcoming the participants and giving an introduction of the ICP and explained the following purpose for holding the Group Discussion.

- To identify factors which encourage and enable young people to engage in activities that are aimed at addressing public or community issues (i.e. civic engagement).
- To identify barriers which discourage young people from participating in these types of activities.
- To identify positive effects of youth civic participation.
- To identify possible opportunities for greater youth engagement, leadership and empowerment.

Focus Group Formation:

Six female participants took part in the group discussion. All of them were attached with Pakistan National Youth Service (PNYS) Program of YES Network Pakistan.

The Facilitator addressed the participants further as follows:

“Aslam-o-Alaikum! Welcome and thank you all for coming today. I am representing - YES Network Pakistan. I am going to tell you a little bit more about what we are going to do today, and then I will give you all an opportunity to introduce yourselves, and we can get going!

*My organization (YES Network Pakistan) is helping to conduct a research on youth civic engagement in Pakistan. Today we are gathered together to have an open and constructive discussion about youth civic engagement in Pakistan. That means we are interested in young people’s participation in the political process **but more specifically** we are interested in activities young people engage in that are helpful to the community or society—volunteering, joining a club or group that is working on a project to help others, trying to improve the environment, or working with an Non-Government Organization/Voluntary Organization. We want to hear directly from young people about their experiences and perceptions of these activities and projects.*

*This discussion will be part of our research and will be used to write a final report on youth civic engagement. **However we want each of you to feel comfortable and safe to discuss youth thoughts freely today so all your names and personal information will remain strictly confidential**.*

The Facilitator explained that *“the whole proceedings may take about 1.5 hours and a short break will be taken in the middle of the discussion”*.

The Facilitator added that, *“The way this works is that I am going to ask you a series of open-ended questions **to which there are no right or wrong answers**. Some of these questions will be about your personal experiences, some will be more general, and some will ask you to think about imaginary people and situations”*.

Showing the tape recorder the Facilitator said that, *“This will make an audio recording of our conversation today so that I can remember what you have to say. No one else will hear the tape, and it is just to help my own memory. I want you to feel completely free and comfortable to discuss personal and sensitive issues. If there is anything I can do to make this a more comfortable space for you, please let me know, either now or at any point during the discussion”*.

At this stage the Facilitator asked the participants *whether **any one of them have any questions about how this is going to work?** Since there was no ambiguity the proceedings went on further.*

The Facilitator asked the participants to introduce themselves, turn by turn, so that each of the participants may know each other a little better. The participants introduced themselves also giving brief detail of their educational background and their views on the issues raised in the presentation.

In order to create a friendly atmosphere so that the participants could feel at home and are able to give their frank opinions and answers to the questions contained in the study without any hesitation, the Facilitator held an informal, open and general discussion with the participants.

The Facilitator added *“We want to hear directly from young people about their experiences and perceptions of these activities and projects. This discussion will be part of our research with special reference to YES Network Pakistan. There is a series of open ended questions which are to be responded”*.

Questions and their answers from the participants are reproduced below:

Questions – Answers:

- 1. In which service you are participating and what is your profession?**

Participant No.1:

I am working as a Group Leader in PNYS program. I am working as a teacher in the school.

Participant No. 2:

As a Group leader I am attached with the Computer Center and I am working in the hospital.

Participant No. 3:

I am Group Leader of the Stitching Center and at present I am working as a teacher in a school established by YES Network Pakistan.

Participant No. 4:

I am working as a Service Scholar with the PNYS.

Participant No. 5:

I am working as a Group Leader in the Tuition Center established by PNYS.

Participant No. 6:

I am working as a member in the Computer Center established by the PNYS and am also a student of F.Sc.

2. Since when you are working with PNYS?

Participant No.1:

Since April 2006 I am working with the PNYS.

Participant No. 2:

I am working since last three years i.e. with effect from April 2006.

Participant No.3:

For the last three years i.e. since April 2006.

Participant No. 4:

For the first two years i.e. since April 2006 I have worked as a volunteer. After that I am working as Service Scholar.

Participant No. 5:

I am working since April 2006.

Participant No. 6:

I am working with the organization for the last three years. I joined in April 2006.

3. When you joined this voluntary work, what was your vision? At the time of joining the Youth Service what did you think and did you think that where you would be after two/three years? What was your objective?

Participant No. 1:

First of all the representatives of the organization told us that they wanted to do something different. We got the opportunity to utilize our capabilities and we were very happy at that time. We thought that we would go a long way.

Participant No. 2:

In the beginning when we started our image was that youth of our area may gain confidence and be self-reliant and we may take him further. Similarly we may give opportunities to women folk, confined within their homes, to lead towards the road of progress.

Participant No. 3:

Basic idea for working with the YES Network Pakistan was to gain confidence. There were so many ideas in our minds. Second aim was to translate our ideas into action. We achieved our target through PNYS.

Participant No. 4:

In the beginning we thought that we will collectively good work for the PNYS and enhance our confidence. We have succeeded in it.

Participant No. 5:

When we started working for PNYS our aim was the welfare and betterment of the society. By the grace of Almighty Allah we are doing the same.

Participant No. 6:

Our basic aim was to tackle with the frustration, which was prevailing after the earthquake. In shape of PNYS we saw a ray of home and we gathered around a platform. When we got the platform, we got the opportunity to discuss our all. We gathered happily and enthusiastically. We had the spirit to do something concrete.

4. What sort of activities you are undertaking in the project you are engaged in?

Participant No. 1:

We undertake different kinds of activities in our school for example apart from providing basic education to the children, we provide computer literacy and cutting and stitching skill to young girls. We also hold Parents Day so that we may have direct interaction with them. We also arrange teaching activities for our own members and community members.

Participant No. 2:

I have a Computer Center where I take the classes of children and we hold classes for the whole day on every Friday. Our members take classes and for the purpose devote two hours daily. Apart from it we arrange computer literacy classes for the women off the community.

Participant No. 3:

Due to our Vocational Center the women of the community are getting orders for their products. Our members are also utilizing their spare time in the Center. We are also introducing it in the school. As a result of this our products can catch good prices and our members can be economically self-reliant.

Participant No. 4:

In the beginning I was working as a volunteer in the PNYS. However after getting employment in the organization I am working as a Service Scholar and looking after 27 networks. I check all the activities being carried out in these 27 networks. As the Group Leader of PNYS Dheer Kot I check the performance of remaining Service Scholars.

Participant No. 5:

We have a Tuition Center and we have opened a Stitching Center in it from where women are getting benefit. Children are benefiting from the Tuition Center.

Participant No. 6:

In our Computer Center the children are learning about the basics of the computer. Apart from this activity we also take classes in the evening.

5. How many meetings you hold monthly or weekly?

Participant No. 1:

In school we compulsorily hold a weekly meeting.

Participant No. 2:

We hold meetings on fortnightly basis.

Participant No.3:

We hold meeting thrice a month.

Participant No. 4:

We hold meetings twice a month.

Participant No. 5:

We hold meeting twice a month.

Participant No. 6

We all the members meet thrice or four times a month and discuss our problems.

6. How do you activate the people of the community?

Participant No. 1:

We invite the parents through letters. We also invite the women of the community so we are very much in contact and in touch with the people of the community.

Participant No. 2:

We undertake different kinds of activities for example teaching courses. In this way we invite people. Explain to them that how they can help us. People cooperate with us.

Participant No. 3:

Our three members, Group Leader and remaining members have been given the assignment to create awareness among the people of the community and they do it very efficiently.

Participant No. 4:

We invite the people to participate in different kinds of activities. We sit with them and share our aims and objects with them. Apart from it we also give donation for the school.

Participant No. 5:

We hold our meetings every month and we hold a separate meeting with the people. They extend full cooperation to us.

Participant No. 6:

As Service Scholar I go in the field alone. However in case of any problem we go in a team form. We have established an Action Committee who makes contact with the people, suggests the solution of the problems.

7. How many hours in a week you give to the program?

Participant No. 1:

I am working in the school and give 6 to 7 hours daily so I give about 36 hours a week.

Participant No. 2:

I devote an hour daily in the Computer Center.

Participant No. 3:

I am working in the school of YES Network and devote 7 to 8 hours daily. Apart from it I give an hour or so I spend in the school. Almost whole of the day is spent.

Participant No. 4:

Since I go in the field, which involves the whole day. We go to the far-flung areas and return at the time of evening prayer.

8. What are your achievements since you started as a volunteer?

Participant No. 1:

We started a Tuition Center and after that we converted it to a school. I think it is a positive change.

Participant No.2:

In the beginning when we started a Tuition Center we were working collectively. However after that we divided into groups and every group separately started Computer Center, school and Education Center.

Participant No. 3:

We were 15 persons and we started working collectively and were running Computer Center, Education Center and Coaching Center. Gradually we gained confidence and started running these Centers separately. Due to our Vocational Center many women are now in a position to generate income.

Participant No. 4:

I started as a volunteer. However afterwards I became an employee of the organization. During the course of employment I had to travel to far-flung areas and through this exercise I gained a lot of confidence. Almost every day I return at the time of evening prayer but that does not bother me. If someone misbehaves I tackle with him properly. In case of any problem we try to solve the same collectively.

Participant No. 5:

When we started Tuition Center we had 14 children. Gradually this number increased and at present, women of the community are also getting benefit of it.

Participant No. 6:

When we started our Center we gained a lot of confidence and we were able to contact any NGO to get our problems solved. We also started English Language Center. We also worked in the Computer Center, which is now running efficiently. Our two members are running Computer Center and they are now in a position to save out of the income.

9. Are you satisfied with the performance of your team?

Participant No. 1:

I am very satisfied with the work of my team.

Participant No. 2:

I am very satisfied with the work of my team. In the beginning some girls were lethargic. However when they realized that it is in the interest of all of us, they started cooperating with us fully.

Participant No. 3:

By the grace of Almighty Allah all the members are cooperating fully and I am very satisfied with their work.

Participant No. 4:

I am satisfied but not fully because we want to work on a larger scale. I mean we want to have a bigger center.

Participant No. 5:

Yes I am fully satisfied with the performance of our members. All the members are cooperating with us.

Participant No. 6:

In the beginning my team members worked whole-heartedly but now they are not been able to deliver. Reason of this change is that the selection of the team was wrong. Many members are saying that they have been forcibly brought in, we were engaged for one year only and now we do not want to work. We are facing the problem, as the selection was wrong.

10. **With reference to the time you have given and contribution you have made so far, are you satisfied with the results, which have come out?**

Participant No. 1:

I am very satisfied because I am getting the result of work, which I have done. Although other schools were opened along with our school but the enrollment of our school has increased as compared to other schools. My family members have also appreciated my performance, hence I am quite satisfied.

Participant No. 2:

I am also very satisfied. I got the experience by working voluntarily. In the beginning we had not a good image but the scenario has changed now.

Participant No. 3:

I am almost satisfied with my work. We started a Coaching Center then we converted into a school. It was a big achievement. Our Vocational Center was first of its kind in whole of the Kashmir. It is also a big achievement. In Computer

Center, Dheer Kot although the computers were there but were like show pieces. We made them operational. This is also a big achievement.

Participant No. 4:

In the beginning we were not satisfied because in spite of the fact that we used to give more time but the results were not there, as the people were not cooperating. However now the [people are cooperating fully and I am quite satisfied.

Participant No. 5:

I was not satisfied in the beginning, as the people were not cooperating. Now the people are cooperating with us.

Participant No. 6:

I started my career as a volunteer with PNYS and after that I joined the organization as a Service Scholar. I am satisfied to great extent.

10. How do you assess the relationship you have with the community? Do you feel that you have a separate identity than the community?

Participant No. 1

It is obvious that we have worked so much for the community and the community gives us a respectful place. By working with this NGO our separate identity is has established.

Participant No. 2:

Since the time I joined PNYS as a volunteer, the community has given me a respectful place due to school we are running. Apart from this we are working with the organization in an informal way hence I am identified from two/three references. I am working as Group Leader along with other members who appreciate my work.

Participant No. 3:

Before joining the PNYS I was confined to the four walls of my home and I was not in position to solve any problem of the community. Since joining the PNYS I am able to help people and solve the petty problems of the community. As a result I enjoy a good place in the community.

Participant No. 4:

Due to the work in the community we are able to discuss problems and in this process our identity has established.

Participant No. 5:

Before joining PNYS the people of the community did not even know me. However after joining and working in the organization most of the people now

know me very well. Before joining I myself did not know the people properly but after coming in the field I also know a lot of people.

Participant No. 6:

I started to work as a volunteer and the people of the community used to see me as a revolutionist. When I started my career as a Service Scholar with PNYC, all the people of Network respect me. Apart from it the people of the community know me and I enjoy a separate identity. People respect me.

- 11. You joined the organization and started working. Do you feel that your participation in the program has been beneficial for the community?**

Participant No. 1:

Before joining the Network we used to feel that we are waste and useless persons in the community. However we started working and undertook activities we felt ourselves as useful and our participation has been beneficial for the community.

- 12. Two/three years before you were not in the program and now you are working. Do you see any difference in your own feelings?**

Participant No. 1:

We have gained confidence. Apart from it we have been able to achieve those goals, which were in our minds.

Participant No. 2:

First of all there has been improvement within ourselves. There is a change in our own thinking and we have the urge for progress. We have worked for the people and there is spirit to better ourselves and to lead the community towards the road of progress.

- 13. You claim yourselves as “change maker”. Can you bring the change in the community?**

Participant No. 1:

Before we joined the program the people used to have a criterion in their minds that we people should remain within the four walls of the homes and do domestic work only. However after we joined the organization, there has been awareness, we have started working along with the men folk and we are now properly listened.

Participant No. 2:

Before joining the Network we used to think about our homes only. However after joining the organization we have discussed the problems and we have the urge to step forward.

14. Did you have to face challenges? How did you tackle with them?

Participant No. 1:

When we joined the PNYS we had to face a lot of problems. People used to have loose talk about us e.g. new NGO has come, it has gathered young boys and girls etc. However we delivered good results and the people were a bit satisfied. Then we started English Language classes having co-education system. People started saying that boys and girls have started studies together, who knows what is going to happen. We worked hard and got good results. Now many challenges have been talked successfully,

Participant No. 2:

In the beginning we thought the girls are supposed to do domestic work. However our family members believed in us and allowed to move out. We have been able to deliver good results. People used to talk a lot but now by the grace of Almighty Allah the conditions are much better.

Participant No. 3:

In our Vocational Center we had a basic criterion of teaching about cutting and stitching of shirts and trousers (“*Shalwar*”) only. Many students were unable to complete the (one year) course and as result we had to make payment of salary out of own pocket to the teacher for the agreed upon period of one year. We had to face a lot of problems. We had problems from the community as well. It was the first time that a NGO had come forward in our area. People had outmoded minds. However the things have changed now.

Participant No. 5:

When we started our Tuition Center we had to face a lot of problems. The children used to study in the school and they used to say that they couldn’t pay the tuition fee.

15. What do the organizations and NGO around think about us? In case they think about us in a right way then what logic they have and what is the logic behind it if they think otherwise? Would you like to comment?

Participant No. 1:

If we see this matter with reference to of all the NGOs, it comes out that the NGOs think and consider youth as talented and they want to utilize this talent. However they do not have good opinion about youth. They take the youth as a little child who knows nothing, and that the elders can only think rightly. They

further think that elders have the experience and the youth should follow them, whereas the youth can learn better through its own experience.

Participant No. 2:

I am working in a NGO and as far as I think basic aim of these organizations is to give opportunities to those women who cannot come out of their homes so that they could come out and be self-reliant, may have saving and secure their future. I think all the NGOs think for our betterment.

Participant No.4:

Our elders think that what we have achieved, the youth should also do the same.

- 16. Does government help in the capacity of a volunteer or not? Do you know that government provides such help?**

Participant No. 1:

Government has never helped us. We have established a school under PNYS and now we want to get it registered which involves an expenditure of Rupees 14 thousand to 15 thousand. The government is not helping us in this respect and we are doing it at our own.

- 17. What does government think about the future of the youth? In case the government is thinking on the lines, what plans and programs they have?**

Participant No. 1:

According to a previous concept the government did not think much about youth but now the present government is taking initiatives, moving to vocational training and giving art to the women folk. Apart from technical courses are being offered in schools. In other words forward steps are being taken.

- 18. Does the government help in solving the problems being faced by youth i.e. with reference to employment, health and education?**

Participant No. 1:

Present government is helping and offering employment to youth. In respect of health, a hospital and a dispensary have been established.

- 19. Should government provide help to the volunteers?**

Participant No. 1:

Yes! the government should provide help.

- 20. Why do you think so?**

Participant No. 1:

In case the government provides help, the youth will have the spirit to step forward.

Participant No. 4:

There is a lot of talent in our youth but they lack the resources.

21. What does a “volunteer” mean? Who is a “volunteer”?

Participant No. 1:

It is obvious that those people who devote their time for the community. They do have their own needs and seeing their devotion we should help them.

Participant No. 2:

I would like to say that the government has provided help to a greater extent. A dispensary has been established, girls have been provided jobs and unemployment has been eliminated to a certain extent. They (the government) should take care of volunteers so that they feel that they are getting benefit of their services.

Participant No. 3:

In my opinion a volunteer serves so many people, keeping himself aside he thinks about others. However the question is that till what time he/she can carry on such selfless services? After all his/her own needs are there. If a volunteer does not have personal benefit, then he/she cannot carry on voluntary service for the whole of his/her life. The government should provide a lot of help to such persons and should think about them so that there is a personal benefit as well for them and they are able serve in a better way.

Participant No. 4:

A “volunteer” is the person who serves the community without any monetary incentive.

22. We have seen the role of the government. There are international organizations. Are they helping? Do you have information about such organizations? “Aira” is a Pakistani organization, what do you think what sort of help it can provide to bring betterment in your work? Do you have suggestions?

Participant No. 1:

In my opinion every person is educated but he/she does not have the “art” or skill. I think they should arrange workshops for the people and equip them with “art” or skill.

Participant No. 2:

They should arrange training courses.

23. What would you say in respect of health?

Participant No. 1:

They should provide financial support so that we may translate our ideas into action.

24. What the government in Pakistan can do for the development of youth? What are the roles of different stakeholders – the community, ordinary people, international organizations, other NGOs? What sort of help these organizations can provide for the welfare of the youth?

Participant No. 1:

Unemployment has increased so much in our country that the needs of our youth are not being met. Anti social and anti country elements are getting hold of youth and utilizing them against their own country. The government should provide “art” or skill to youth. Our country is agriculture based but majority of the youth does not have the aptitude towards it. Every young person wants to be doctor or an engineer. Poor people the talent but they do not have the resources.

25. **In your opinion is the approach of all the stakeholders is right or wrong? Are they providing help to you or are discouraging you?**

Participant No. 1:

I think they are working on positive lines.

26. **PNYS is busy in serving the people. How it can improve its working? What should be done in your area on overall basis in order to make its service better?**

Participant No. 1:

In the beginning we ourselves did not have the experience. Now we are working and strongly feel that there should not have been so many networks. Had we fewer networks we would have more funding and the people attached with these networks would have worked in a better way. Now the question is that since they are there what should be done to refresh them or should give them more funds enabling them to refresh themselves? In the beginning the people involved had no experience and they have incurred the whole money and they do not have funds even to pay their membership for the next year. In case more funds are given to them they can improve because the people involved have got the experience now and the results would be better.

Another thing I would like to submit that we go to the far-flung area and our number is less. If staff is increased and funds are given them they can work in a better way.

Participant No. 2:

I would like to say that all the members be given proper briefing as I earlier said that there have been many difficulties. The people were recruited for one year and they were not given proper briefing that is why there have been difficulties.

I would also like to say Service Scholars have to travel to far-flung areas but their pay is very less. Major portion of their pay is incurred on travel. If their pay is increased it will be better for the program. We the old partners and groups are working on the right lines. PNYS should do something for the people mentioned. As far as the Service Scholars are concerned they are working very nicely. However proper support be provided to them i.e. their pay be re-fixed according to their performance. Moreover PNYS should arrange training course from to

time, there should be necessarily training courses after every two or three months. In this way they would be able to understand better.

Facilitator:

Thank you very much. Thanks to all of you. The Focus Group Discussion was ended with the prayer that Almighty Allah may grant us the strength to work hard and we may have the good results of it and He may bless us with more achievements. Amen!