



<https://doi.org/10.53032/tvcr/2025.v7n3.36>

## Reconfiguring the Role of Youth in Community Transformation: A Critical Inquiry into the Challenges and Prospects of Inclusive Developmental Paradigms

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### Abstract

Youth-related issues, such as riots, protests, or violence, have surfaced as a worrying problem for many societies, regardless of their development level. In already developed and developing countries, it is becoming more apparent that the youth have a high level of unrest, primarily caused by apathy towards and disconnection from public affairs, and not taking an interest in any public-spirited activities. This disinterest usually appears in combination with antisocial acts, substance abuse, crime, and a general inclination toward idleness. In India, the rise in apathetic youth is alarming, but this increase in youth restlessness has caught the attention of many Indian policymakers, as it is viewed as a barrier to the progress of the country. The youth apathy problem and the social issues connected to it are a growing concern not just for social peace, but also for the development of a country. If guided and engaged in constructive activities, the “demographic dividend” of India can vastly improve the economy. Sadly, without sufficient aid from social services, a large number of culturally active youth disengaged from social activities, campaigns, or movements. Things may not be as grim as they seem. Young people have innovation, idealism, and undying optimism, which makes them very useful in the process of building a nation. Constructed properly, their zeal and vigour can be transformative at the grassroots level in community development, volunteerism, and civic participation. Therefore, there is increasing attention given to the need to include young people in the entire scope of community work and social responsibility. In this regard, this article claims to explore the diverse aspects of youth participation in community engagement and focuses on how to best utilise these people. It investigates the challenges which actively hinder youth engagement, such as a general lack of awareness, insufficient institutional support,

# *The Voice of Creative Research*

Vol. 7 & Issue 3 (July 2025)

societal apathy, and lack of initiative, and appreciates the possibilities created when proactive youth are engaged in public, civic, or constructive initiatives. The discussion aims to address issues relating to problem prevention by creating a supportive environment so that young people are inspired to engage with society and development more meaningfully, rather than having anger and unrest.

**Keywords:** Capacity Building, Community Development, Developmental Challenges, Inclusive Participation, Policy Frameworks, Social Integration, Sociological Perspectives, Transformative Leadership, Youth Empowerment, Youth Inclusion

## **Introduction**

It is universally accepted that the active participation of the youth in community development plays a huge role in constructing and further developing society or any nation. The creativity, adaptability, and dynamism of the younger generation give them considerable social transformation powers. With the recent expansion of the internet, young people have been given the power to transform into innovators and digital warriors. They have, and continue, to shift the way our communities are run and how they develop. Different members of society had already begun taking notice. Many governmental or non-governmental and even some nonprofit organisations are now spearheading the development of community initiatives. They started recognising the enormous potential that youth possess and have tried to streamline the planning and execution processes by attempting to involve the youth more effectively. Youth empowerment paired with institutions creates an optimal situation for achieving relevant and up-to-date local and global sustainable change.

Regardless, there is still a great struggle in reasoning at which level to incorporate youth participation, as there is a gap in the understanding processes involving harnessing their contribution. One of the significant obstacles that still exists is the outdated notion that young people do not possess sufficient decisional capability or advisory potential due to a lack of experience, and tend to ignore strong members in the active population for their ineffectual use. As in most stereotypes, educational institutions hold the keys to breaking this one wide open. Schools and Universities, through embedding civic education and leadership training into the policy, are gradually giving the youth a sense of identity towards meaningful involvement in community service. Furthermore, educators are fostering an environment of social responsibility where learners are motivated to think beyond opportunistic short-term projects to long-term endeavours that require great endurance, careful planning, and action from all spheres

## **Demographic Importance of Youth in India**

As per the census 2011, the youth population in India amounted to 33 3364,636 crore, of which 17,29,11,297 crore (51.87%) belongs to males and 16,04,53,339 crore (48.13%)

# *The Voice of Creative Research*

Vol. 7 & Issue 3 (July 2025)

belongs to females. The majority of the youth (36.16%) belong to the age group of 15-19. And a minimum of youth (30.42%) belongs to the age group of 25-29. The rural youth population in India amounted to 22,38,05,788 crore, of which 11,60,85,208 crore (51.87%) belongs to males and 16,04,53,339 crore (48.13%) belongs to females. The urban youth in India amounted to 10,95,58,848 crore, of which 5,68,26,089 crore (51.87%) belongs to males and 5,27,32,759 crore (48.13%) belongs to females. Keeping in view the above figures, it is clear that the youth in India are more than 1/3 of the total population of the country. The number is further increasing as per various trends available from non-governmental sources.

## **Youth as a Concept**

Thought is one of the most powerful factors behind the growth and change of society. It is not a dead process confined to the mind of the average person, but is associated with an inertial force that can shape the world and change social conditions. Looking back at the history of human life, at the foundation of every great change was the seed of a thought. That thought itself questioned beliefs and norms, and challenged traditions and customs. Usually, many people see thought only as a personal mental act. But the truth is that it is not an act confined to an individual. On the contrary, thought is a powerful driving force that works for the comprehensive transformation of society. The thought that arises within a person, when joined with action, paves the way for a social revolution that breaks down boundaries. In this way, thought does not remain confined to mere observation or theory but becomes an active social intervention.

History itself is proof of this argument. From the French Revolution to the Indian freedom struggle, all great socio-political movements began with a new thought. Although the ideas of freedom, equality and fraternity were initially just thoughts, they later turned into great movements and changed the course of world history. In the Indian context, Mahatma Gandhi's principle of non-violence and satyagraha initially started as a different thought. But it later became a socio-political movement that inspired crores of people.

Thought has a special ability to challenge the traditions and customs of human life. It is thought that gives courage to question the values and customs that have been prevailing in society for decades. Women's freedom movements, Dalit movements, labour movements, etc., are all examples of courageous thinkers who questioned the once existing social norms. But the word "youth" describes the stage of life that exemplifies the best qualities of optimism, creativity, and revolution. Young people, motivated by idealism, zeal, and a desire to make a difference, are frequently viewed as the change agents. "The word 'youth' is used very loosely in a variety of socioeconomic and cultural contexts. In many cultures around the world, it can refer to a stage of life marked by dependency and transition, in addition to an individual's age group" (10).

## **Community Development**

A concept of community has been understood throughout human evolution, and as such, its comprehensible definition might be based on the nature of those who experience it and attach to it to share their daily life, geographical place, socioeconomic, cultural and

# *The Voice of Creative Research*

Vol. 7 & Issue 3 (July 2025)

political trends to make each member feel belonging and attachment to continuing their common direction. In short, the community provides its members with attached experiences throughout their lives. Thus, community involves a wide range of concepts and underlying historical links vis-a-vis people, culture, environment, geography and attachment. Development, on the other hand, has been understood in many different ways and linked with several concepts, including modernity, industrialisation, urbanisation, economic growth, free market, and grassroots movements. “The concept of community development gained popularity in the 1950s and 1960s with economy, especially in the Third World where there which supported the process of reconstructing the econo was an urgent need to improve living standards among the poor” (1997). Because people have been living as a group, the introduction of the community development paradigm could be well-aligned with international agencies' strategies and goals of poverty reduction through community-building measures and producing community-wide positive impacts.

## **Youth participation in community development**

Any nation is accounted for its progress and development made in terms of technological research, science, and medicine. The same is marked when the youth is sincerely giving by putting up their efforts. India accounts for having the largest number of youngsters, who, if nurtured well and put their effort in the right direction, would make this nation excel in the whole world.

In general, youth spend a substantial amount of time in extra-curricular activities in school and the community, including participation in the implementation of community development projects, school and local sports teams, and school-based clubs. All of these, and the interaction with individuals within them, directly influenced youth involvement in their participation in community development projects. (12)

Participation in the implementation of community development projects is related to the behavioural well-being of the youth. Influences on youth participation, such as increasing academic level, increasing the likelihood of college attendance, greater community engagement, reinforcing positive social values or setting an example, have been found to affect the youth participation in the implementation of community development activities and projects.

On the other hand, there are other factors influencing the youth's need for participation willingness to be a part of a greater good through participate in the implementation of common development projects. These include: feelings of efficacy, the need to be valued and taken seriously by other members in the community, increasing their self-esteem, and having a responsibility toward society and a sense of ownership and identity. Recognition by the community at large is of being valued and provides great motivation for the youth to participate in community development activities. Moreover, other factors such as parental involvement can influence the youth's great involvement in the implementation of community development projects. Youth who are actively involved in community projects are more likely to be active

# *The Voice of Creative Research*

Vol. 7 & Issue 3 (July 2025)

themselves when it comes to participation in the implementation of community development projects.

Youth whose parents do not participate in community development activities may, on the contrary, still become active in their communities; however, supportive parental engagement plays a vital role in the youth's contribution to participation and involvement in common development projects. Perhaps as a result of an increased awareness of the advantages, parents play a significant role in linking youth to the world around them. It can be observed from our historical times that youth have been involved in several changes, development, prosperity, and respect for our nation. Youth occupy a disadvantaged and vulnerable position, and society does not pay sufficient attention to their needs. Therefore, it becomes necessary for him to get involved in the total population programmes from the planning to the evaluation stage so that his needs are satisfied in the development

Furthermore, as youth is a formative stage of life to acquire the skills necessary and adopt values and attitudes appropriate to work as constructive citizens towards their country's development, their participation is essential. Absence of such participation would create an irresponsible and antisocial attitude, an attitude of claiming benefits without paying the price or being worthy of the same. It is also a stage when comparable abilities develop and the seeds of stability are sown. As development agents, elder members in the family generally wish to maintain the status quo. Sometimes, the adult members have vested interests in maintaining the status quo situation in society. But it is not always in the interest of youth to maintain the status quo. Youth change the old rituals and challenge the existing practices.

Youth becomes highly effective as an agent of development firstly because he is a critic of their society, approaching problems with an open mind. The youth are quick in applying and testing ideas in new social situations. Secondly, he is also minus family and occupational responsibilities. Thirdly, the youth is the embodiment of energy and enthusiasm, a period of adventure, full of vitality and risk-taking enterprises. Lastly, he is an important resource for the implementation of development plans and could act as an intermediary to bring about social change. An opinion survey of experts in development programs indicates that youth form an important Intermediary for introducing development projects; seventy-one per cent of the national experts and 29 per cent of the foreign experts have expressed this opinion. Every individual, as a child, dreams of becoming something in their lives; in other words, we can say they have an objective. The child completes their education and obtains some skills to achieve something. Therefore, it is a positive attitude of that individual towards the progress of the nation.

## **Review of Literature**

G. Stanley Hall (1904) work is seen as one of the earliest scientific studies which incorporated sociological elements in the study of youth. However, the work of Hollingshead, A. B. published in 1949, "Elmtown's Youth: The Impact of Social Classes on Adolescents", is seen to have marked the beginning of a systematic tradition of sociological research on youth. Since then, remarkable strides have been made in the sociology of the youth, especially in the

# *The Voice of Creative Research*

Vol. 7 & Issue 3 (July 2025)

West. Even in India, many such empts are made. For several decades, the special contribution of sociology to the study of youth was quantification- sociologists used representative sample surveys to present empirical information on the attitudes and behaviour of young people. Presently, new research trends are emerging in this subfield of Sociology

Mannheim. K. (1970), “youth experiencing the same concrete historical problems may be said to be part of the same actual generation, while those groups within the same actual generation which work up the material of their common experiences in different specific ways, constitute a separate generation-units”

Giddens (1991) describes identity as a reflexive project, something individuals continually shape and reconsider throughout their lives. Parsons, as discussed in Barker (2000), maintains that youth is not a timeless category but a social construct that emerged under specific historical circumstances. He links this development to the rise of capitalism, suggesting that the creation of specialised, standardised, and rationalised occupational and adult roles in capitalist societies produced a gap between the family and the wider social order. According to Parsons, this gap required a transitional phase of preparation and training, which gave rise to the recognition of youth as a distinct stage of life.

Gore, M. S. (1977) associates the rise of the youth with the development of technology. He notes that -in simpler societies, the skills to be mastered by the young to achieve economic self-reliance are simpler and call for less time to be devoted to their young and generally societies with higher levels of technological development have to allow for a longer period of dependence for their young. Thus, the youth stage in advanced societies is more prolonged compared to that of simpler societies.

## **Challenges of youth participation**

With one of the largest youth populations in the world, India has enormous potential for both global leadership and national development. This sizable youth population offers a singular chance to harness their inventiveness, vitality, and creativity for the advancement of the country. But achieving this potential calls for careful preparation, wise judgment, and committed work toward their overall empowerment and development. It is a fact that India’s youth face many obstacles in actively contributing to social change and developing their own skills and potential. Youth are the country’s most powerful human resource. Their energy and creative potential are crucial for the progress of society. However, situations that do not awaken those skills and channel them in the right direction often stand in their way.

These obstacles have many faces. First, structural obstacles hinder the youth’s journey forward. The current education system often prioritises theoretical studies and neglects real-life skills and training to deal with social problems. As a result, even after completing their education, young people lack the confidence and practical skills needed to intervene in social change. Second, social barriers reduce youth participation. Traditional perceptions and norms in society often view youth as “inexperienced” or “opportunities”. In many areas, only adults are given the power to make decisions, and the opinions of young people are not taken seriously. This discourages young people from coming forward with ideas and innovations for

## *The Voice of Creative Research*

Vol. 7 & Issue 3 (July 2025)

social change. Third, economic barriers are a major challenge. Unemployment and inadequate job opportunities hinder the growth of young people. In a situation of economic insecurity, young people are forced to struggle only to earn a living instead of participating in activities for social change. Poverty in rural areas and inequality in cities limit the potential of young people. Fourth, systemic barriers hamper youth participation. Youth participation in government and political structures is often limited. Without opportunities to enter leadership positions, they are deprived of spaces to put their ideas into practice. In addition, systems full of corruption and injustice affect the self-confidence of young people.

Together, all this often deprives young people of the opportunity to work for social change. However, there are ways and possibilities to overcome these. If quality education, job opportunities, platforms for youth leadership, and social awareness are strengthened, the youth will emerge as a force for change in society.

Their creative thinking, technological knowledge, and sense of social responsibility can lead society towards innovation. Finally, opening the youth to opportunities and possibilities, rather than confining them within barriers, is essential to ensure the future of the nation and to lead society on a path of progress. Youth engagement is hampered by several unique barriers, which differ based on the stakeholders, the youth, the organisations that support them, and the larger community. (15)

The lack of confidence in youth in decision-making processes is among the most urgent problems. Young people deal with logistical and personal difficulties as well. Due to time constraints brought on by part-time jobs, family obligations, or academic obligations, many people find it difficult to participate in civic or community projects. Further impeding their confidence and capacity to make a significant contribution are skills gaps, such as deficiencies in leadership, public speaking, literacy, and communication.

Economic hardship is also one of the major obstacles faced by youth. Many young people in India come from low socio-economic backgrounds. Homelessness, limited financial resources, and lack of access to quality education directly affect their lives. These not only affect their well-being; they also significantly reduce their chances of social mobility and career growth. Youth participation is further discouraged by biases, institutional rigidity, risk aversion, and hierarchical structures in communities and organisations. These systems frequently oppose change and are reluctant to cede authority to younger people. Inequality, particularly discrimination based on class, is one of the most important structural problems. It can be challenging for young people from underprivileged and marginalised backgrounds to engage with or work together on an equal basis with their more affluent peers. This gap hinders the development of inclusive, representative leadership in addition to restricting their access to opportunities. "Creating inclusive platforms, strengthening policies that prioritise young people, and cultivating a culture that respects, supports, and works alongside them are crucial steps toward overcoming these barriers" (14).

# The Voice of Creative Research

Vol. 7 & Issue 3 (July 2025)

## Conclusion

The future of the nation of tomorrow lies in the hands of today's youth. Their ideas, energy and aspirations are the foundation of the future society. These creative and dynamic capacities have the potential to reshape the political, social and economic structures of society. Therefore, it is imperative to recognise the infinite potential of youth and provide them with meaningful opportunities to develop themselves individually and collectively. Education, skills training, employment and civic participation are not ordinary privileges for youth; rather, they are key tools that enable them to build a just and progressive society. Young people typically possess a rare combination of qualities such as passion, creative thinking and resilience. These skills put them at the forefront of driving innovation, meeting new challenges and promoting future-oriented social transformation. However, translating skills into action does not happen naturally. Young people need guidance and institutional support to identify and use their skills in the right direction. While personal motivation and talent are crucial, the environment and structural mechanisms that enable them to make sustainable progress are equally important. In other words, potential alone is not enough; it must be nurtured, guided, and enabled.

Fortunately, a strong ecosystem is emerging that supports the empowerment and growth of youth. Educational institutions, non-profit organisations, youth-led initiatives, corporates, and government programs play a critical role in providing the tools and opportunities for youth to thrive. Their goal is not limited to providing professional growth; they also focus on fostering social responsibility, ethical leadership, and active citizenship.

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Vol. 7 & Issue 3 (July 2025)

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