

WORLD DEVELOPMENT REPORT (WDR) 2007

Development and the Next Generation

REGIONAL HIGHLIGHTS—SOUTH ASIA

This is a summary of references in *WDR 2007: Development and the Next Generation* to policy directions, actions, and programs relevant to youth in South Asia (SAR).

Take advantage of South Asia's demographic "window of opportunity"

- As of 2005, SAR has an estimated 400 million young people aged 12-24—about 30 percent of all youth in developing countries (UN World Population Prospects 2004 revision). This cohort will grow slowly; most countries (except Pakistan) peaking in the next 25 years.
- WDR 2007 notes that the expected decline in dependency (increase in working age population relative to non-working age population) offers a tremendous opportunity for economic growth in South Asia, provided that the greater labor supply is productively employed, and that saving and investment increase.
- This demographic shift is both an opportunity and a challenge in a region that lags behind in key areas such as literacy and maternal health.

Expand opportunities for education and employment

- The World Bank's investment climate surveys show that over a fifth of firms in developing countries (including Bangladesh) rate inadequate skills and education of workers as a major or severe obstacle to their operations.
- Working at very young ages can impair schooling and learning, the report states.
 - In rural Bangladesh, working while attending primary school had a sizable negative effect on the transition to secondary school, and starting to work while attending secondary school had even larger effects on secondary school completion (Canals-Cerda and Ridao-Cano, 2004).

Priorities

- Focus on quality as well as quantity. While education policies have focused on increasing the number of primary school-goers, the report recommends that the quality of basic education services and skills acquisition should improve.
 - In Nepal, for instance, fewer than 60 percent of children who dropped out after grade three can read a simple sentence.
- Support remedial programs for youth still in school but performing poorly.
 - In India, a large educational program for younger children had positive results (Banerjee et al, 2004). Young women from the community taught basic literacy and numeracy skills to lagging primary school pupils.
- Make lower secondary education part of basic, compulsory education. Children of better educated parents tend to be better educated and healthier. Child immunization rates are higher when mothers have some secondary education.
- Help young people from poor families to finance their education and to offset opportunity costs. The report describes incentive-based schemes, but recommends that the focus be on quality as well as quantity.
 - Channeling conditional subsidies directly to girls aged 11-14 by the Bangladesh Female Secondary Stipend Assistance Program has hugely

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increased girls' enrollment—despite strong biases against their schooling. Concerns about learning outcomes are being addressed in later programs.

- Teach students skills that will prepare them for the transition to work. Computer literacy and command of English are increasingly assets in the labor market.
 - A survey from Mumbai shows that during the 1990s, the earnings of those who attended English-medium schools increased sharply (Munshi and Rosenzweig, 2003). The “English premium”—the earnings of students educated in English schools—increased from 15% in 1980 to 24% in 2000 for men and from approximately 0% in 1980 to 27% in 2000 for women.

Invest more in nutrition, maternal healthcare and family planning education

- Adolescent mothers face an increased risk of death or delivery complications owing to incomplete physical growth.
 - In Bangladesh, over 30 percent of 15-19 year old girls are mothers or pregnant, but few can identify life-threatening conditions in pregnancy (Siddiqua and Kabir, 2002).
 - In Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, use of maternal health services is low among young women. In rural Pakistan, adolescent girls' mobility is highly limited. This may affect their ability to seek timely health services.

Priorities

- Invest in maternal health care and family planning education in South Asia, where 15-20 percent of female deaths are pregnancy-related.
 - Nearly 50 percent of teenage mothers in Bangladesh reported seeking no help for maternal complications. The report notes successful targeted programs such as Matlab district's 'doorstep delivery' program, which increased the use of ante- and post-natal services (Joshi & Schultz, 2005)
 - The report recommends that antenatal care, during which iron supplements are typically offered to anemic mothers, should be universally available in countries such as India where anemia is prevalent in 50 percent of girls.
 - In Bangladesh, Pitt and others report that *men's* exposure to social development activities as part of Grameen Bank's micro-credit schemes could explain lower fertility rates. WDR 2007 recommends that family planning and reproductive health campaigns should also target men.
- Integrate STI and HIV services with female reproductive health services, to encourage more use of both. This is vital in India, where HIV prevalence, though low, is increasing significantly among young married women.

Increase youth access to information; capacity to make and act on decisions

- In many traditional societies, young people—females in particular—do not participate in decisions that affect their lives, the report notes.
 - In an international survey of 15 to 24 year-olds, very few young Bangladeshi women thought they had the most influence on schooling or marriage choices.

Priorities

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- Reduce health-related risk-taking behavior among young people by extending better access to relevant information, the report says. It provides several examples of situations that could be remedied through information campaigns:
 - In Nepal, almost 60 percent of all young males aged 15 to 24 smoke.
 - A study of drug-using street children in four cities in Pakistan found that 90 percent inhaled glue, gasoline, or thinner, all available from the local market. Roughly two-thirds of these children had never been to school.
 - In India, there has been a marked diet shift in the last 20 years towards saturated fat, sugar, and refined foods.
- Promote “agency” among young people—the ability to define and act on goals.
 - India’s Better Life Options program provides services to young women aged 12-20 in certain peri-urban slums and rural areas—dissemination of information on reproductive health and services, vocational training, and promoting women’s empowerment through recreational events. Analysis shows that young women in the program were significantly more involved in key life decisions than those who were not (CEDPA, 2001).

Improve opportunities for civic engagement among young people

- Without chances for productive civic engagement, young people’s frustrations may become violent and lead to social and economic instability, WDR 2007 says.
 - Abeyratne (2003) concludes that the initial cause of Sri Lanka’s ethnic conflict was the frustration of Tamil students shut out of universities and other avenues of civic engagement.

Priorities

- Encourage young people to actively contribute to development through collective action, public accountability and caring for the community and the environment.
- Broaden the access of previously excluded groups to opportunities for growth and better living standards through active citizenship.
 - Participants in Nepal’s Women’s Empowerment Program were more likely than non-participants to start community activities and campaigns against issues like domestic violence (Dhakal and Misbah, 1997).
- Channel young people’s creativity and energy productively.
 - In 2005, university students in Lahore worked to ensure that aid reached those who needed it—helping donor and relief agencies save lives.

Offer integrated “second chance” options

- While policies that expand opportunities and help young people choose wisely are highest priority, consider “second chance” options for those left behind. Integrate such programs with mainstream programs; coordination is critical.
 - In Bangladesh, for example, the Underprivileged Children Education Program (UCEP) helps 10 to 16 year-olds who have dropped out of primary school, providing them with three years’ schooling and feeding them into UCEP-run vocational programs.