

National Youth Policy, 2010

Evolution, Definition and Implementation

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Abstract:

Given that youth is the backbone of Nepal from both qualitative and quantitative perspectives, it is necessary to identify and address their issues while capacitating and mainstreaming their involvement for national development. This paper analysis the National Youth Policy 2010 which was the foremost work undertaken by Ministry of Youth and Sports which was formed after signing the peace accord. This document analysis the evolution of the policy taking into consideration of how super ordinate bodies, political will and demographic opportunities paved way for the policy. The controversial age bracket in defining youth and its underlying reasons are also explored. The last section analyzes the implementing challenges due to the crosscutting nature of priority areas identified by the policy. While analyzing the policy, an effort to see it through the academic lenses formation considering different theories and stages has been made.

I. BACKGROUND:

Educated, revolutionary, courageous, optimistic and most importantly restless for change – it is, it was, and it will be the characteristics and capabilities of youth that will determine the present and the future of Nepal. Nations have utilized its youth to leapfrog progress and prosperity. It is youth who powered India's IT revolution; it is youth who are behind the burgeoning garment industries in Dhaka and are lending a hand to China's speeding economic growth. For Nepal, youth can be considered both the savior and a threat. Nepal would have still been under an autocratic rule hadn't the courageous and pro-democratic youth flooded the streets. While on the other hand, the violent civil unrest wouldn't have happened hadn't the youth been involved. History and present have both proved that youth are indispensable determinants of a nation. And, Nepal will go where the youth go!

Given that youth is the backbone of the nation from both qualitative and quantitative perspectives, it is necessary to identify and address their issues while capacitating and mainstreaming their involvement for national development. Nepal, after 10 years of armed conflict is in its peace process and is drafting a new constitution for a prosperous Nepal. The youth population in itself is an invaluable asset to a nation. In Nepal, population of 16-40 age group in accounts for 38.8 percent of the total population while the age group 15 – 29 accounts for 27 percent (2001 census). This population has always been the driving force behind major political changes including the change to a republican and secular national. But when the political change has been achieved, the government has always remained passive in institutionalizing the potential of youth. Fortunately, in 2009, the Ministry of Youth and Sports has been formed. Prior to it, youth issues were looked after by a department at Ministry of Education and sports that had an annual budget of 10 lakh. The Ministry of Youth and Sports was formed soon after the peace accord.

I. HOW WAS 'NATIONAL YOUTH POLICY' BORN

Nepal's national youth policy is found to have multiple origins. Though the recently formed Ministry of Youth and Sports appears to be central to it, the super ordinate bodies including UN,

advocacy done by civil society and youth wing of political parties, the political purposefulness among the political parties all served in rolling out of the policy and the demographic opportunities foreseen among youth had significant influence in the rollout of National Youth Policy 2009. The following point discusses the evolution of the policy.

1.1. INTERNATIONAL INFLUENCE

Super ordinate states especially UN has found to be key player in influencing its members to come up with National Youth Policy. In 1969 United Nations secretary had for the first time called upon its member states to come up with relevant policies and programmes. Following that, UN had proclaimed 1975 as 'International Year of Youth' with a recommendation from the General Assembly that through National Youth Policies member states recognize the potential of youth while shouldering them the responsibility for development. Later after 10 years, in 1995, the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY) was instrumental in setting a global agenda for young people on the basis of 10 priority areas. In 2005, the General Assembly added five new priority areas of concern. At its sixtieth session, the General Assembly adopted a resolution on *policies and programmes involving youth*, requesting that the United Nations Secretariat, in collaboration with other relevant United Nations Programmes and Agencies, establish a broad set of indicators related to youth, which Governments and other actors may choose to use to monitor the situation of young people related to the priority areas identified in the World Programme of Action for Youth. (UN Commission on Social Development, 2009)

Initially World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY) identified 10 priority areas to guide policy and action in the area of youth development, but the General Assembly added five additional priority areas in 2005. In a broader perspective, WPAY paved way towards an Integrated National Youth Policy. Following WPAY, in 1998 over 140 ministers responsible for youth met in Lisbon at World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth where they made a political will to frame, implement and monitor National Youth Policy for their respective nations. Also, they committed to involve youth in all these processes.

Hence, the present National Youth Policy was an outcome of series of influence at the global level especially from the United Nations. The initiation of draft Youth Employment Action Plan supported by ILO and UNFPA's influence of health policies related to adolescent and female had also blazed the path towards National Youth Policy.

1.2. POLITICAL PURPOSEFULNESS

The National Youth Policy clearly recognizes the role of youth in political changes. It states "Given that the youths are the agent of economic, social and political change, the central need of this time is to specially address this class by a national policy and forge their involvement in the nation building." Historically, youth have rendered an outstanding contribution to every political change, founding of democracy and other social movements in Nepal. The peaceful popular movement for republican Nepal, decade-long Maoist armed conflict, Madhesh movement, Tharuhat movement have proven the political potent of youth to change systems. The political parties of Nepal recognized this potential- youth had freshly manifested their political strength during 2006 political movement for Republican state. The political mood at that period still recognized the political power of youth. In this context, the Interim Constitution of Nepal, 2007 directed the State to pursue a special policy to mobilize the youth in the development of the country; Ministry of Youth and Sport was an outcome of this recognition.

Even historically, efforts had been made to come up with National Youth Policy. The National Youth Policy-2005 Draft Committee constituted under the convenorship of Assistant Minister Pathak had prepared the draft of the policy and put it forward to the-then Majesties Government along with procedures for the formation of the Youth Council. The committee has put forward the proposal for constituting a National Youth Council under the patronage of the-then Royal Highness Crown Prince Paras Bir Bikram Shah Dev. The proposal also set the provision to ensure wide-ranging representation of "talented youths" of 16-40 years of age group from various walks of life including Dalits, indigenous, backward and excluded communities.

Formation of National Youth Council at that time and even in the present context is seen to be the central to the policy. The political interest surfaced by the-then Kings Government to led and thereby mobilize youth has been clearly evident by constituting the council under the-then Prince

patronage. Even though no direct patronage is present in the present council, the structure still remains. The large age bracket in defining youth was a result of political ambitions of the drafting committee members.

1.3. YOUTH AS A “DEMOGRAPHIC CHALLENGE”

Youth were at the core of the conflict, both as perpetrator of human rights and as victims of civil war. Among the 19 thousand Maoist combatants approximately 3000 were identified as minors (below 18 years of age) during the verification process (www.nepalcaportal.org). Every year about 300,000 youth enter job market in Nepal (S.Dahal, 2005). In India, Nepalese Immigrant Associations estimates the number of Nepalese as up to 3 million (Kollmair et al, 2006). The remittance data until November, 2008 was 215.3 Million USD which is being provided mainly by the low skill work force in Arab countries. In education front, government claims youth literacy rate to be 70.1 percent. Accessibility to quality education has increased the rate of Nepalese students going abroad to pursue higher studies. Nepal currently stands in the 11th position in terms of number of foreign students studying in Australia (www.kantipuronline.com). All this demographic challenges and opportunities surrounding youth provided the Nepal – a post conflict nation - a grave need to address their problem through a National Youth Policy.

Furthermore, After the peace accord was signed, on the one hand there was a need to address issues such as class, race, language, religion and gender which was the establishment of federal democratic republic in Nepal, while on the other hand it was necessary to specially address the issues minorities, marginalized communities which was one of the key reason for the 10 year long civil war. Youth were central to these changes. The below paragraph taken from the policy clearly highlights the demographic strength for the government to come up with National Youth Policy:

“The State has to pursue a concrete policy in order to institutionalize federal democratic republic in consonance with the inclusive, proportional and equal development principles, to maintain national independence and sovereignty of Nepal, materialize the potentiality of youth

leadership in the economic, social, political and cultural transformation and ensure the active participation of the youths in each and every process of state functionality.”

Furthermore, the wound of the civil war and the role they had played both in support of peace and war is manifested in the policy as it talked about *“build up capacity inherent in them in order to develop clean social life founded on justice and morality and the necessity of the policy to support “vulnerable youths”.*

II. WHO DEFINED “YOUTH”

The most controversial issue in National Youth Policy happens to be on defining the age bracket of you. The National Youth Policy defines youth as “women, men and third gender of 16-40 age”. In contrast, United Nations defines ‘youth’ as persons of 15 to 24 years. DFID’s youth participation in development report states age group as a means to capturing the ‘transitional characteristic’ in areas of health, employment, education and identity and esteem of a population. It is more about the transitional experiences of being young (DFID, 2010).

As it is said *“where you stand depends on where you sit”*. The drafting committee which consisted of 23 members had 17 members that belonged to representatives of youth wings of major political parties. Furthermore, most of them were above 30 years old. The rationale for defining age was based on value judgment which said that due to the economic and social context of Nepal, transition took a longer time. It is widely blamed that the drafting committee made space for themselves in the National Youth Council that was to be formed. The provision of an autonomous and executive national youth council to be formed for the implementation of this policy consisting of representatives of the youth organizations of political parties and office-bearers appointed by the Government of Nepal and having organizations structure from the center to the local level lured the drafting committee to recommend such an age range. The definition was totally based on “political and administrative satisficing”. Their decision also happens to be based on value judgment as political career was taken as a reference when it providing argument in terms of ‘career’.

The civil society groups advocating for a lesser age bracket (15 – 29) were tricked as the draft policy first brought down the age to 35 from 40. This resulted in decreased advocacy. But, the final document showed 40 at the final day when the document had to be signed and send to the assembly. Three civil society members wrote a note of dissent. The pro 40 members said that the decision was based on consultation done in different regions. There were 5 consultations done, each consultation had 50 representatives from political parties. And, age was not a criteria while calling in participants for the consultation. The pro 20 group especially represented by civil societies claimed that the age group 15-40 would incorporate both father and son whose needs and aspiration are completely different.

The policy acknowledges the lack of national youth survey at the time of its formulation and promises to make necessary revision to the policy after adolescent and youth survey being carried out by the Central Bureau of Statistics is complete. So, such a large category (16 years to 40 years) was considered ‘youth’ without a scientific rationale. Surprisingly, the National Youth Council ensures the representation of major “*groups conventionally preserved as marginalized*” but doesn’t utter a word about the need for age-based representation in the council thought the whole advocacy about the need for National Youth Policy was underpinned by the fact that age-based discrimination was prevailing.

III. OBJECTIVES AND IMPLEMENTATION

National Youth Policy states “The long-term vision of this National Youth Policy shall be to prepare capable, entrepreneur, creative and competent youths with scientific and positive vision and establish the youths of the country in the leadership role so that they can render a meaningful contribution to the economic, social, political and cultural spheres of the nation, while guaranteeing the basic rights of the youths and also taking into consideration of the sensitiveness of the younger age through youth empowerment.”

Like discussed earlier the objective reflects the present situation or at least an assumption of the situation of where youth are. In its ‘long term vision’ as well as in the objective it forecasts preparing “creative” and “positive vision”. The policy has considerably looked through a ‘threat

lens', the recent political upheaval might influenced the perspective. The policy identifies 17 priority areas thus have multiple objectives and priorities. Here again, the area are largely influenced by World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY)'s priority areas besides these 2 areas relate to migration and conflict reconciliation. Some of the areas include: Education; Youth Empowerment and Leadership Development; Participation: Social and Cultural; Health and Family Well being: HIV/AIDS, Malnutrition, healthy lifestyle, mental health; Drug abuse; Human Trafficking; Environment and Sustainable Development; Science and Technology among other.

The policy is found to lack strategies to handle these multiple objectives clearly. It talks about inter ministry coordination by identifying a focal person in 17 related ministries. Being the youngest Ministry, it doesn't have any administrative mechanism or district level departments. This might come as a serious challenge during implementation. Also, the cross cutting national of youth issues requires coordination amongst various ministries. The policy doesn't indicate on how this coordination is to be done and nothing has been mentioned about the possible conflict of responsibility and interest with other ministries. A constrain analysis isn't seen to have been done.

IV. CONCLUSION

The National Youth Policy has provision for incremental approach to policy refinement. Every 5 year the policy is supposed to be reviewed. The nation needs to be applauded for overcoming the most hectic job of framing the policy. The short coming of the present policy can be overdone in an incremental approach.

Prioritizing the 17 key issue areas on the basis of science rather than value judgment would be very necessary in regards to easier implementation. Also, situation analysis that is based on a relatively old data needs to be up dated with the ongoing census. It will prove essential that programmes be considered with an 'youth as opportunity' lens rather than from a 'youth as threat' perspective.

As the policy is found to lack strategies to handle the proposed multiple objectives. A proper inter ministry coordination through National Planning Commission would be necessary. The very young Ministry of Youth and Sports also needs to build programmatic reputation and capabilities in face of other Ministries by flexing its administrative capabilities. Identifying probable challenges in policy implementation especially in light of cross cutting nature of youth issues has to be clearly forecasted.

A research based analysis of the characteristics displayed by the presently defined youth and how it might be different through the age 15-40 needs to be seriously considered. National Youth Council needs to also consider age based representation apart from “*groups conventionally preserved as marginalized*”.

National Youth Policy is a major breakthrough in the advocacy of youth rights in Nepal. It has the potential to strengthen the prevailing opportunities laden young population. A judicious refinement to it would serve the purpose of it very well.

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