



Indo-Global
Social Service Society

YOUTH Action *for* Peace

Promoting Peace through Youth
Action in Urban Areas of Srinagar,
Jammu and Kashmir





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Indo-Global Social Service Society (IGSSS) is a not for profit development organization established in 1961 to support development programs across India, especially providing services to the vulnerable communities and grass root community based organizations. Our vision is to establish a humane social order based on the tenets of equity, liberty and justice in which the human rights and dignity of every individual is upheld. IGSSS is an autonomous, secular and apolitical organization and its programs do not discriminate people on the basis of their caste, creed, gender and ethnicity. IGSSS implements and supports quality development programs across 22 States and one Union Territory of India.

IGSSS reaches out to more than one lakh families every year through its programs on sustainable livelihood, disaster risk reduction, gender equity, urban poverty reduction and youth development. The programs at IGSSS are targeted towards the poor, marginalized and vulnerable sections of the society with special emphasis on women and children.

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Foreword

The Project, "Youth Action for Peace" aims at mobilizing and organizing vulnerable youth for increased awareness towards services, entitlements, rights and duties through capacity development. The project also focuses on promoting multi-stakeholder dialogue between youth, activists, intellectuals, government officials and representatives from civil society organizations working on issues like Peace, Democracy, Human Rights and entitlements etc. The project is implemented in urban areas of Srinagar district in Kashmir division.

Through this intervention of IGSSS, the youth have been provided opportunities to attend various capacity-building programmes for their personal development. They have acquired skills to work towards the peace building process. Youth groups were formed in diverse communities of Srinagar and their interventions were strategized to bring long term socio-economic development. The initiatives have started yielding positive impact and have been creating rippling effect. Around 11 youth led community based organisations (CBOs) have been formed and 300 youth have been participating in the process. More than 1000 youth from several parts of the valley of Kashmir are connected through this network. This forum is appropriately used to advocate peace in Kashmir.

This study is an attempt to highlight the impact the Program 'Youth Action for Peace' has created among the youth. The outcome of this document will help us in defining our future work with youth. IGSSS greatly acknowledges the support of Caritas Italiana for this programme. We also appreciate the whole hearted cooperation of the youth in this programme.

John Peter Nelson
Executive Director



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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

The term 'youth' does not simply represent an age group but also a period of an individual's life and a condition. It represents a system of attitudinal and behavioural patterns related to a particular position in society. United Nations defines youth as an individual between 15-24 years of age. But this is not mandatory for the Member States, they can define their own age group.¹ Presently, nearly half of the global population is below the age group of 25 years.² The majority of this population is living in developing nations. Millennium Development Goal has also given priority to this age group. Both these factors have led to the youth evolving as an important stakeholder in the global context. India has the largest youth population in the world; around 66% of the total population is below 35 years. Presently in India, every third person is a young person (15-24 years).³ The population size of young people in Jammu and Kashmir is 2.39 million. This clearly explains the reason for focussing on the youth group.

In 2012, the United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development conducted a survey of 13,000 young people from 186 countries. The study identified the challenges that obstruct youth participation in the process of development. The primary reason was found to be the limited opportunities for youth to participate in decision-making processes. There is dearth of participatory structures at the community and national level added to which there is a deficit of trust between youth and government institutions. Hence, capacity development programmes for the youth and youth organisations are essential to overcome this situation.

As has been stated before, there are various definitions regarding the age group of the youth. United Nations considers 15-24 years as the age group that comprises the youth category. However, the United Nations Volunteering defines youth as persons belonging to the age group between 18 and 29 years as it is felt that knowledge, maturity, experience and conditions of services are most appropriate for this age group.⁴ IGSSS on a similar rationale has defined the age group of 15-35 years as 'youth'. The Preamble of the UN Programme of Action for Peace states that, "people represent agents, beneficiaries and victims of major societal changes... Young people in all parts of the world, living in countries at different stages of development and in different socio-economic settings, aspire to full participation in the life of society." The Kashmiri youth are no exception. They also want to positively contribute towards the development of the society. Vibrant, active, self-motivating and enthusiastic are some of the characteristic traits representing youth which make them relevant to contribute to peace building. This process has been hindered in Kashmir due to the ongoing unrest which has led to economic

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1 **Definition of youth.** United Nations Youth <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-definition.pdf>

2 **World Youth Report 2005.** <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/uny/in/documents/wyr05book.pdf>

3 **Census of India.** 2011 <http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011-Common/World-Population.html>

4 *ibid*



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instability, unemployment, poverty etc. Unrest in the Valley escalated since the 1990s leading to continuous protests, shutdowns, curfews etc. Youth who form nearly 60% of the population in Kashmir, are caught in a vicious cycle of violence and uncertainty. The lack of transparent space also obstructs their participation in the peace building process.

This project has proved that given the opportunity and guidance, Kashmiri youth can meaningfully engage in socio-economic developments of their communities leading to long-term conflict resolution and sustainable peace. This can be achieved only if the priorities of the youth are better understood and safe forum or spaces are provided to them to articulate their interests. These spaces should encourage discourses related to their common concerns and promote their engagement with substantive socio-economic priorities of their communities.

IGSSS through ‘Youth Action for Peace’ has proven that with appropriate capacity building of the youth cadre and providing spaces to them so that they can share their thoughts and views, can help in building leaders of peacebuilding. Youth will positively contribute towards the socio-economic development of their communities thereby impacting the conflict resolution process.

This project was initiated in 2011, a year after extreme unrest in the Valley making it the most appropriate time to channelize the energy of the youth towards the development process. In the last four years this project has helped in reaching out directly to 390 youth in Srinagar and 1060 youths indirectly.

The purpose of this document is to capture the journey of the project since 2011. It will focus on encapsulating the impact and learnings of the project. The project had to and continues to confront various challenges which are shared in Chapter Six. The Third chapter will provide an insight to the situational analysis of the State

and will talk about the intervention areas. The theoretical discourses regarding the concept of youth's participation in the peace building process will be briefly shared in Chapter Four. The following chapter elaborates the genesis of the project and the different activities that have been undertaken to attain the goal of the project. The last chapter provides concluding words.

Methodology

Before delving further in the report, it is important to share the methodology that has been used to develop this document.

Following discussions with the IGSSS staff, data and relevant documents including programmatic reports, reports developed by fellows, research study documents, photographs etc. were collected. Focussed group discussions (FGDs) and interview sessions were the two medium of collecting qualitative information from the primary stakeholders of the project which included youth members of the CBOs and network.

FGDs was selected as a method of capturing data as it provides an opportunity to understand not just the group dynamics but also helps capture the shared experiences that may remain unrecorded during the interview process. Semi-structured questionnaires were used during this process to gather systematic as well as uninhibited information from the groups/individuals. Effort was made to ensure that a conducive environment was provided to the participants to collect accurate and qualitative information.

Interview method was used to capture experiences of individual youth members. In order to implement these methods it was very important to select a good sample. Hence, the simple random sampling method was used in case of the youth groups. Thus, FGDs were conducted among 6 youth groups out of the 11 groups that had been formed. As there is only one network, discussion was also conducted with them.

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Chapter Two

YOUTH IN KASHMIR- A SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

Mughal emperor Jahangir called the valley 'Paradise of the Earth' due to its beauty, even if scenically this is an epidemic truth

Any effort to write about Kashmir conspicuously induces the use of words and expression like political violence, shutdowns, political instability etc. It seems almost naïve to mention that Kashmir geographically denotes the gorgeous valley between the Himalayas and the Pir Panjal mountain range; that Srinagar (34.09 N, 74.79 E) and Jammu (33.45N, 76.24E) are the summer and winter capitals of the State of Jammu and Kashmir. It seems unjust in the current scenario, to mention that the Mughal emperor Jahangir called the Valley, 'Paradise of the Earth' due to its beauty, even if scenically this is an epidemic truth. The seemingly positive facts like male literacy rose to 76.75 % as per 2011 census from 66.60 in 2001; or female literacy has seen a rise of about 13% (56.43% -2011 census) compared to 2001 hardly indicates a state of normalcy or a social transformation towards a positive index. The fact that the state of J&K denotes a large land mass politically claimed, administered and divided between three different sovereign countries is symptomatic of its fractured and volatile situation. Politically, the State of Jammu & Kashmir has been a point of constant rivalry among the neighbouring nations of China, India and Pakistan. In the context of this report we will only focus on the summer capital Srinagar.

The Kashmir situation is one of the most confounding situations in international politics which has impacted society at large and youth in particular. Dating back to 1989, the immediate impact was the exodus of about 0.1 million Hindu 'Kashmiri Pandits'. According to official records death toll after nearly two decades of insurgency in Kashmir is over 47,000 people⁵. However, Kashmir's main separatist group, the All Parties Hurriyat (Freedom) Conference, says more than 100,000 people have died since insurgency broke out in 1989. The figure does not include people who disappeared as a result of the conflict. A human rights group puts the number of missing Kashmiris at 10,000 although authorities say many of them may have vanished to join the insurgency. According to the disputed figures, there are 27,000 widows and 22,000 children orphaned during militancy which is refuted by figures of disparity claiming that there are 32,400 widows and 97,000 to 100,000 orphans in the Valley. Whatever may be the truth, conflicting numbers do suggest one thing in common: that Kashmir has seen a lot of bloodshed in the past two and a half decades which has left deep scar on the social psyche. As Anwasha Ray Chaudhuri in the article "The Changing Aspirations of Kashmiri Youth"⁶ pinpoints that the underlying suppression of political and democratic space (sabotage and influencing the democratic electoral process, heightened sense of insecurity from Indian perspective) eventually took shape of armed struggle in the region which could not be mitigated by large economic packages or jobs.

5 India Revises Kashmir death toll to 47000. Reuters. <http://in.reuters.com/article/2008/11/21/idINIndia-36624520081121>

6 Ray Chaudhuri, A., The Changing Aspirations of Kashmiri Youth. <http://www.kashmirilit.org/the-changing-aspirations-of-kashmiri-youth/>

Unfortunately, violent clashes, sporadic incidences of militancy have continued in the valley of Kashmir despite the paradigm shift from an armed struggle to unarmed street protests (albeit incidences of stone pelting have continued).

There are many references that amidst this complex situation youth have been at the forefront of the movement since 1989. A large number of youth swept the streets of Srinagar in particular and Kashmir in general during the 2008 movement (centring around the Amarnath Shrine Land dispute which took an ugly religious colour and accounted for 50-70 civilian deaths, mostly youth), and during 2010 summer uprising resulting in more than hundred civilian deaths (again mostly youth).

In other words while youth from other less volatile states of India, have benefitted from the changing economic paradigm and globalization, the Kashmiri youth are still languishing in the sphere of political identity. It is truly ironic that when India woke up to an open economy during the 90s, Kashmir and its youth were subject to shrinking socio-economic and political space. Based on numerous secondary data sources and interactions/interviews of the youth groups the following have emerged as reasons for the continued alienation, confusion and loss of faith of Kashmiri youth:

- Lack of a single credible voice/ forum with a road map to do away with the stalemate political situation;
- Increasing disillusionment with non-violent means leading to insecurity
- Continued protests, shutdowns, killings and their ramification
- Governance – lack of transparent mechanism and process in aspects of civil life, educations, jobs, social security;
- Rampant nepotism pervading the structures and institutions of public and social life;
- Economic paralysis – lack of livelihood options, jobs and a prospective economic future;
- Lack of faith in civil society movement including the validity and credibility of NGOs;
- Lack of individual understanding on Rights, Services, Duties, Responsibilities, Alliance;
- Lack of space for open dialogue and expression – this refers to both lack physical space like clubs, parks, sports facilities and lack of space for voicing expressions like art groups, open forums. Chat shows, cultural programmes etc; (the emergence of vibrant social media has improved the situation but then that virtual space often is curbed by sanctions, prosecutions, and the reach of such medium is limited in Kashmir);
- Lack of credible education system/ institutions/ skill training facilities oriented towards job markets
- Reports of Kashmiri students being prosecuted, expelled, denied funds under central schemes adds up to disillusionment and loss of faith.

It has been more than two decades now that deep tectonic forces have worked against the social fabric of the valley. These forces have been gnawing at the centuries old tradition and values of Kashmir. This migration is not physical, but cultural, driven largely by a misplaced sense of morality. A new breed of religious preachers and their blind followers are finding their ways into our lives through TV and internet.

**Tariq Jameel-
understanding
our inverted moral
compass- Greater
Kashmir- 14 August
2015**

Till now, not a single member of the security forces deployed in the state has been tried for human rights violations in a civilian court. This lack of accountability has in turn facilitated other serious abuses.

Amnesty international

- Rampant drug abuse
- Issues of mental health

There is a possibility that there may be other issues considering the complex situation plaguing the Kashmiri youth.

The political conflict and widespread violence over the last two decades has led to many social evils which were unheard of in Kashmiri society which was quite homogeneous. Women and the girl child has been affected most severely. Incidences of domestic violence have increased. According to one survey, about 40% of women in Kashmir are physically or mentally abused by their husbands or their in-laws. Provisional figures released by the Census 2011 show a staggering drop of 82 points in the child sex ratio (ages 0-6) in J&K – from 941 in 2001 to 859. The headlong decline has been worse in the Valley districts. Compared to 2001 data the following districts show a dismal figure which baffles any discourse of reasoning - Pulwama has come down more than 200 points from 1046 to 831, Kupwara to 854 from 1021, Budgam to 832 from 1004, Shopian to 883 from 1011, Kulgam to 882 from 1003. Incidences of drug abuse are increasing at the rate of 35-40 per cent in the last few years, most of them youth including females. In 2014, 633 cases were registered at the Police Control Room (PCR), which had gone up to 1,978 in 2015. While eighty one percent of those who visited PCR for drug de-addiction were male, nineteen percent were females.

IGSSS is working in the backdrop of these extremely difficult circumstances having to negotiate (i) historical baggage (ii) the disillusioned fractured present and (iii) seemingly futile and hopeless future. To embark on a journey of peace, ensuring non-violent ways of activism and articulation within a framework of an inefficient political system is a road less travelled. IGSSS is trying to walk a path towards peace building along with the vibrant youth of Srinagar and Kashmir at large.

The intervention areas have been selected keeping in mind the vulnerable and at risk groups, i.e. the youth. However it must be mentioned that during the selection process, IGSSS faced difficulties when intervening in volatile areas. In the end, the areas selected were done on the basis of the impact of conflict on youth, level of development of individuals and the communities, zeal of youth to work for development and peace building and livelihood opportunities available to them. Hence, the intervention areas finally selected along with the name of the group constituted are as follows:

1. **Batapora:** Batapora is situated outskirts of the city. It is not an exclusively volatile area but has its own plethora of problems. "Afreen Youth Group" has been formed here.
2. **Lal Bazar:** This area is not very volatile but is close to a few other volatile areas. A boys group of the area has been formed, the "Youth Social Welfare Group".
3. **Rainawari:** A volatile downtown area prone to disturbances at the slightest provocation. This area is usually hit with any change in security situation. Name of youth group of this area is "Youth Social Awareness Group".

4. **Dal Kalan:** This area is in the interiors of the Dal Lake and though usually not directly volatile, is affected by volatile situations and suffers due lack of basic facilities. The area is cut off from the rest of the city given its location. There is no motorable road to the community and community pattern is closed. The community is unique in the way it houses the people, with no walls surrounding the houses. The people rear livestock and grow vegetables as if they are living in one big compound. However much as one would like to admire this sociological phenomenon; the problems that stare one in the face are too big to be ignored. To name just a few, there is a lack of basic facilities such as sanitation, educational institutes, healthcare facilities and road connectivity. It feels like being in a village when you are actually standing in the heart of Srinagar. It has been an area that has been neglected for long and its the inhabitants have not been able to do anything about it due to the low levels of literacy in the area. The youth group of this area is registered as a Trust called “Almuntazir Welfare Trust”.
5. **Eidgah:** A volatile downtown area, directly affected by disturbances. Eidgah is named after the vast ground present in the area used for congregational Eid prayers. A boys’ group of the area has been formed and named as “Eidgah Youth Forum for Change”.
6. **Habbak:** This area is on the periphery of the city and houses fishermen and faces marginalisation as this particular community is subject to occupation based discrimination. Fishermen are looked down upon as a ‘lower class’ in the social hierarchy and thereby excluded from mingling with the ‘upper class’ Kashmiris. Name of the youth group of this area is the “Khidmat Guzaar Youth Group”
7. **Hawal:** Hawal is a predominantly volatile area prone to violence and, of late, prone to sectarian clashes. It is also close to extremely violence prone areas such as Nowhatta and Gojwara. A mixed boys and girls group is present in this area and named as “Al-Mehdi Youth Group”.
8. **Behrar:** Also known as ‘Leper’s Colony’, this area houses people affected by leprosy from all over the state. Needless to say they bear the brunt of being socially marginalised and ostracised from the mainstream society. A mixed group of boys and girls working in this colony named as “Peace Revolutionaries Youth Group”.
9. **Qamarwari:** Qamarwari, a volatile area prone to many problems like drug addiction, gambling and low literacy. The youth with limited education are unemployed and live in a volatile atmosphere and as such are very vulnerable to stress. With stress comes a desire to escape, a solution to which is found in drug abuse and gambling. It is evident that both drug abuse and gambling also lead to stealing, to acquire the money required. The problem of drug addiction is also prominent in Eidgah, which is also a very volatile area in downtown. A boys’ group of the area has been formed and named as “Petrol Youth Group”.
10. **Chinarbagh:** A slum area near to Lal Chowk, Srinagar where people live in a very miserable condition. 10% of the community is educated. The people of the community are mostly sweepers working in municipality department.

The area is prey to a multitude of problems viz a viz poverty, drug addiction, gambling, drop outs, child marriages and low literacy. In this area, there is girls' group named as "Sunshine Girls Group".

11. **Ladakhi Youth Group:** A group formed under the YAP that comprises of Ladakhi Students named as "Focus Ladakh Youth Group". This group was formed with a rationale that in Kashmir, Ladakhi students at many places like in colleges, universities, forums feel a sense of humiliation. In order to resolve this conflict, the group was formed to provide them equal opportunity to express themselves.



Chapter Three

PEACE BUILDING AND YOUTH: A PERSPECTIVE

Conflict has a significant impact on any society. Any form of conflict results in loss of human lives, destruction of properties, loss of livelihood, lack of opportunities in terms of economic growth and human development. Generally, being both the victims and witnesses of conflict, stimulates that negative feeling in hearts and mind of people in general and youth in particular - making them extremely vulnerable.

Kreisberg (1998) states that “a social conflict exists when two or more persons or groups manifest the belief that they have incompatible objectives.”⁷ In other words, conflict occurs naturally between two more persons or parties with different ideologies and interests. It may occur at formal or informal set up. If conflict is not addressed timely it may aggravate and lead to violence.

Kashmir has been facing a similar situation since 1990s. The Kashmiri youth and adolescents who have experienced early aggression, a violent childhood are at the highest risk of perpetrating violence. They are highly vulnerable because of their lack of necessary skills to communicate through non-violent means. Youth sensitised on conflict prevention and peace building procedures may yield long-term positive results.

History has proven that young people have been the “vanguards of social change”⁸. Many revolutions were led by young students or activists. Some of the glaring examples are the Naxal movement in the 60s and 70s in West Bengal, All Assam Student Union agitation in Assam in 1984, the youth agitation on the issue of anti-reservation in Gujarat in 1985, anti-Mandal agitation in North India in 1990. An important phenomenon of the twentieth century was the emergence of youth as a major force in national movements in different parts of the world including India. Under Mahatma Gandhi’s tutelage a large number of young men and women actively participated in the independence movement.

Peace building is a term which is used in varied forms. A common definition is ‘to strengthen the relations and positive patterns of engagement between individuals and groups.’⁹ It must be inclusive in nature and establish greater social cohesion. John Paul Lederach, an eminent scholar on peace building, shares that though peace building is not just a reaction to a situation of conflict but also a means to

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7 Dedring, J. On Peace In Times Of War: Resolving Violent Conflicts by Peaceful Means. http://www.gmu.edu/programs/icar/ijps/vol4_2/dedring.htm

8 Youth and Peace Building NGO input for the Peacebuilding Architecture Review UNOY Peacebuilder, 2015 URL: <http://unoy.org/wp-content/uploads/Peacebuilding-Architecture-Review-Youth-and-Peacebuilding.pdf>.

9 Danesh, Dr. R., Youth and Peacebuilding. 2008. URL: www.tc.columbia.edu/.../DaneshYouthandPeaceBuilding_22feb08.doc

A neglect of adolescents and older young people is short sighted and counter-productive in terms of peace building particularly in the crucial post-accord phase with its twin challenges of violence prevention/accord maintenance and societal reconciliation and reconstruction

ensure that conflict can be prevented in future. It is an essential life skill and is relevant in all societies.

Youth as a social category in the analysis of conflict and peace processes must be analysed in relation to variables such as ethnicity, religion, race, gender, class and exposure to violence.

Young people can be protected from violent conflict by providing a positive vision to shape their future through participation in issues pertaining to their lives including peace and security and the provision of quality education and livelihood opportunities.

Various documents by international organisations share that the participation of young people in the peace building process is largely an untapped resource.¹⁰ They can be involved in their respective communities to constructively address and propagate peace. They have the creativity and leadership quality to strategize and walk on the path of peace building process. Their actual contribution and potential as important conspirators of inclusive peace, social justice, sustainable development and economic prosperity must be recognised and tapped in a systemic manner. As stakeholders and leaders, the inclusion of young people in peace building process ensures a relevant, representative and active category of society.

Although history has witnessed the critical role of youth in peace building process, it has recently gained the international focus. The mechanisms of youth engagement in this process and its contents are still in the early stage of experimentation. Very limited academic studies and research have been conducted on this issue. As Siobhan Mc Envoy states, "Neither children nor youth appear as important variables in the literature on peace processes. Nor, authors of important UN reports admit, have adolescents been separately or well considered even in studies of war-affected children. A neglect of adolescents and older young people is short sighted and counterproductive in terms of peace building particularly in the crucial post-accord phase with its twin challenges of violence prevention/accord maintenance and societal reconciliation and reconstruction. Youth embody essential elements of both challenges: posing at once potential threats to peace and peace building resources."¹¹

In the post-independence period, several academic studies and research were conducted on youth and youth culture as a separate entity. Many social scientists have attempted to identify different aspects, conditions and problems concerning Indian youth with special focus on their education and occupational aspirations, values and attitudes and so on. The studies were initiated in early sixties. Some of them are:

She who Rides The Peacock: Indian students and social change (1961) by Margaret Cormack

Social change and college students of Gujarat (1964) by B.V.Shah

¹⁰ ibid

¹¹ McEvoy-Levy,S., Youth as Social and Political Agents: Issues in Post-Settlement Peace Building, Kroc Institute Occasional Papers, 21: OP2 (2001).

The Restive Students: Strands and Themes in Contemporary Youth Culture (1972) by S.C.Dube

Study of the Youth and Established Culture: Dissent and Cooperation (1976) by Kirpal Prem

Rural Youth in Urban India (1983) by P.K. Gandhi

Values and Attitudes of Indian Youth (1986) by N.Y. Reddy

Indian Youth: Problems and Prospects (1995) by M. Abdul and M. Noor

Youth, media and social change (2005) by Sushila Jain

There is very limited literature related to the youth of Jammu and Kashmir, especially in case of Kashmir. Most of those studies are focused on the urban youth especially the college students as they are more visible to the media, can be surveyed easily and to some extent do share their thoughts while being interviewed.

IGSSS under this 'Youth Action for Peace' project conducted a significant research study on the Issues of Urban Youth with special focus on Srinagar. This study was conducted by Dr. Bilal Ahmad Bhatt. It discusses the issues of the urban youth living in Kashmir.

Dr. Bhatt, in the study, discussed different sociological theories. Scanning through them and based on the survey conducted, he has shown how structural functionalism and conflict theory perspectives are most relevant in the understanding and application of youth and their issues in Kashmir in general and urban youth in particular.



Chapter Four

A PROGNOSIS OF 'YOUTH ACTION FOR PEACE'

Genesis of the project

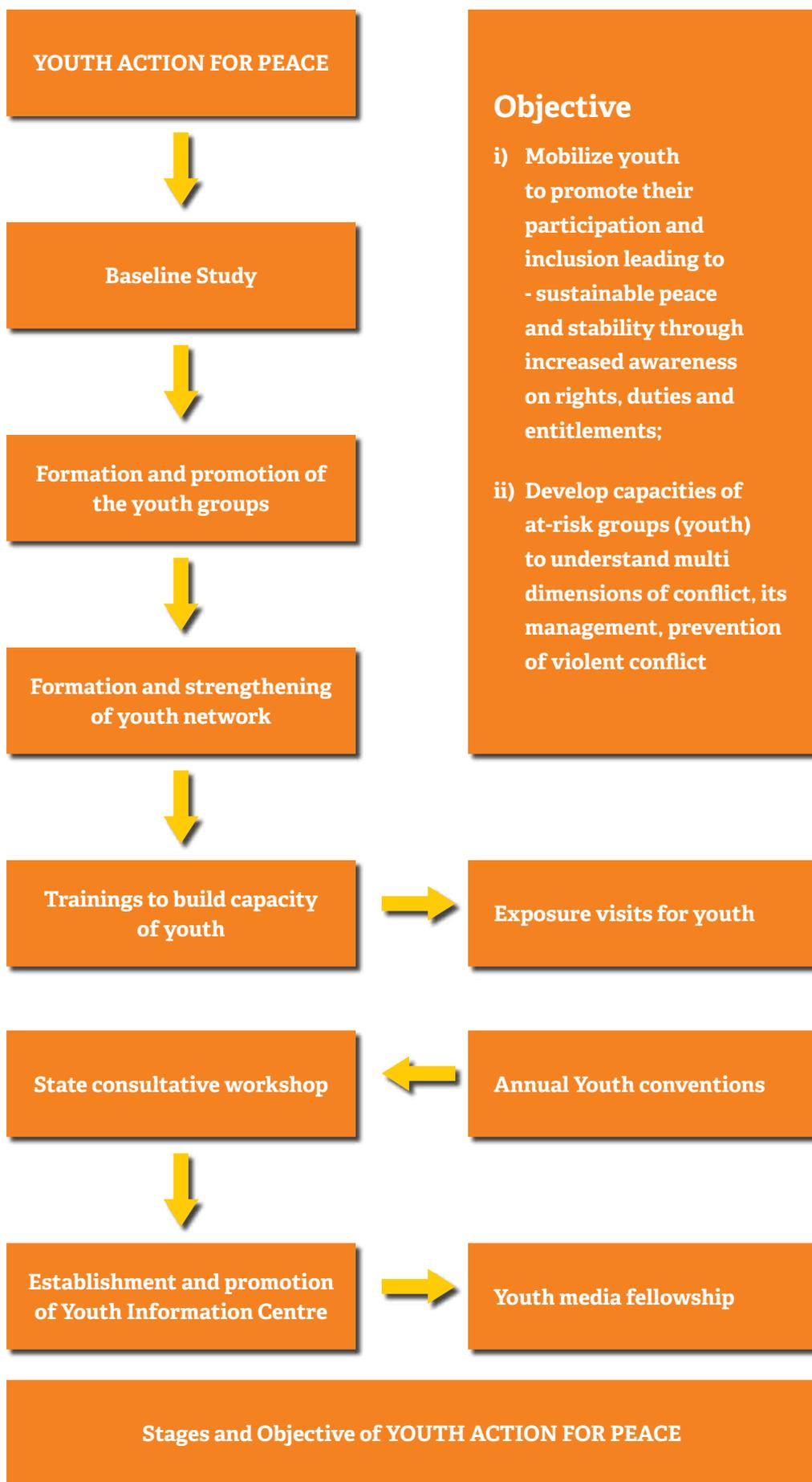
As discussed in the earlier section, youth plays a critical role in bringing change in the society. With the objective of promoting youth as Change Makers, IGSSS has been implementing a programme, SMILE, since two decades across various states of India. The objective of the programme is to orient rural and urban youth towards socio-economic conditions, develop their ability to analyse and take action, and promote employability. With this diverse experience, IGSSS initiated '**Youth Action for Peace' in 2011 in the state of Jammu and Kashmir.**

Youth Action for Peace was an innovative programme which directly worked with urban youth living in volatile and unpredictable situations, providing them a platform to express their views and opinions and engage with like-minded people, institutions etc. This initiative was also unique considering that there was/ is a negative common perception among the youth about the functioning of any independent group/ NGO working in Kashmir. Working for and with the youth having such perception was a challenge in itself.

The project was a step towards ensuring peace in the Valley. The **goal of the project** was "to contribute towards lessening conflict and promoting affirmative youth action for peace and development by reducing the gaps between stakeholders in Kashmir."

The **specific objectives** have evolved over the period of project implementation. Two important objectives included:

- i) Mobilize youth to promote their participation and inclusion in initiatives leading to sustainable peace and stability through increased awareness on rights, duties and entitlements in conflict affected areas.
- ii) Develop capacities of at-risk groups (youth) to understand multi dimensions of conflict, its management, prevention of violent conflict and build confidence to represent and negotiate with the volatile situation.



Programmatic Activities

The potential and power of the youth of Srinagar needed to be nurtured to sustain the process of peace building. The following activities were undertaken to develop a large cohort of youth who would bring a sustained positive change in the Kashmiri society.

Baseline study

Any Baseline study provides an information base essential to monitor and assess the progress and effectiveness during the implementation and after completion of the programme. In other words, it is a prerequisite for developing an effective impact oriented plan. IGSSS conducted a baseline study which formed the basis for intervention in different communities. It also helped develop a perspective regarding the opinions of diverse stakeholders on youth issues. The sample of the study included 400 youth, 180 families, 5 NGOs/CSOs, 8 government officials and 2 media persons. Focus group discussions and interviews were conducted to understand the urban youth in eight localities of Srinagar including Aluchi Bagh, Batamaloo, Bemina, Batpora, Dal (interior), Rainawari, Rajourikadal and Rajbagh.

Formation and promotion of the youth groups

Following the baseline study, IGSSS team finalized the intervention areas for this project. Successive meetings and interactions were held in the communities to convince the youth living in the target area as well as the community leaders on how the youth groups will have a positive impact on their communities. After a series of meetings, the groups were formed and they started working as CBOs within their communities. The purpose was to guide these groups to become potential resource pools within the community and capacitate them to develop qualities to lead a lasting change in a social set up that is completely adult driven.

As the concept of youth groups was a very novel idea in the traditional community set up of the Valley, a series of sensitization meetings and orientations were held with every youth group separately. These meetings were organized for the groups to understand the concepts of group dynamics, power structures and various other processes of group formation and functioning. As a result the group structures were formed and the operational guidelines were also developed which included the bye-laws. The youth started to identify themselves as part of a larger system and started to work as systemic action groups. They were able to define the objectives of their own groups and developed the ability to plan their actions for bringing positive change in their communities. In other words, every youth started nurturing their leadership quality and moved towards becoming a change agent within the society.

Presently, 11 community based groups have been formed and are actively working. The groups are structured with a minimum of 10 members and a maximum of 15 members in each group between the ages of 15-35 years. These groups act as platforms for bringing the youth together to discuss issues in their communities, and deliberate on the possible solutions to these issues. These groups include both boys and girls. The groups are as follows:

Successive meetings and interactions were held in the communities to convince the youth of those target area as well as the community leaders on how the youth groups will have a positive impact on their communities.

- 1) Afreen Youth Group - Batapora
- 2) Youth Welfare Organization - Lal Bazar
- 3) Youth Social Awareness Group – Rainawari
- 4) Al Muntazir Youth Group – Dal Kalaan
- 5) Eidgah Youth Forum for Change – Eidgah
- 6) Khidmat Guzar Youth Group – Habbak
- 7) Al Mehdi Youth Group – Hawal
- 8) Peace Revolutionaries Youth Group – Behrar
- 9) Sunshine Girls Group – Chinargbagh
- 10) Focus Ladakh Youth Group – Dargah
- 11) Petrol Youth Group – Qamarwari

The youth groups have 163 members, of which 55 are girls and 108 are boys.

Following a series of capacity building programmes the youth were capacitated to utilize their skills and work on different issues to take steps towards bringing peace in this conflict prone valley. These initiatives will be discussed in a following sub-section of this chapter.

Formation and strengthening of youth network

The conflict in Kashmir has always forced the youth to suppress their emotions and views. In 2012, a few young professionals attended a series of trainings organised on governance, life skills, conflict management etc. under the 'Youth Action for Peace' project. It provided them an opportunity to share their experiences without any inhibition. As a network member mentioned, "We felt that this stage is made for us." They felt inspired and motivated to drive themselves along with their peers towards this peace building process. Following this, the youth network named **Roots of Chinar Kashmir (ROCKS)** was formed with the aim to create a platform for youth from diverse backgrounds to come together and contribute towards the common goal of PEACE. ROCKS presently has 250 members from various professional and educational backgrounds including civil society members, NGO professionals, lawyers, media professionals and others.

In last three years, the contribution of the network in the attainment of the goal of the project has been immense. They have not just organized various activities but have counselled the youth groups to ensure their retention and have also guided them by organizing various awareness programmes in their communities. They utilised their professional experiences to help the youth group members to understand the issues. ROCKS organized activities for the youth including sessions on youth rights, career counselling etc. They even filmed an audio-visual documentary on violence against women and shared it in the communities followed by discussions which were highly appreciated and positively accepted.

For wider outreach a social network page was created. Presently, more than 330 youth and other professionals are following this page with the goal to strive for amity, equality, brotherhood, espousing the problems Kashmiris face and their probable solutions. The page can be accessed with the following link:

ROCKS organized activities for the youth including sessions on youth rights, career counselling etc. They even filmed an audio-visual documentary on violence against women and shared in the communities and had discussions on it which was highly appreciated and positively accepted

Roots of Chinar Kashmir (ROCKS) <https://www.facebook.com/groups/ROCKSKASHMIR/>

The youth network is expected to play a very crucial role in the future to sustain the programme and create a wider impact amongst the urban youth of Kashmir.

Trainings to build capacity of youth on life skills, governance, human rights, development entrepreneurship, street theatre etc.

Most the youth in Kashmir have lacked exposure due to the ongoing disturbances in the Valley and its repercussions have restricted their mobility beyond the State. As mentioned in an above section, one of the objectives of the project was to develop capacities of the youth to understand the multi-dimensions of conflict, its management and prevention.

IGSSS through its project 'Youth Action for Peace' organised a series of capacity building programmes including trainings, workshops and orientations. One of the biggest outcome of these trainings was that the youth now understand how to cope up with the fallout of conflict and are well equipped to take assertive actions in their society in a more coherent way. Their critical thinking ability has increased and they are continuously engaging in actions which will bring peace to the Valley.

During these programmes different alternative means of expression including fine arts, writing in different forms (prose or poetry) and street theatre have been inculcated so that they can convey their opinions on different issues in a more inclusive and coherent form.

Various trainings on personality development like leadership training and life skills programmes were conducted. Series of trainings on governance was also conducted to make the youth conscious of their rights as citizens. Trainings were also held on different government welfare schemes so that they can create linkage of the respective government departments with their communities to access the schemes.

'Conflict management' was a very important theme on which the youth were trained. Even though they had lived their entire life in a conflict prone zone, they had very little knowledge about the concept of conflict. The objective of the training was not only to build understanding on conflict and its impact but also guide them in devising various strategies to resolve conflict in a peaceful manner and maintain harmony in society. This training was conducted for both the youth group members of rural and urban areas, students of educational institutions like Islamic University and Kashmir University, network members etc.. A series of trainings at the community level were also organised to develop a common understanding on this issue.

Based on the needs of the youth, many other trainings were also organised which developed the skills required to build a peaceful cohesive society. Most youth members have appreciated the capacity building programmes as they have built the morale of the participants. Many of them stated that for the first time in their lives, people have respected their views and and have given importance to their thoughts and opinions.

Youth Action for Peace' organised a series of capacity building programmes including trainings, workshops and orientations. One of the biggest outcome of these trainings was that the youth now understand how to cope up with the fallout of conflict and are well equipped to take assertive actions in their society in a more coherent way

Exposure visits for youth

Due to the geographical location, political situation and other reasons, Kashmir is alienated from the rest of India. The youth of this state has been affected by this. They have not had an opportunities or access to appropriate forums to share their experiences and knowledge beyond the state. This has impacted their personal growth. 'Youth Action for Peace' project has provided the youth an opportunity to share their experiences directly with the youth of other State. The exposure visit also provided them the scope to learn about the problems and pressing issues, aspirations, and medium of expression of youth from other states. Exposure visits were organised in 2012 and 2015 to Pravah, a Delhi based youth organization whose focus is on engaging young people from conflict stricken regions in dialogue and conflict transformation activities based on intercultural learning and providing them with a positive experience in living and learning together. The visits helped youth members to identify and discuss challenges faced by young people and develop leadership skills and learn conflict resolution, peace-making and peace building at all levels. In the words of the youth group members, these visits have been an extremely enriching experience and such experiences have been able to build confidence not only within the group but within the individual member as well.

Youth led initiatives

As community based institutions, the youth groups have been undertaking affirmative initiatives in their communities. As the youth groups are in the formative stage, the role of the IGSSS in this process was extremely crucial. They have not only provided financial support, but have guided and facilitated the entire process.

The capacity development programmes have not only built skills of the youth members, but have made them more responsible citizens. They have developed the capacity to identify social issues within their communities that need to

“IGSSS staffs have guided us throughout starting from the process of group formation. They have always motivated is and helped retain our belief. They have provided support in every step we took including accessing the government schemes.” Khidmat Guzaar Youth Group Member, Habak



be addressed. The youth are more aware about their rights and have started demanding access and implementation of the government schemes. Several non-violent means have been implemented by the groups to attain these. They include rallies, community meetings, signature campaigns, trainings, street theatre, fine arts etc.

Some of the issues/themes on which the groups have tried to create awareness within the community that will help build peace in society are:

Name of Youth Group	Geographical Location	Issues of intervention in the community
Afreen Youth Group	Batapora	Domestic violence, Dowry system, adolescent girls' health and schemes, Awareness on Right to Information Act and Public Service Guarantee Act, Disaster Management
Youth Welfare Organization	Lal Bazar	Awareness on Right to Information Act and Public Service Guarantee Act, Disaster Management
Youth Social Awareness Group	Rainawari	Awareness on Right to Information Act, Awareness on welfare schemes, Disaster Management
Al Muntazir Youth Group	Dal Kalaan	Community health and sanitation, Drop out
Eidgah Youth Forum for Change	Eidgah	Crime against women in Kashmir, Training on First Aid, Awareness on Public Service Guarantee Act , Drug de-addiction, Child abuse
Khidmat Guzar Youth Group	Habbak	Disaster Management, Awareness on Health and Sanitation, Caste system
Al Mehdi Group	Hawal	Awareness on Public Service Guarantee Act and Consumer Rights, Women's health and hygiene
Peace Revolutionaries Youth Group	Behrar	Drug de-addiction, Female foeticide, Awareness on Right to Information Act and Public Service Guarantee Act
Sunshine Girls Group	Chinarbagh	Awareness on Right to Information Act and Public Service Guarantee Act
Focus Ladakh Youth Group	Dargah	Awareness on Right to Information Act and Public Service Guarantee Act. Drug de-addiction
Petrol Youth Group	Qamarwari	Drug de-addiction

The youth groups have recently taken the decision to work on common issues in all communities. Thus, they have decided to work on ensuring retention in schools. They believe that working on the same issue will create a deeper impact across the entire city.

Urban rural youth partnership

Rural urban divide is a common phenomenon in all societies. It is prevalent in Kashmir as well. If peace needs to be truly attained this rift also needs to be bridged. The youth of Srinagar felt this urge and thus, IGSSS initiated a series of meetings between the urban and rural youth. This urban - rural youth partnership also helped build synergy within the youth related IGSSS programmes. This forum provided youth a common platform to share their concerns and develop strategies to overcome them. It made the young people realise that they may belong to diverse backgrounds with varied experiences but they have common issues to deal with -- that is building peace and harmony in the valley of Kashmir. In the words of the youth members, it has been a great learning experience that helped bridge the gap. However, this partnership is still in a nascent stage. The biggest challenge to sustaining this, is coordination among the members. It is very difficult to bring the rural and urban youth to a common place because of the geographical distance between them.

Interaction with various stakeholders

The youth of Kashmir have limited opportunities to interact with other stakeholders such as government departments, judiciary, media etc. The Project hoped that these meetings would help build conviction of the youth towards the systems in place. Thus, during the project implementation period, interactions were held with the State Human Rights Commission and RTI Commission, Jammu and Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society, Centre for Law and Development etc.

Continuous interactions and meetings by the IGSSS project staff and youth have helped establish linkages with Entrepreneurship Development Institute (EDI), Kashmir, Nehru Yuva Kendra, Department of Youth Services and Sports, various departments of Kashmir University and Islamic University of Science and Technology. Interface meeting was held with Directorate of Lifelong Learning of Kashmir University which resulted in a collaborated workshop in Dal.

Annual Youth conventions

The Youth Convention is an annual programme which has been organised since 2011. Nearly 100 young people from youth groups and the youth network have participated in this process and have shared their experience while working towards peace. The objective of this programme was to provide an informal platform to demonstrate their opinions regarding conflict management in the Valley through creative means. The Conventions have provided an opportunity to know about the experiences and learnings of various groups. These Conventions have helped motivate the group and network members and have also provided direction towards better performance in the peace building process. The

participants also share their feedback regarding the project or related activities, which was extremely beneficial for the project.

State consultative workshop

A State Consultative Workshop based on the theme of “**Entrepreneurship in Kashmir: A critical overview**” was organised where over 125 youth participated. The objective of the event was to create a platform for various stakeholders, including government departments, NGOs, University departments of social work and management, aspiring and established entrepreneurs and others to discuss the scenario of entrepreneurship in Jammu and Kashmir. It provided an opportunity to students from educational institutions to identify loopholes and hurdles in entrepreneurship so that ways could be devised which encouraged youth entrepreneurship in Kashmir. The participating youth got the opportunity and an open platform to discuss their concerns and nuances about entrepreneurship. This workshop also provided the stage for dialogue between the upcoming entrepreneurs and established entrepreneurs.

Establishment and promotion of Youth Information Centre

During the initial period of the project, a Youth Information Centre (YIC) was set up to make information related to education and career more accessible to the urban youth. However, it was realized that due to the centralized location of the YIC, it was not possible for all youth to utilize this facility. Thus, an online page was created on a popular social network site, Facebook to make it accessible to wider audience. Presently, more than 700 youth including members and non-members are accessing this page. The page features regular updates on education and career and caters to the need of youth. Apart from this, YIC is also used as a library by the youth for borrowing and reading books and other literature that were unavailable to them.

The following is the link to the Youth Information Centre

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Youth-Information-Centre-Kashmir/367447093346889?fref=ts>

Youth media Traineeship

In any modern society media plays a critical role in influencing the perceptive attitude of people. Highlighting the issues of the youth through print and electronic media was the objective behind awarding media traineeship. Two journalists Ms. Monisa Qadri and Ms. Afsana Rashid were awarded this the traineeship in 2011-12 and 2012-13 respectively. They successfully shared their thoughts and opinions on pertinent issues of urban youth in popular regional dailies namely Rising Kashmir, Daily Kashmir and Herald of India. Some of the issues they wrote about were impact of economic constraints on youth, drug abuse, youth and domestic violence, issues of youth living in the interiors of Dal Lake etc. The articles were a reflection of the field based research conducted by the Trainees in the intervention areas. Ms. Monisa Qadri completed a documentary titled ‘Shades of Paradise’ to

demonstrate the challenges that youth of Kashmir witness in the backdrop of violence and constant conflict.

Following are the links of the published articles:

- <http://www.risngkashmir.in/news/domestic-violence-on-rise-in-the-valley-48716.aspx>
- <http://www.dailykashmirimages.com/news-domestic-violence-on-rise-in-kashmir-valley-44090.aspx>
- <http://www.dailykashmirimages.com/news-drug-abuse-emerging-as-a-huge-challenge-to-kashmir-society-44906.aspx>
- <http://www.risingkashmir.in/news/drug-abuse-a-challenge-to-society-50049.aspx>
- <http://www.dailykashmirimages.com/news-devoid-of-any-facility-dal-lake-inhabitants-have-much-to-complain-42813.aspx>
- <http://www.dailykashmirimages.com/news-a-family-in-old-city-strives-hard-to-live-a-decent-life-41117.aspx>
- <http://www.dailykashmirimages.com/news-multiple-health-issues-among-youth-%E2%80%93-a-growing-concern-41845.aspx>
- <http://www.dailykashmirimages.com/news-youth-entrepreneurship-still-a-long-way-to-go-in-kashmir-39092.aspx>
- <http://www.heraldofindia.com/article.php?id=609>

Research studies

A research study was conducted by Dr. Bilal Bhat titled, “**Issues of Urban Youth of Kashmir: Aspirations and Challenges- Special focus on Srinagar**”. The objective of the research was manifold and varied. The multiple objectives and patterns are detailed below:

- To find out the socio-economic characteristics of the youth and to understand certain attitudes, aspirations and value orientations of the youth in Kashmir.
- To know the youth access and equity in education, and valuation for education and their particular implications for youth.
- To examine the perceptions and attitudes of the youth regarding the experiences in violent conflict situations in Jammu and Kashmir and the possible role of the youth to improve collective understanding and capacity to work for peace and development in Jammu and Kashmir.
- To assess the extent, magnitude and factors of unemployment and underemployment and to know the social and political implications of the prolonged unemployment and economic exclusion.
- To know the nature and direction of change among youth in Kashmir under the influence of modernization, mass media, and industrialization etc. in the areas of education and occupation, social control, state of individualism versus collectivism, leisure patterns and entertainment orientation.

The study focused on youth in the Valley, especially urban youth aged 15–35 in district Srinagar. A sample of 1000 respondents (including 800 youth, 50 government officials, 50 local scholars/intellectuals, 50 social notables/workers and 50 knowledgeable senior citizens) was selected to uniformly represent different politico-economic and socio-cultural groups. The study has helped to identify some interesting facts. First, 89.1% of the respondents felt that the impact of conflict situation was pervasive and largely adverse on the Kashmiri society. While the negative repercussions of conflict were rampant, a small percentage felt that positive transformation has been brought by armed conflict. Increased awareness on different social, religious, political, economic and cultural issues has been possible because of it. Youth have realized the need to have an active understanding on politics. The statistical figures clearly displays the deep psychosocial impact of the conflict on the respondents. 72% respondents have expressed profound social alienation as a result of the ongoing violence and deprivation they experienced during the last few years. Education was highly affected, around 83% respondents have missed classes in their colleges due to frequent strikes and curfews and 68% conveyed that the quality and effectiveness of education has deteriorated severely over the last few years. The study further revealed that 82% youth fear that their education is not going to help them find a job in the future. 89.3% respondents have identified unemployment as one of the major problems faced by the youth. 67.5 % respondents revealed their opinion that conflict situation in Kashmir has certainly contributed to the emergence of late marriage. Conflict has hindered the ability of the young to enjoy and play activities in the company of the peers. 86.3 % have never voted in their life time and were disappointed with the government. The youth of the valley feels that peace is the most important thing that they want from the government.

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Chapter Five

YOUTH AS PEACE-BUILDERS: IMPACT ANALYSIS

Impact and learnings

Since the commencement of the project, the progress has been extremely stimulating. To reiterate, this is one of the innovative projects that solely focuses on the urban youth of the Valley who can play a critical role in the peace building process. The progress of the project clearly proves the positive impact it had on the youth, their communities and society at large. This project had two prime objectives: (a) youth development and (b) youth led development which will be a step towards ensuring peace in this conflict prone Kashmir.

A systematic and sensitive approach as detailed in the forgoing chapters had been employed by IGSSS.. YAP has been successful in empowering young people to mobilize themselves and others towards the common purpose of building peace in the state of Kashmir. In last four years, through this intervention IGSSS has reached out directly to 390 youth and indirectly to 1060. It was hoped that through their efforts, these youth can help build a cohesive, safer and stronger community. In other words, the project's major accomplishment has been the creation of conscious and optimistic citizens who are and will bring sustainable change in the state of Kashmir.

Creation of Potential Young Leaders / Promoting Leadership: Continuous capacity building programmes have helped build confidence within the youth to take practical actions in order to create positive social change in this conflict prone zone.

The trainings on leadership and life skills have been highly advantageous for the youth. 4 intensive leadership trainings were conducted. The youth felt empowered and consequently nurtured this quality to showcase their ability to bring changes. As a result 70 youth have emerged as leaders including 40 males and 30 females. These young leaders have started taking initiatives to build more cohesive, safer and stronger communities and move towards making Kashmir a peaceful place to live.

The idea of youth leadership really took off in spirit during the Kashmir floods of September 2014 when unorganized and spontaneous efforts by the youth who were involved in rescue and relief operations across the state claimed widespread acclaim. A disaster was what it took to show the whole population that given the opportunity youth can lead without any political or apolitical leaders and complete a task in the most effective way possible. The youth under YAP were recognized for leading organised efforts throughout the intervention areas of IGSSS, thereby carving a new identity for themselves and their groups.

“Exposure visit gave me an insight to life. It showed me the courage of how to face life without fear and work for the peace –for the better future of Kashmir.”

Adil Manzoor,
President Youth
Social Awareness
Group

There was an unmatched energy in the youth who had till now been critical of their roles, and were now involved in most of the community work while their elders and critics sat watching the new development. A rise in interest and enthusiasm was evident in the youth as a change that was building and had now exploded suddenly. The youth had been waiting for an opportunity to reclaim the leadership that had been denied them and during floods this was exactly what they did. All the youth groups in Srinagar were actively involved in important major assessments carried out by IGSSS and other organizations as well. The work of the youth was appreciated by other NGOs, government authorities and community members for working throughout the floods in protecting lives, properties and leading the relief operations in their communities. A difference had been made and the acknowledgement of the work done since years with youth had finally begun bearing fruits. Results were visible and acknowledged by important stakeholders.

Post floods there has been a huge attitudinal and behavioral change in the youth who have taken started taking initiatives in restarting project activities. There is an evident hunger in the youth to move forward as leaders and reclaim their spaces, while the traditional structures acknowledged and appreciated this new role of theirs. A major apprehension that we had as a team was that the youth wouldn't be involved in the projects given the additional economic and rehabilitation responsibilities post floods, but we were pleasantly surprised as the youth led the process of planning, of synergizing and to some extent of implementing. The youth had braved the floods, and now confidence was a friend and not a formidable enemy; they continue to move forward gradually making themselves known, recognition that a disaster gave them.

From Individual to Commune: This project had other positive impacts on the youth at an individual level. It has helped develop a positive attitude towards life. During the open discussions with the youth, members of the groups and the network shared that this programme provided them a platform to speak about their thoughts and views. This helped them to overcome their inhibitions and speak for the larger issues. Their communications skills have improved remarkably. It provided them the motivation to contribute positively and non-violently towards peace building. The youth have developed the understanding on group cohesiveness and that no conflict can be resolved without working in tandem with each other. As Altaf of Al Muntazir Youth Group, Dal says, **“The first thing we learnt Mein nahin hum (not ‘I’ but ‘US’). To resolve conflict we need to work together. Only then can we attain success.”**

The Gender Aspect: Kashmir much like the rest of India, being an orthodox and patriarchal society does not appreciate women participating in the decision making processes. Their role in the larger society is often not taken into consideration. In such a scenario, the formation of the girls groups and their participation in mixed groups is a remarkable achievement. So far **30 girls are actively participating in this peace building initiative.** The girls have been most passionate about their contribution towards bringing peace in the society and have made remarkable efforts. They have identified and created awareness on issues like female foeticide, domestic violence and so on. They have not just worked within their community

“There will be challenges while working in the community, but only if we believe in ourselves and confront those hurdles then can we bring change.” -
Member of Youth Social Awareness Group

but have participated in activities conducted in other communities to bring sustainable change. They have participated in street plays as well. They were initially discouraged by their families and their communities but their confidence and zeal to bring peace in their society gave them the courage to move ahead. Presently, the parents and the communities support them and even respect their opinions. The change of perspective of the youth is also very evident. They have also started respecting their fellow female youth. A glaring example is that of a young girl, **Shazia Yousuf** who is the **President of the Peace Revolutionaries Youth Group, Behrar which is a mixed group**. She has been elected twice and is considered to be an extremely efficient leader by her team members.

Afreen Youth Group of Batapora is an inspiration for many young girls. They had identified and reported a case of domestic violence. Their commendable support to family of the victim for justice was highlighted in the media. Following are the links where the stories can be accessed:

Kashmir life, 'Together for a cause':

<http://www.google.com/url?q=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.kashmirlife.net%2Ftogether-for-a-cause0406%2F&sa=D&sntz=1&usg=AFQjCNGuZZ-SlhcfF75pcpppElOGyKi-4g>

Rising Kashmir, Inspirations to be had from Batapora Girls

<http://www.google.com/url?q=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.risingkashmir.com%2Finspirations-to-be-had-from-batpora-girls%2F&sa=D&sntz=1&usg=AFQjC NENehev38sbhCQItt2brhIGVYnvCA>

Another major achievement of this group is inclusion of young boys in the group. In a patriarchal society it is a very rare occasion that a group of active girls have been able to convince the boys to join the initiative. Based on the involvement in the community, the boys have felt inspired to be part of the group.

Alternative Medium of Expression: The trainings on different medium of expressions have not only developed their skill but also provided a direction to the lives of the youth. It has channelized their energy towards taking positive social actions. In the words of Umar Farooq, a member of Youth Social Awareness Group, **"I am a theatre actor and have been acting for last 8 years. But the street theatre workshop was an eye-opening experience for me. Earlier, I used to just perform but now I have found a reason to use my skill. I understand the issues of my society and direct plays to create awareness on those issues. I have found a better way to raise my voice to bring change."**

Confidence and self-esteem are the two new characteristics that they have gained from these trainings. Many of the youth members were not aware about their potential, but these programmes helped in manifestation of those talents. The communities who were earlier apprehensive and doubtful regarding the functioning of these groups have realized the critical role that youth play in the present times for conflict management. The transformation in their attitude has been remarkable. The community leaders now take into consideration the opinions of the youth groups regarding the community related issues. Presently, they even suggest that the youth groups address some community related issues through their creative medium which is actually an alternate form of nonviolent

"Earlier I had the fear to speak in front of people. The theatre workshop helped me to express my feelings. Now I am uninhibited and perform to raise awareness. I feel highly confident and motivated."

Member of Eidgah
Youth Forum for
Change.

For the first time, nearly 25 adolescent girls of Batpora learnt about female reproductive health and how to maintain hygiene during menstruation to overcome problems like Urinary Tract Infections, Reproductive Tract Infection, Sexually transmitted infections

expression for demand generation.

During the trainings the youth have internalized the importance of peace building and conflict management. It is for this reason they have used various alternative nonviolent expressions to convey their messages and also to bring development within their community and beyond to pave way for peace building. They developed various strategies and organized various programmes independently to bring lasting change. Each of these programmes had a deeper impact which can eventually bring systemic change. Their contribution has helped in building a strong and cohesive society.

Often when issues related to women arise, we try to make only the women aware about their rights, but tend to forget that the male members of the society also need to be oriented about their responsibilities. 'Eidgah Youth for Change' was successful in organizing a discussion followed by a peaceful rally in the community on the issue 'Crime against Women in Kashmir'. 25 male members of the community including the youth participated in it.

Confronting Taboo: Being a conservative society, discussion on reproductive health is considered a taboo and the issue is not discussed in the community. On top of that, a girls group taking the initiative of organizing such an activity is a distant reality. Afreen Youth group of Batpora showed the courage of organizing an orientation on **Reproductive health of young women**. For the first time, nearly **25 adolescent girls of Batpora** learnt about female reproductive health and how to maintain hygiene during menstruation to overcome problems like Urinary Tract Infections, Reproductive Tract Infection, Sexually transmitted infections etc. The girls were able to share their problems and learn more about issues related to menstrual cycle and reproductive health both of which are considered unmentionable in Kashmiri society.

The group also organised a campaign on the dowry system. Discussion with the community members was held where they unanimously agreed that they will neither give nor take dowry. Following this they signed a pledge.

Addressing the Social Peril: In a traditionalist society like Srinagar, the youth group of Behrar uninhibitedly conducted an **awareness programme on Female Foeticide**. Street theatre was used as a medium to convey the message. This awareness programme was successful as **83** people attended it including 35 males. Discussions on such an issue needs to be attended by both male and female members of the society.

Activism for Rights: Ensuring the accessibility of various government schemes and entitlements is critical in a conflict prone zone to maintain a peaceful environment. For this purpose the youth groups and the network took affirmative actions to communicate their thoughts and demands. They steered different awareness programmes on social welfare schemes, consumer rights and Right to Information. The groups guided the community' people in demanding access to schemes. They also helped in filing of RTIs. In this way, 30 people were linked to the schemes. **12 females** were linked to **National Family Benefit Scheme (NFBS)**, **3 male members** were able to access **Old Age Pension (OAP)**, **6 women** started receiving **Widow Pension**. **9 students (4 boys and 5 girls)** received **Post Matric Scholarship**. **2 cases** related to **consumer rights** were filed by the community people of Batapora

and Eidgah. Following community based training and awareness programmes on Right to Information Act, **6 RTIs were filed** which were handled by the groups. These include, 1 RTI to LAWDA (Lake and Waterways Development Authority) by Al Muntazir Youth Group, Dal, 1 RTI in Roads and Building Department by Afreen Youth Group of Batapora, 1 RTI filed in Fisheries Department by Khidmat Guzaar Youth Group of Habak. 2 RTIs were filed by Youth Social Awareness Group of Rainawari in the department of Consumer Affairs and Public Distribution. Two more were filed to the Revenue Department and Roads and Building Department each by the same group. These have not just provided the required information, but made the community people aware about their entitlements. The youth groups along with the community now have the courage to confront the government departments in a nonviolent and persuasive way. It has been observed that the departments are being comparatively active and are speeding up the processes or taking immediate actions regarding the community related issues.

Youth led Children Initiatives: Children are an indispensable age group who are often not taken into consideration where adult related issues are addressed. Drawing from their individual experiences, youth members understand this and have organized awareness programmes and/or taken initiatives to address issues of children. Awareness programmes on child rights was conducted. Discussions were held on the importance of education. Families were counselled to retain their children in schools despite financial difficulties and not engage them in work. The Al Muntazir Youth Group initiated a **Functional Literacy Centre** in their community. As the rate of drop out was very high in their community, they started this centre running during the winters for Classes I-X. Till date, **40 students** have received back up support including 35 boys and 5 girls.

Institution for Cohesive Actions: The youth group of Dal is highly inspired and wants to reach out further to multiply the impact with their efforts. They feel that their efforts to bring peace needs to be widespread and with this thought they have initiated the process of **registering this group as a Trust** and have named it **Al Muntazir Trust**.

The youth network, **ROCKS** had **independently developed a documentary on violence against women** and played it in front of a group of girls and women of the community, following which an intense discussion was held. This was also highlighted in the media.

Taking the drug menace head-on: Born and brought up in turmoil and violence, the Kashmiri youth in the age group, 18-35 years, are falling prey to drugs. As per the records of the Srinagar Police Control Room's de-addiction centre 633 cases were reported in 2014 which has alarmingly increased to 1,978¹². While 81% of the drug addicts are male, 19% of them are female. It is a striking percentage considering that Srinagar is a conservative society. Since 2008, PCR has treated more than 7000 abusers which is a matter of great concern. The youth groups are aware of this grave concern and over the period of their groups' functioning they have addressed this issue in different community group programmes. They **identified 45 youth drug addicts** of which 25 were provided community level counselling. **10** showed an interest in rehabilitation and they were **linked with the drug de-addiction centre**.

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12 Kashmir Reader, 15th April 2015 <http://www.kashmirreader.com/kashmir-witnesses-rise-in-drug-abuse/>

Initial Steps for Resource Mobilization: The groups realize that financial resources are essential to sustain their activities. With this intention every group as well as the youth network have started collecting monthly membership charges from the members. The amount varies from one group to another and is decided unanimously by the groups. Money collected is handled completely by the groups and is usually maintained by the Treasurer of the Group. During **March 2015**, when there was a rise in the water level and threat of potential flood, Al Muntazir Group with their groups' savings provided **rehabilitation support** to the communities. They provided food and basic medicines without any personal gain and without the support of IGSSS.

From gang of stone-pelters to harbinger of peace: A story of transformation Qamarwari is a highly volatile area in the downtown of Srinagar where conflict has affected the lives of its residents. Low literacy has led to an increasing rate of unemployment. To overcome this stress, people have adopted negative coping mechanisms mainly drug addiction and gambling. Theft has become a common crime in that area. Most of the youth are addicted and cynical and need support. 10 young boys of the age group between 16-20 years were involved in antisocial activities like gambling, threatening people even beyond their communities, getting involved in physical violence. They were also stone pelters. This group was popularly known as 'Petrol Gang' and were known in other volatile communities for their violent engagements.

One day, after a lot of persuasion, one of the boys of that gang attended the leadership training which turned out to be a life changing experience for him. It provided him a space to realise that there are others of his age group who have and are undergoing similar adversities but that is not hindering them to take positive actions. For the first time he felt that even their gang can bring change in their community. Peace can be attained and conflict can be resolved in Qamarwari. He shared his intentions with IGSSS team and they guided this gang to form a group. That was how the 'Petrol Gang' became "Petrol Youth Group'. Following the formation, the first issue that they wanted to work on was drug addiction. They organised a counselling session for the drug addicts at the community level. The biggest transformation that the members feel is that earlier they were filled with aggression. But now they have learnt to control it. They are eager to use their energy for positive change of their community.

BEST PRACTICES

- Encouraging heterosexual group participation.
- Promoting capability rather than gender.
- Participatory approach: Creating conducive environment to voice opinion
- Using innovative methods like street theatre and alternative forms of expression : novel concept in Srinagar
- Addressing taboos
- Conducting research on Urban Youth of Kashmir: A pioneering initiative
- Media fellowship: Highlighting the issues of urban youth
- Youth network: engaging professional from diverse backgrounds bringing varied experiences.

Chapter Six

CHALLENGES

'Youth Action for Peace' project has been a pioneer project in involving the urban youth in affirmative action related to them and their community. This has led to the creation of youth based structures to help ensure their participation in the process of peace building at the community level. Since 2011, the project has been steadily progressing towards the ultimate goal of developing the youth as a powerful agent in the peace building process. However, as the road is less travelled, IGSSS had to face challenging situations since the inception of the project.

YAP was initiated in 2011, a year after the uprising in Srinagar when turmoil was still prevalent. Due to this the project had to face endless shutdowns (hartals), curfews and non-working days given the security situation in the city. The volatile and unpredictable situation had made the people of the Valley extremely vulnerable and there was a sense of mistrust within them. The project took a considerable time in building the trust within the community people and particularly the youth. This became more challenging as the intervention areas are predominantly volatile in nature. Dynamic strategies had to be adopted to achieve and create a working ambience for youth involvement. This being a youth led development model, the project could not progress without the youth who form the backbone of this initiative. Due to these reasons, different programmes of this project got affected and were considerably delayed.

The youth group members belong to the age group of 15-35 years. Being the active age group they are either pursuing education or are engaged in work. One of the biggest challenge was to coordinate within the group members to ensure their involvement in this process. A similar constraint was faced by the youth network members who were involved in different professions.

Key CHALLENGES

Conflict leading to disillusionment with nonviolent means

Common perception: NGOs do not or cannot work on the core issues of Kashmiri youth

The conditions of unrest break the communication and engagement with youth causing work to suffer.

Rescheduling of project activities because of curfews and strikes and unpredictable weather condition in Kashmir becomes a big challenge for completing the planned activities on time.

Involving girls in exposure trips is very difficult as it involves apprehension, not only on part of the girl's families, but also the community as well.

Motivating the youth for venturing into entrepreneurship and self-employment, despite linking them with JK Entrepreneurship Development Institute.

Busy schedule of youth in other activities like studies, exams becomes a problem for mobilization.

Dealing by the staff, especially female staff, with newly formed boys group in the volatile areas.

Group formation in volatile areas.

During the project period, many groups have gone through a rough graph. As the crux of the group functioning is volunteering, several members lost their motivation leading to high attrition. But the positive side was that at the same time the group activities motivated other young people of the community to be part of these social actions for peace and social change.

In these youth groups, involving the girls was difficult as Srinagar is a conservative society. Coupled with the volatile situation, parents did not agree to let their children, especially girls, get involved in such volunteering activities as they feared that there was some hidden agenda involved. While success has been achieved to a large extent, in convincing the parents, there are many areas where greater efforts need to be made to bring the girls out of their homes and get them involved in the bigger cause of the society.



Chapter Seven

Conclusion: Transforming Spaces for Youth - Suggested Points of Action

Youth are potential and dynamic agents of social change. Unfortunately, the ability of the Kashmiri youth to be engaged in socio-political transformation is often left unexplored because of dearth of safe space and conflict in the Valley.

John Paul Lederach identified four features that can help in the process of peace building. They are: relationship, curiosity, creativity and risk.¹³ 'Youth Action for Peace' project has been focussing on these features. It has been giving utmost importance on building relationships and engaging with different stakeholders, motivating the youth to use their critical thinking ability. IGSSS throughout the project has been promoting usage of creative means in the peace building process.

'Youth Action for Peace' has provided the youth of Kashmir particularly from urban Srinagar, a conducive environment to contribute to the socio-economic development of their communities and Kashmiri society as a whole. This project has been successful in ascertaining that if the youth are steered towards peace building by developing their capacity and nurturing non-violent means to raise their voice; this can lead to a deep impact.

The project has helped foster a positive attitude, develop empathy and promote a better perspective on conflict resolution and peace building as well as helping manifest an assertive role that young people can play.

'Youth Action for Peace' has helped facilitate social connectedness and provide opportunities for young people to interact with youth from different backgrounds.

The orthodox nature of the Kashmiri society coupled with the conflict in the state have restricted the mobility of the women. Girls are allowed to pursue their education and women do get engaged in employment, but are not allowed to be involved in any other work in the external world. The engagement of girls and women in the external world is more to do with economic compulsions and benefits rather than empowerment and free will. The life of adolescent girls are further restricted. The participation of boys and men is far more spontaneous and acceptable in the society be it in protest or activities of social change, than participation of girls and women in such activities. This project has helped girls break the shackles and get involved in development related activities of their communities. 'Youth Action for Peace' has helped them develop their own identities and has given them confidence that they can also contribute towards the

Sharing of experiences with other youth group have helped us develop our further strategies.

Khidmat Guzar Youth Group member

¹³ Danesh, Dr.R., Youth and Peacebuilding, 2008.
URL: www.tc.columbia.edu/.../DaneshYouthandPeaceBuilding_22feb08.doc

peace building process. The experience of last four years has proven that girls are more passionate and dedicated towards this process and have made a remarkable impact. However, it cannot be denied that the challenge has yet not ended. There are many more girls in Kashmir who need to be given the courage and motivation to manifest their views and work towards building a peaceful society.

The participation of the young boys in this process can also not be underestimated. Through different awareness camps, rallies, meetings and many other modes they have tried to create awareness amongst the community regarding their rights as citizens and have also worked to provide access to different government schemes. Youth activism has led the people to become more active citizens of the nation, they have started demanding their legal rights. Apart from this the groups have also tried to build awareness on different issues within the society for example, education, crime against women, employment opportunities etc. These group initiatives have also been highlighted through print and social media.

In this project not only the youth of the communities, but youth from educational institutions and different professional backgrounds were included. As a result, a youth network, ROCKS was formed. The Youth Information Centre also evolved. Both of them are important platforms for engagement, sharing resources and ideas. It is being envisaged that this network will play a critical role to ensure sustainability of this initiative as it involves young professionals with diverse experiences .

Another important aspect was that this project provided a platform for interaction of the rural and urban youth of Kashmir. The young people felt a kind of revelation while exchanging ideas and concerns mutually, thereby becoming aware of their respective issues unknown till then. It not only helped gain insight into each other's world but also helped them learn from the experiences of each other.

It is strongly felt that youth participation should be encouraged at all levels of social interaction, from neighbourhood, school, local community to state and national level. Youth should be given responsibilities as per their capacities and should be encouraged to take initiatives. Youth activism needs to be given prime importance so that their potential can be utilised in the peace building process in Kashmir.

It needs to be mentioned that although the youth groups and network have started taking initiatives we cannot ignore the fact that due to the conflicts in the region and natural calamities the implementation of the project was interrupted. Moreover, there has also been an attrition of group members. Due to all these challenges there is an urgent need to continue this project. It's a long road, till the process reaches its logical conclusion and outcomes in absolute measurable terms come pouring in. There are still many more arenas that need to be further explored and further support will help ensure sustainability of the project in the long run.

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