

# Youth Engagement

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## A NATIONAL DEFICIT

By

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## **Pakistan - A Home of Disengaged Youth**

Pakistan is passing through the most difficult period of its history. It is facing serious crises. These crises are coming both thick and fast. The term “manufactured crises” best distills the reality of these crises. There is an unprecedented increase in the crime, violence and terrorism activities. Majority of these activities are carried out by young people living in low-income families and communities. All the government departments and agencies are unable to control and stop these crises. One of the major reasons for this growing deterioration in law and order situation in Pakistan is the disengagement of young people. Pakistan is one of those unfortunate countries in the world where young people are disconnected from the society. The numbers of disengaged and vulnerable young people are increasing tremendously. It is our greatest failure. It is our biggest threat. These young people if not engaged in some constructive activities will continue to prove a prescription for disaster for themselves and for the society. The disengagement of young people of Pakistan is the greatest loss of the country. Unfortunately, the numbers of disengaged and socially-excluded young people are increasing every day. These numbers are never lit on the billboards of the city so that everyone can see how quickly numbers are increasing. There is a need to declare a “Youth Emergency” in the country to help millions of young people in Pakistan to find a purpose, connection, hope and place in the society.

There is no shortage of evidences reflecting the costs of neglecting young people in Pakistan. Almost all the terrorist attacks made recently are committed by young people between the ages of 12-30. These young people are telling us through their behaviors that what is missing in the society and it is our responsibility to listen to their voices and understand their needs. It would not be wrong to say that it is not easy being youth in Pakistan. Despite of the fact, that Pakistan has the largest cohort of children and young people in its history, there is no public cry to reach out and engage young people. Our politicians, policy makers and practitioners have a very low or no understanding about the consequences of ignoring young people. If there are any efforts underway, they are limited to discussion and manipulation. It is the need of the hour that we must recognize young people as partners in development. How can we even think of any development, prosperity and progress without the engagement and

contributions of young people? Time has come when we should understand the strong linkage between youth engagement and community development. No nation and community has ever developed by ignoring its young people. Young people are the lifeline of any nation. They are the most promising resource available to us in a huge quantity. Unfortunately, this untapped resource is not recognized and tapped by the society for greater good. It is heartbreaking to see the waste of so many lives of young people. We need to ask ourselves why extremists' and terrorists' groups find it so easy to mobilize and engage youth in self-destructive activities. What they offer to young people? Why young people listen to them? Why young people give up their lives so easily? These extremists groups offer everything which is missing in the lives of young people. They give hope, desire, sense of purpose and sense of usefulness to young people. Imagine what would have happened in Pakistan, if all these young people who have committed suicide attacks were engaged in positive activities. Imagine what would have happened in Pakistan, if these young people had used their potential, passion and energies to address issues like education, women empowerment, health, environment, etc. instead of blowing themselves up. It is a sad reality that our country has forgotten young people. Young people are considered as future leaders. We have forgotten that young people are also the present. Young people cannot become leaders by simply getting education or staying away from problems. They need opportunities to act and lead. They need structured opportunities to explore and realize their potential. They need support and acknowledgement from the society. They need validation of their intelligence. We have enough time available to us to discuss about the economic challenges and increasing national debt faced by the country. We are always thinking that we have a money problem in our country. If we will get financial assistance, our problems will be resolved. We are unable to understand that we do not have a money problem in this country. We have a serious youth disengagement problem. This disengagement has already cost us a lot. It is time for all of us to revisit our priorities and programs. It is clear that without change in our thinking, no change will occur. It is very painful to see that even those countries which are supporting Pakistan to fight against terrorism and social evils are unable to read the situation. We cannot win any war against terrorism, poverty, illiteracy, etc unless and until we open doors of engagement for our young people. We must ask ourselves what kind of Pakistan we are creating and for whose benefit. We have an education crisis, an electricity crisis, a gas crisis, a food crisis, a political crisis, a water crisis and above all a

crisis to understand that young people are our best resource and best hope for the continuity of our nation. It seems to me that we have settled for a country where a vast majority of children and young people are expected to grow-up without any desire and hope in their lives. They are expected to lead a very impoverished, disconnected and anxiety-driven life over which they have no control.

Youth engagement helps to develop a desire in life, and if you are successful in developing a desire among young people- a desire to succeed, a desire to accomplish anything in life- I think you can change the world.

**A disengaged youth is the biggest threat to a family, community and country.** A disengaged youth is a hazard which has the potential to turn into a disaster. A disengaged youth can cause more damage and collapse through his/her actions to the society than a fully-prepared youth. A disengaged youth has more power to influence the lives of others negatively than a prepared youth who is waiting for the opportunity to get engaged. Engagement of young people should be the responsibility of everyone; it should not be restricted to few experts and professionals. Youth engagement should be recognized as an exciting strategy to create an impact in the lives of everyone.

## Definition of Youth Engagement

Youth Engagement is a process where **all** young people including **troubled** and **prepared** are provided **structured opportunities** to use their time, intelligence, talents, skills and abilities for making a significant contribution in their lives and the lives of other.

Contributing youth is much better than prepared youth.

## Key Words of the Definition

**All:** It means that every young person regardless of sex, color and creed should be given an organized opportunity to play a constructive role in his/her personal and societal development.

**Troubled:** It means that every young person regardless of his/her deficiencies and disturbances should be treated as a pure potential and a resource.

**Prepared:** It means that academic skills are not enough for young people. There are many young people who are educated and skilled. They are waiting for an opportunity to do something but they are not acting and leading.

**Structured Opportunities:** It means building a youth engagement system at all levels of the society for the meaningful and sustained involvement of young people.

Youth engagement is based on the concept that we should stop treating young people as empty vessels into which we pour our wisdom and instead we should treat young people as the most promising resource available to us in developing a new societal structure and meeting the high service needs of our communities.

### Why Youth Engagement Is A Big Challenge?

Issue	Solution
Youth engagement is limited to addressing youth problems.	Broaden the Outcomes
Youth engagement is considered as the responsibility of youth-serving institutions.	Broaden the Professionals
Youth engagement is limited to participation of young people in crisis situations.	Broaden the Situations
Youth engagement is confused with programs which provide basic services to young people.	Broaden the Services
Youth engagement is limited to participation of young people in co-curricular activities.	Broaden the Definition
Youth engagement is confused with the participation of young people in training programs.	Broaden the Targets
Youth engagement is considered as an episodic activity.	Broaden the Timeframe
Youth engagement is considered as a waste of time by major stakeholders.	Broaden the Understanding
Youth engagement is considered as an activity meant for male youth only.	Broaden the Gender Equality
Youth engagement is limited to the participation of prepared youth.	Broaden the Scope
Youth engagement initiatives are very less in numbers.	Broaden the Numbers

## Route to Youth Development

Environment

Empowerment

Engagement

**Environment:** It plays a very large role in the development of young people. It either facilitates or diminishes the process of youth development. Family provides first social environment to a child. Favorable environment enables young people to grow fully-prepared and fully-engaged. Unfavorable family environment discourages preparation and engagement of young people. One of the most influential factors in the readiness of young people to learn and serve the society is often caused by family environment. The development of young people is further enhanced if it is supported by peers, schools, communities and the country. It matters a lot where young people grow and with whom they grow. All these players play an important role in shaping the personality of the young people. If the environment in which young people are growing is not inviting and nurturing, it would be very difficult for young people to pick up positive behaviors and patterns.

**Empowerment:** Empowerment of young people in a wide range of areas such as physical, emotional, social, intellectual and moral is crucial to the development of young people. Knowledge and skills acquisition in these areas help young people to feel empowered. It is very important that young people are provided opportunities for self-empowerment by homes, schools, communities and the country. Empowerment helps young people to get prepared for positive engagement in future.

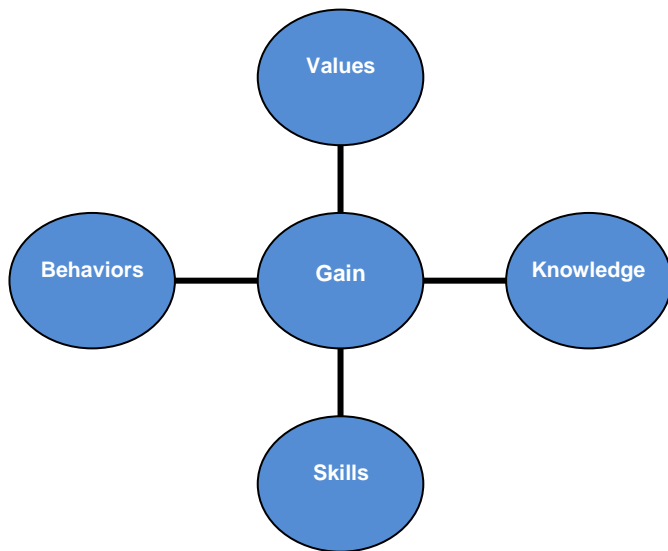
**Engagement:** Youth development is not simply something that happens to young people. It should not be defined in terms of what young people acquire from the society such as competencies, skills and knowledge. It should also include what young people give back to the society. Youth development is not possible without youth engagement. Youth engagement is a responsibility of everyone. It includes family, community, school and the country. Youth development is best achieved when young people are engaged in a process of service delivery in an organized and systematic manner. Youth engagement opportunities should be provided by educational institutions, community institutions, public and private institutions. Engagement provides young people the best way to achieve their full potential by using their knowledge and skills and by staying away from risky behaviors. Attaching youth engagement to public entities at the national, provincial and local levels would provide a ready-made framework to operate. It can be attached to the ministries and departments of the government. In short, engagement is a key to help every young person to reach his/her full potential.

Youth Engagement is not just about inviting young people to attend meetings, seminars and workshops. It is about building-up a system through which young people can use their potential, intelligence and energies in an organized manner for personal and greater good.

## 2 G's of Youth Development



Youth development is an ongoing process. It does not occur in a vacuum. It is not only about gaining knowledge and skills to function effectively. It is also about giving back to the society through meaningful engagement. Youth development can be divided into two areas. Each area is equally vital for the development of young people. Progress in one area alone will not help young people to grow and succeed in life. Real and meaningful youth development is always the result of giving equal importance to what you gain and what you give back to the society. Real and meaningful youth development occurs when young people give more than they gain. The secret to success in life is about giving more than taking more.



## G.E.T of Youth Engagement

Engagement benefits young people in many ways. It provides substantial opportunities to youth to give, eradicate and take. When young people get engaged, they get more than they give. Here is a list of what young people give and what they get through engagement.

G Give	E Eradicate	T Take
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Time</li><li>• Knowledge</li><li>• Care</li><li>• Appreciation</li><li>• Happiness</li><li>• Skills</li><li>• Sacrifice</li><li>• Hope</li><li>• Opportunities</li><li>• Encouragement</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fear</li><li>• Sense of futility</li><li>• Shyness</li><li>• Inadequacy</li><li>• Self-indulgence</li><li>• Disengagement</li><li>• Isolation</li><li>• Stagnation</li><li>• Identity crisis</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Love</li><li>• Respect</li><li>• Confidence</li><li>• Employability skills</li><li>• Wisdom</li><li>• Contacts</li><li>• New identity</li><li>• Strength</li><li>• Opportunities</li><li>• Experience</li></ul>

## **What Happens When Youth Get Engaged?**

Youth engagement is a win-win situation for everyone. When young people are engaged, positive change impact upon the lives of everyone.

Youth engagement offers a wide range of positive outcomes to the society including:

- ✓ Meeting the Unmet Needs of the Society: Youth engagement helps in meeting the unmet service needs of the society. It is not possible for the government and the civil society organizations to deliver services to everyone. Youth engagement helps to break zones of isolation by reaching out to underserved and isolated people/communities with products and services.
- ✓ Decreased Violence: Youth engagement plays an important role in decreasing violence, crime and terrorism from the society.
- ✓ Building up a Democratic Society: Youth engagement plays an important role in building a democratic society. No society can be declared democratic, if the majority of the people are disconnected and isolated. A democratic society needs contributing citizens.
- ✓ Culture of Respect: Youth engagement helps in developing a culture of respect, partnership, and shared responsibility between youth and adults.
- ✓ Economic Development: Youth engagement plays a very important role in economic development of the communities and the country. It helps the country to harness and utilize its idle resources.

## **Youth Engagement: Everyone's Responsibility**

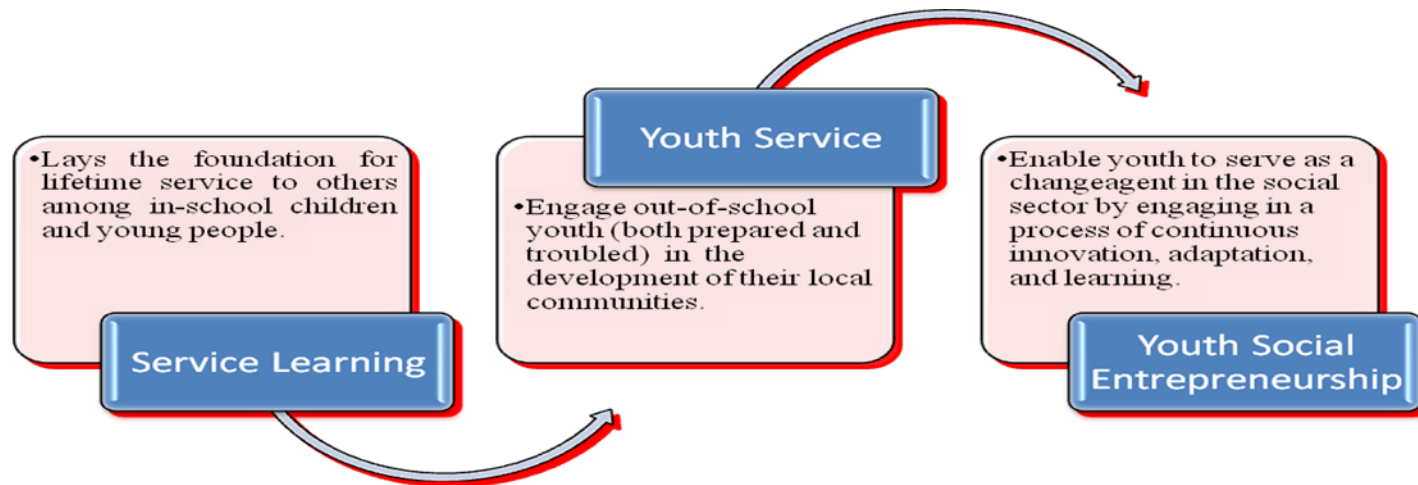
Youth engagement is an investment that must be made by every public and private institution of Pakistan. Youth engagement provides an opportunity to everyone to tap the potential of young people in creating a peaceful and prosperous society. When young people are provided opportunities for engagement they stay away from troubles, they prepare themselves for bigger challenges and they act and lead. On the other hand, when we ignore youth engagement, young people become very vulnerable as they look for opportunities and support structures to establish their identities and prove their usefulness. Youth engagement is about give and take. There are many ways to establish and institutionalize the routes for youth engagement. A few of the ways for youth engagement are given below:

- I. Youth engagement should be integrated into the curriculum of the educational and technical institutions. Every child and young person should be given an opportunity to use classroom learning into real life situations. Youth engagement should be made mandatory for every youth as part of their study requirement.
- II. Existing youth internship programs should be replaced with youth engagement programs. Under internship programs, young people are provided opportunities to get employment experience. It would be better if we encourage and provide resources (internship stipend) to young people to establish a community-based social enterprise.
- III. Integrating youth engagement into existing public entities at the national, provincial and local levels. It will provide ready-made framework to use youth engagement as a strategy for nation building.
- IV. A national body on youth engagement should be formulated with the objectives of promoting, documenting and coordinating youth engagement activities at all levels of the country.

- V. Enlisting support of media and celebrities for the promotion of the youth engagement. Case studies demonstrating the impact of young engagement should be collected from the field for recognition and inspiration.
- VI. Allocating five percent of the national and provincial budgets to youth engagement.
- VII. Establishing linkages with regional and international organizations working for the promotion of youth engagement.
- VIII. Acknowledging the contributions of those who serve in youth engagement programs.
- IX. A national level team of master trainers should be developed to train and engage civil society institutions in designing and implementing youth engagement programs.
- X. Youth engagement should be employed as a cost-effective strategy by the leading ministries and departments such as women, education, health, environment, skill development, etc of Pakistan for meeting their developmental goals.
- XI. Youth engagement should be used as tool for promoting national unity and fostering national development.
- XII. Youth engagement should be seen as a method of realizing local, national and international commitments.
- XIII. Youth engagement should be seen as an alternative strategy for engaging unemployed youth in community service, thus helping them to acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes required for any job.
- XIV. Youth engagement programs should be developed and delivered through public and private partnerships.
- XV. Creating a youth engagement foundation devoted to youth engagement with a venture capital fund gathered from major foundations, organizations, corporations and philanthropists.

- XVI. Setting-up a youth engagement school to provide extensive and residential trainings to youth, civil society organizations, youth-serving organizations, etc.
- XVII. Enlisting support of well-established youth-serving institutions such as Boy Scouts and Girls Scouts for the expansion of youth engagement programs.

## Strategies for Youth Engagement



**Service Learning:**

Education without engagement has no value.

Service learning is an exciting strategy to help students in using classroom learning in real life situations. Service Learning provides opportunity to educational institutions to integrate service into learning process of students. Students are encouraged to design and deliver service projects for meeting the needs of the society. Service-learning provides an opportunity for every student to be successful. Service-learning is a stimulating and meaningful activity. Education is becoming increasingly irrelevant to real issues of the society. Students have become objects or passive recipients rather than actors. Today, majority of the educational institutions are preparing students solely for careers. They are not preparing students for service to the society. It is time to bring a major shift from what is happening in the educational institutions - the heavy-loaded curriculum, limited-assessments and too many books - to cultivate the spirit of sacrifice and spirit of selfless service to the society. It is time to address the deficiencies in our education system. Our education system has become self-centered. Educational institutions have so much to offer in the shape of human (students, teachers, volunteers and parents) and material (physical infrastructure such as buildings, classrooms, libraries, computer labs, science labs, transports, etc.) resources to address the present challenges. Service Learning program provides an exciting opportunity to educational institutions to use these resources for both meeting the educational needs of students and addressing serious social problems. It is already proven that service learning improves the academic performance of the students, brings new energy and life to the classroom, contributes in developing life skills among students and improves the relationship between teachers and students. The most striking part of service learning program is that both learning and serving are focused. Service Learning is more than a one-dimensional activity. It aims at helping students to make connections between theory and practice. It aims at developing sense of responsibility among students about the issues around them. Service learning provides millions of workers at less expense to the society. Given the situation of Pakistan, it is the need of the hour to make service learning compulsory for all children and young people studying in educational institutions as part of their studies'

requirement. Each student must give certain hours for service to the society. The government and educational institutions should acknowledge those hours given by the students through credits, rewards and acknowledgements. Youth Engagement Services (YES) Pakistan has successfully demonstrated the impact of Service Learning program on students, schools and the society with the help of Catholic Board of Education, Lahore. Under this program, over 15,000 students have been engaged in the designing and implementation of service learning projects.

**Youth Service:** It is based on the concept of “service” where young people are provided an organized opportunity to learn and serve in their communities for a pre-determined service period. It is a powerful strategy to engage young people in service which benefits both young people and the society. Youth service refers to the meaningful engagement of young people in designing and implementation of community development projects. It is used as a developmental tool to engage out of school young people in carrying out programs that are left unattended. It is seen as an effective mechanism to re-integrate youth into the society as active-citizens and not as citizens in waiting. There are millions of young people in Pakistan who are educated, half-educated, skilled, half-skilled and illiterate looking for opportunities to establish their identities and prove their potentials. There are no programs and policies to benefit from the enormous talent, intelligence and positive energies of these young people. These young people are out of touch with themselves and the society. Youth service provides an exciting personal development opportunity to the left-out young people, while at the same time helping the society to address serious developmental issues. True and ever-lasting change is only possible when youth service and community development are seen as the two sides of the same coin. Youth service also provides an effective way to engage marginalized and socially-excluded young people in re-branding their image in the society by transforming themselves from dependants to service providers. Youth service is based on the idea that young people learn and develop through organized services that satisfy the need of the community. Youth service can be used as a developmental tool by the government and the civil society organizations to engage young people particularly disconnected young people in meeting the unmet service needs of the society. There are many examples and case studies of young people engaged by YES Network Pakistan in meeting the needs of the society and transforming them from victims to leaders.

**Youth Social Entrepreneurship:** It is an exciting way to engage young people in bringing positive change in the society. It also helps young people to assume leadership role in social change. Youth social entrepreneurship helps a young person to walk away from the idea of charity and do something that is meaningful, lasting and socially impactful. There are several organizations operating at regional and international levels for the promotion of youth social entrepreneurship. YES Network Pakistan has played a pioneer role in starting a youth social entrepreneurship program in Pakistan. Youth social entrepreneurship is a very effective and proven youth engagement model which has resulted in the creation of several exciting ideas for meeting the needs of the society in the areas of public failure. Youth social entrepreneurship challenges young people to become changemakers by taking the initiative to address gaps, inequalities and sufferings by launching ventures of their own design. These social ventures are as diverse as the needs of the people. What makes social entrepreneurship different from other engagement models is that the young people fashion their ideas into attainable goals by leading the process to completion. Young people are more likely to be engaged in social entrepreneurship if they are engaged during childhood through service learning. Youth social entrepreneurship can be integrated by a wide range of stakeholders such as educational institutions, ministries, civil society organizations, private enterprises, etc. into their on-going programs and operations for generating innovative ideas to transform the society by drawing on the talents, skills and abilities of young people. YES Network Pakistan has introduced the concept of Youth Social Entrepreneurship in over 600 youth serving institutions of Pakistan in collaboration with British Council. YES Network Pakistan has launched several exciting products to build-up a culture of youth social entrepreneurship and to inspire young people to become changemakers in the society. YES Network Pakistan has recently established Youth Enterprise Generator in the Agriculture University of Faisalabad to encourage young people to promote entrepreneurial spirit, innovation and creativity among young people.

## **Conclusion**

Pakistan is passing through a fateful time. We need to understand that it is our young people who need to be taken seriously. Young people need our highest attention and a new level of thoughtful commitment. When a country focuses pro-actively upon youth, positive change will impact upon the lives of all citizens. Youth engagement is needed desperately in Pakistan, as there is no other way to meet the needs of young people and the society simultaneously. Pakistani society at large has failed in honoring and valuing the lives of youth. Our current interventions are aiming at addressing the problems, disturbances and deficits of young people. Successful transition to adulthood requires more than preparation and avoidance from problems. We have mobilized young people in the past to meet emergencies. It is time for us to make youth engagement as a top priority by integrating it into all the institutions of Pakistan. It is the most viable and cost-effective ways for a country like Pakistan to meet its challenges and to lay a foundation of a bright future. It is the need of the hour that families, communities, educational institutions, businesses and religious bodies recognize the urgency of breaking the isolation of young people.

Imagine what Pakistan would be like if every young person gives a year or two of engagement. By doing so, we will be able to transform our country. Engagement of young people should not only be the responsibility of a few professionals or experts, rather it should be the responsibility of everyone. The present and future of Pakistan depends upon the ways in which youth are nurtured. Young people must find their place in society to become constructive forces of positive change. It is time to see young people as a part of solution rather than as a part of the problem and a major force to bring positive change in the communities. Their enthusiasm, energies and creative abilities are the best resources available to us to create a meaningful impact on the socio economic development of the country.



About the Author: Ali Raza Khan

Ali Raza Khan is the Founder of Youth Engagement Services (YES) Network Pakistan. He participated in one-year Master Program in Social Work at McGill University, Montreal, Canada as a Sauvé Scholar. He also holds a Master degree in Political Science focusing on Development Politics. He had done one-year diploma in Documentary Making from Jean Sauvé Foundation, Montreal, Canada. He obtained certification in Strategic Communication from Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, U.S.A. In addition to that, he had done a wide range of professional courses such as Leadership Development, Strategic Planning, Community Mobilization, Emotional Intelligence, Business Plan Development, Communication Skills, Material Development, Youth Organizing, Reproductive Health, Advocacy, etc, from abroad.

Ali has played a pioneer role in introducing and institutionalizing the concepts of service learning, youth service and youth social entrepreneurship in Pakistan. He has an extensive experience of working with youth, which is filled with change and challenge; visioning; planning and program development; innovative and social action initiatives and much cooperative exciting work both within and outside the country. He is an Ashoka Fellow, International Leadership Development Program Fellow, Sauvé Scholar Fellow and Population Council Leadership Development Program Fellow. He has won several international awards. He is given the title of "Architect of the Future" by the Waldzell Institute in Austria. He has been selected as one of the top ten young social entrepreneurs (out of 801) under Young Social Enterprise Initiative (YSEI) fellowship of Global Knowledge Partnership. He has also been bestowed with AZM Alishan 2011 Award by the leading media companies of Pakistan. He has served as a consultant, trainer and facilitator for several local and leading international organizations such as ILO, British Council, Population Council, Church World Service, Caritas Pakistan, Sisters of Charity of Jesus & Mary, etc. He has conducted over 300 training workshops for over 1,000 small and medium scale youth driven and youth serving organizations. He has the honor of meeting with outstanding leaders of the world such as former U.S.A President, Mr. Bill Clinton and former Malaysian Prime Minister, Mr. Muhathir Muhammad. He has given talks and presentations at the leading international platforms and educational institutions of the world.