**Breaking Barriers**

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In the grand tapestry of Pakistan’s governance, one thread stands out vibrant and full of potential- the active engagement of the nation’s youth. Like a gust of fresh air, young Pakistanis possess an untapped wellspring of energy, ideas, and passion that, if harnessed effectively, can propel the country toward a brighter future. Youth engagement in governance is crucial as it brings innovative ideas, diverse perspectives, and long-term vision to decision making process. By involving young people, governments can bridge the generation gap, tap into their creativity, and cultivate a culture of active citizenship, leading to a more inclusive and sustainable society.

There are many initiatives through which the voices of the young have positively impacted governance around the globe. For example, in Brazil, the “Youth Participatory Budgeting (BYP)” initiative has empowered young people to have a say in allocating public funds. Through this program, youth representatives from different communities participate in budget meetings, propose projects, and vote on how funds should be distributed. BYP has resulted in increased involvement in youth-oriented projects, such as education, sports facilities, and cultural programs.

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Similarly, the “Sangguniang Kabataan” (SK) or Youth Councils in the Philippines- the local government units composed of elected youth representatives- provide a platform for young people to participate in projects concerning similar youth issues. Also, the “Uwezo Youth Empowerment Program” in Kenya aims to empower young people to actively participate in local governance and decision-making processes. The role of the Pakistan Youth Parliament (PYP) cannot be overlooked too. The PYP has become a catalyst for youth empowerment, enabling young Pakistanis to contribute to the democratic process, gain firsthand experience in policymaking, and make their voices heard at a national level. Through their resilience, activism, and innovative approaches, young Pakistanis are breaking barriers, advocating for human rights, promoting education, and fostering inclusivity.

The demographic landscape of Pakistan reveals a striking youth bulge, as a staggering 64 per cent of its population consists of individuals under the age of 30. While 29 per cent of Pakistanis are between 15 and 29- an age group that UNDP defines as the youth. 29 out of 100 young people are illiterate and only 6 per cent have more than 12 years of education. Regarding employment, 39 of 100 youth are employed (32 of them males and 7 females), 57 of 100 youth (16 males and 41 females) are neither working nor seeking jobs, and only 4 per cent are unemployed and actively looking for work.

Our youth is capable and motivated to bring positive change to the country. They need to be educated, skilled, and streamlined. After that, they should be included in governance and decision-making processes when and how it is possible. This will have positive outcomes for all the communities. The only issue is that the path to youth empowerment in governance is not without hurdles. The prevalence of traditional power structures often marginalizes the perspectives and aspirations of young people. Hierarchies within political parties prioritize seniority, sidelining the vibrant ideas of young people. There needs to be a change in the perspective. And the responsibility of inducing that change is also on the youth. I am taking this opportunity to put forward my raw ideas about youth’s positive role in governance.

Let us imagine one such idea.

1- Creation of Youth Unions:

We all know community governance is the demand of time. How about making small student unions of university-going students- one in each mohallah- and registering that student union with the offices of the assistant commissioner and assistant superintendent of police at the sub-divisional level? Let us call these unions Youth Unions.

2- Mobile Application to Connect Youth Union Members:

The administration would use a mobile application to connect with the members of the Youth Union regularly where the active, well-informed, and tech-savvy members of the Youth Union would keep informing the administration about the new issues, challenges, and needs of the community through messages and pictures. As far as the issue of anonymity and privacy is concerned, the concerned assistant commissioner and the assistant superintendent of the police themselves would use the application only and not any other member. This application would need a password to log in.

3- The App’s Range is Limited to One Tehsil Only:

Each tehsil would have its login ID and of course users- the concerned administration and the Youth Union members of that tehsil only. This would also prevent the flooding of complaints and data into the application which often leads to unnecessary delays and denials.

4- Eligibility Criterion for Joining Youth Unions:

Now, another question arises, who among the students would be qualified to join Youth Unions, and what they would get in return? As far as eligibility is concerned, the local administration must collaborate with the educational institutions of that area and recruit only those young boys and girls who are recommended by their colleges or universities. This way their credentials can be confirmed also through educational institutions.

5- Benefits for Youth Union Members:

And to answer the question that what the students would get in return after joining the Youth Unions, I believe working in Youth Unions must count as work experience and such students must get certificates from their respective educational institutions and local administration also, and these certificates must have some weightage for recruitment in the government job in the district administration (up to scale 16).

This of course is one such idea which we can successfully employ to improve the speed and quality of our governance. The question is, “Will Pakistan seize the opportunity to empower its youth and create a governance landscape where the voices of the young resonate, or will it let the promise of the nation’s future slip through its fingers?” The answer lies in the hands of all stakeholders, united in their commitment to shaping a brighter and more inclusive tomorrow.

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