**[Youth, a buzzword?](https://www.dawn.com/news/1795771/youth-a-buzzword)**

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DECADES of consistently failing the youth of this country has led us to one conclusion: ‘youth’ needs to be more than a buzzword. As we approach the election date, almost every statement by political parties these days pertains to the youth. Yet, conspicuous by their absence in these narratives are the policy actions these parties intend to implement to elevate the status of the youth. Hence, the key question arises: what really is the ‘youth reforms agenda’?

Sure, you are planning on creating empl­oyment opportunities, but how? Of course, you want to improve access to education and health as well, but how? What magic lamp have you stumbled upon this time?

In Pakistan, the term ‘youth’ has been ubiquitously employed but merely as a political buzzword, serving as a means for politicians to garner support from the substantial youth demographic. This superficial usage has resulted in significant disparities between the rhetoric aimed at the youth and the actual implementation of reforms, leading to notable gaps between the demand for and the supply of reforms.

Pakistan is in need of a youth-centric charter of economy, which is designed by the youth and for the youth. For this, we need greater youth representation and participation in policymaking areas. To achieve this, unveiling the suppressed and stifled young voices is imperative to achieving a convergence of expectations of the youth and the practical reforms that politicians can bring. This endeavour necessitates a united commitment from all political parties. With 64 per cent of the population below 30 years, the time to act was yesterday.

Politicians need to directly engage with young minds.

Politicians need to step out of their ivory towers and directly engage with young minds beyond mere displays of power in their jalsas. Using X spaces, they need to have more proactive dialogues with youth from different universities across all provinces to get a better understanding of the problems they face, as well as proposed solutions.

Digital platforms such as WhatsApp and X can be used as mechanisms for collecting information through simple surveys that contain questions focusing on broader issues faced by young people in Pakistan. To ensure a high response rate, the survey questionnaire can comprise simple multiple-choice questions on varied themes. Additionally, leveraging WhatsApp communities can serve as a valuable tool for direct engagement with young individuals to collect their insights.

Furthermore, designated representatives from political parties and governmental bodies can actively participate in meaningful discussions by connecting with student representatives from diverse universities, thereby establishing a dedicated virtual youth forum for constructive dialogue and engagement. These student representatives can be engaged in formulating and sharing with political representatives a concise five-point agenda for advancing youth development, working in tandem with the broader university student body. Additionally, webinars can be organised. They can serve as valuable opportunities to address a wide audience, including students, faculty members, and academic leadership, thereby creating a dynamic space for the exchange of ideas and solutions.

In a recent collaboration with the World Bank, we invited young minds from across Pakistan to share their vision of a brighter, more prosperous Pakistan, in a utopian sense. The entries we received broadly focused on four main themes: education, female empowerment, green energy transition, and inclusion. While reviewing the entries, we saw that participants were predominantly talking about education in the context of skill development. This observation made us rea­lise that at a bro­ader level, the un­­derstanding is there that Pakis­tan is undergoing a human capital crisis, and that the only way out is through accelerated action via skill enhancement across different sectors.

The youth is not merely talking of problems; it is also ready to put forth tailor-made solutions to address those problems. They seek nothing more than a receptive audience — a platform where their insights and recommendations can be heard, considered, and integrated into the broader discourse, thereby fostering a more inclusive and effective policymaking process.

As policymakers, we need to evaluate the factors that have led the youth to demand basic rights such as ‘education for all’ as something relegated to the realm of utopia, an unattainable dream. It is imperative that we move beyond addressing mere issues of polarisation and radicalisation. Instead, we must delve into the fundamental desires of the youth. Despite the dissent within this demographic, there is an undeniable undercurrent of hope which is rooting for change.

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