PARAMETERS PROMOTING OR PROHIBITING PARTICIPATION: A CASE STUDY OF YOUTH IN NORTHERN PAKISTAN

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Abstract:

This paper will explore how the concept of civil society is translated into practice in a specific geographical and social context by analysing responses from the primary sources in Pakistan's four Northern Areas districts including Ghizer, Gilgit, Hunza-Nagar and Astore. The paper will shed light on perceptions of the local youth about the nature and direction of their society; dynamics of relations among different sectors of the society; limitations and opportunities the youth face; the pre-requisites to empower the youth; and finally measures for effective youth and society dynamics. A key question therefore is how meaningfully do the youth manage to interface with different facets/components of civil society? The paper concludes with a summary list of factors which facilitate or frustrate empowerment of youth and analyze how the youth in Gilgit-Baltistan are faring on these parameters, and, to what extent the youth are able to act on their own and at their own terms.

Keywords: Youth Empowerment, Political Participation, Pakistan, Gilgit-Baltistan.

Resumen:

En este trabajo se estudiará cómo el concepto de sociedad civil se traduce en la práctica, en un contexto geográfico y social, mediante el análisis de las respuestas de fuentes primarias en cuatro distritos de las zonas del norte de Pakistán, incluyendo Ghizer, Gilgit, Hunza-Nagar y Astore. El artículo arroja luz sobre las percepciones de la juventud local sobre la naturaleza y la orientación de su sociedad; las dinámicas de las relaciones entre los diferentes sectores de la sociedad, las limitaciones y las oportunidades que la juventud tiene que encarar; los pre-requisitos para fortalecer a la juventud, y, finalmente, las medidas a adoptar para conseguir una juventud y una sociedad más dinámicas. Una cuestión clave por lo tanto, es ¿cómo los jóvenes se las arreglan para interactuar con los diferentes aspectos y componentes de la sociedad civil? El artículo concluye con una lista resumida de los factores que facilitan o frustran el fortalecimiento de la juventud, analiza cómo los jóvenes de Gilgit-Baltistán lo están pasando, de acuerdo a estos parámetros, y, en qué medida los jóvenes son capaces de actuar por su cuenta y en sus propios términos.

Palabras clave: Participación juvenil, participación política, Pakistán, Gilgit-Balistán.

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1. Introduction

Perhaps no discussion of civil society in Pakistan may be complete without referring to the conditions experienced, challenges faced by citizens these days. It has to do with fact whether the members of the society are stable and secure or do they instead feel unstable and insecure. This underlines the need for secure conditions so as the citizens feel safe. This bears direct implications on the civil society's viability.

This paper about the interaction of youth and Civil Society in Northern Pakistan aims to: (a) Develop an awareness of the future possible threats to and opportunities for the development of a strong, vibrant and healthy civil society; (b) Identify in what ways the civil society does and can prepare the local youth for addressing the challenges of the future and hence enhance the ability of civil society; and (c) Suggest policies, strategies and practices to help strengthen civil society through wider youth participation.

This research aims to bring forth the voices of young participants from the field. A field based survey allowed meeting laymen and professional people engaged in social or voluntary work, people with experience in public life or serving the district or provincial administration; besides others working at the grass-root level.

This research explores how the concept of civil society is translated into practice in a specific geographical and social context. The study carries out an analysis from the first hand responses to specific sets of questions collected from the primary sources in Pakistan's four northern districts including Ghizer, Gilgit, Hunza-Nagar and Astore located in Pakistan's Gilgit-Baltistan administrative region (previously/alternately known as the Northern Areas).[2]

2. Modes of Analyzing the Data

The study carries out an analysis from the first hand responses to a specific set of questions collected from the primary sources. While answering the main and subsidiary questions, the respondents also shed light on a number of related issues including:

1) Perceptions of the local youth about the nature and direction of their society

2) Dynamics of relations among different sectors of the society

3) What kind of limitations and opportunities the youth face?

4) Examining the pre-requisites necessary to empower the youth

5) Determining roles and responsibilities society's different section play.

6) Suggesting effectiveness and focus measures of inter-society dynamics to help the youth

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[2] Gilgit-Baltistan is administratively divided into two divisions which, in turn, are divided into seven districts, including the two Baltistan districts of Skardu and Ghanche, and the five Gilgit districts of Gilgit, Ghizer, Diamer, Astore, and Hunza-Nagar.

3. Key Definitions & Concepts

The following lines provide definitions of youth, with particular attention to the society. Who the youth are?

The meaning of youth and the way it is perceived by different sections of the society varies across time and space, as well as within societies. Hence, in addition to being defined chronologically (as a period of age between certain ages), youth is also defined functionally (involving a process of transition from childhood to adulthood, marked by physical changes), as well as culturally (pertaining to the role that individuals play in a given social context). In most countries, a person aged 18 and above is considered an adult. The operational definition and nuances of the term 'youth', however, vary according to the specific socio-cultural, institutional, economic and political context in any given country.

3.1. Youth as an Age Group

In Pakistan, if the age of youth is understood to be between 15 and 29, it means that forty million plus of its 170 million inhabitants fall in this category, which is one quarter of the country's total population. Youth represent the most energetic section of society and have the potential to fuel increasing socio-economic and political development.[3] Unfortunately, in terms of civic participation in societal endeavours, they are the most neglected demographic. Throughout Pakistan's history, policy makers and political parties have ignored the benefits of engaging and harnessing this untapped human capital.[4]

3.2. Centrality of Youth for this Research

In terms of their numbers, their energies and strengths the growing generation can potentially bring, the youth are, remain and will be the most significant portion of the population.

In Gilgit-Baltistan, like other parts of the country, there is a demographic transition. Almost 60% of the population of around 1.2 million people is less than 20 years of age and many of these young boys and girls will join the labour force in the next few years. This demographic group has higher education levels than the rest of the population; however, they lack productive skills to fight for competitive jobs or to become gainfully self-employed.[5]

This demographic is split into two main target groups, a) school dropouts with basic literacy and, b) educated youth with a university degree. Productive skills to match jobs in the emerging sectors are needed by both women and men to become gainfully self-employed. Main issues for the educated youth include mismatch between education and job requirement and lack of work experience.[6]

The young people are considered to be more energetic, more productive and able to make significant contribution economically to the country's development. Hence, they are a resource that can be mobilized to support, uphold and continue the keeping of power of current leadership. That's why they need to be equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to increase, expand and sustain such a potential.

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[3] Centre for Civic Education Pakistan (2010): *Civic Health of Pakistani Youth - Study of Voice, Volunteering and Voting among Young people*, Islamabad, p.2.
[4] *Ibid.*
[5] Beg, G.A. (2006): *Youth Issues and Challenges*, talk at Karakoram International University Gilgit, 23 April.
[6] *Ibid.*

3.3. Profile of Respondents

The draft National Youth Policy has defined youth as, "a period of transformation from family dependent childhood to independent adulthood and integration in the society as responsible citizens. In Pakistan youth group is defined as the population in the age group of 15 to 29 Years".[7]

The fieldwork undertaken in districts and sub-districts of Gilgit-Baltistan region benefits from interviews with young men and women aged 18-24 with intermediate education or above.[8] The profile of respondents reflects the representative nature of the individuals from both the public and private sector of the society. These include: youth activists; leaders in youth sports; women activists; cultural figures; teachers; students, journalists; economists; intellectuals; NGO activists; politicians; political scientists and sociologists. To solicit multiple perspectives a diverse sampling of development specialists were consulted to explore, identify and discuss the several aspects of social empowerment, its impact and possible measure to address that.

4. The Northern Areas Context

Pakistan's Northern Areas are located in the extreme North of the country and scattered over an area of 72,496 sq. km and remained historically significant for being part of the ancient Silk Route. Before the advent of Islam, this area was called Dardistan. Northern Areas borders with China's Sinkiang Province in North; Afghanistan in North West with Tajikistan close behind, and on the Southern side is a 300 miles stretch line with Indian controlled Kashmir and Ladakh.

Since the 1998 Population Census, the total population of Northern Areas has grown from 0.97 to 1.20 million. The density of population is 12 percent per sq. km. Main occupation of about 80% population is subsistence agriculture and earning very nominal income due to scarcity of farm land i.e. 0.127 hectares per capita. The remaining 20% population is engaged in services and small trades. The population is predominantly rural based and scattered over a high mountainous and difficult terrain. The entire area is characterized by the high mountains with hard climate i.e. warm dry in summer and cold in winter.[9]

4.1. Virtuous Paths or Vicious Circles: Youth Options in Northern Pakistan

The following passages explore in what ways despite having a significant portion of youth in the total population of Pakistan generally and Gilgit Baltistan particularly, the society has not been able to take optimal advantage of this reservoir of energy and enthusiasm. Voices of the youth and their peers are brought in to the discussion to explain what factors contribute to such situation and where such circumstances leave the young men and women of Northern Pakistan's Gilgit Baltistan region.

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[7] Centre for Civic Education Pakistan, *op. cit.,* p. 9.
[8] Namely the districts of Gilgit, Ghizer, Hunza-Nagar and Astore in Pakistan's Northern Areas visited in July 2009, transcription of the 100 interviews was completed in Winter 2009, while a detailed report completed in Spring 2010.
[9] Jamy, Gul Najam (2009): *Background Paper on Social Protection in the Northern Areas Pakistan: Northern Areas Economic Report* (NAER), Islamabad, World Bank/AKDN, p. 27.

For those young men and women in the Northern Areas of Pakistan investing sixteen to eighteen years of their lives to equip themselves with education the chances to get a reliable job with continuity and regular pay are not becoming much brighter. In fact, the prospects to get on a predictable career path are only getting unpredictable. The youth encounter narrow choices to select from, limited avenues to explore; a lack of adequate guidance; and, an absence of any appropriate process for career planning and guidance. While career coaching in itself is no guarantee to a secure job, it can nevertheless help determine what skills will be in demand in future and which ones offer lesser prospects.

Drawing on a survey of young adults, this paper identifies different factors that influence young people by shaping their post-school experiences particularly those which limit or constrain their choices. The opinions offered by youth shed light on the ways in which limited choices available to young people leave them exposed to the financial insecurities and economic uncertainties.

During the fieldwork, many respondents voiced concerns over being increasingly exposed to social and security risks that leave them unsafe and unprotected from a number of uncertainties mentioned a few paragraphs below. Moreover, in recent years, while conditions may have improved for some people, thousands of others have become more vulnerable; through greater exposure to physical or political disaster or threat, through higher costs of meeting contingencies such as health expenditures, or through loss of assets through individual or widespread disasters which have used up their reserves, leaving them less able to cope with future challenges. Such circumstances make it necessary to devise strategies that could help reduce risk, and improve assets through an increased ability for adapting and adjusting to the conditions. Nevertheless, action can fit better when based on sensitive understanding of who are at risk, what they want and need, and how they cope.

Many leading youth specialists have written about risk and vulnerabilities present young generation may need to encounter. Professor Gill Jones cautions that if young people have no power or influence over the policies and structures which determine their lives, then, institutional individualization can put them more at risk than adults [Jones 2009]. This research also provides a few pointers to some potential patterns of vulnerability. Vulnerability, writes Robert Chambers, means defenceless-ness, insecurity, and exposure to risk, shocks and stress. This implies weakness, isolation, poverty and powerlessness as well as vulnerability.[10]

Vulnerability here refers to exposure to contingencies and stress, and difficulty in coping with them. Vulnerability has thus two sides: an external side of risks, shocks, and stress to which an individual or household is subject; and an internal side which is defenceless-ness, meaning a lack of means to cope without damaging loss. Loss can take many forms – becoming or being physically weaker, economically impoverished, socially dependent, humiliated or psychologically harmed.[11]

Writing about the conditions prevalent in the Northern areas a female teacher trainer pointed out in 2006: "If the Karakoram Highway is blocked and the weather remains cloudy (as mostly it does in fall and winter) accessing goods and necessities of life from the down part of the country becomes dreadful for the people in the region. The supply of gas, vegetables, flour and other necessities of life becomes difficult (as the area lacks variety of

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[10] Chambers, Robert: "Vulnerability, Coping and Policy" (Editorial Introduction), Anthology 2006, Institute of Development Studies *IDS Bulletin*, vol. 37, no. 4 (September 2006), p.33-40.
[11] *Ibid.*

production). Interestingly, the prices of remaining goods get higher so it creates a clash between the nature and human beings, and life becomes harsh and challenging. These harsh realities of the context have also added to the difficulties of developmental processes in education, health and social mobility."[12]

Since autumn 2009, the situation has turned much more serious aggravated by torrential rains, floods, landslides and bursting of dams. The people and the authorities in Gilgit-Baltistan may never have anticipated the expanse of region's worst natural calamities. According to a report in The Dawn[13]:

Over 20,000 people evacuated from vulnerable villages downstream of the dammed Hunza lake were still in relief camps when the worst flood disaster struck all seven districts of Gilgit-Baltistan. According to Gilgit-Baltistan Disaster Management Authority [GBDMA] a total of 347 villages were affected due to the rains and floods, including 71villages in Diamer District where 103 casualties also took place. The total death toll in Gilgit-Baltistan is 183, as reported by GBDMA. The total number of houses damaged in Gilgit-Baltistan has been reported at 2,830 by the regional authority. A total of 86,000 people were affected including over 9,500 in Diamer District alone due to destruction of 953 houses. Moreover, Around 947 kilometres of paved and unpaved roads have been left in shambles, 182 bridges destroyed and several hydral power stations destroyed, plunging a major part of the region into darkness.

A veteran development worker active in the Northern Areas cites seven types of "risks" and "shocks" which contribute to the vulnerability of the people of the region[14]:

1. *Environmental and agricultural risks:* Given the heavy dependence of the poor on natural resources, for extraction of livelihood and to survive, depletion of natural resources usually has a very powerful negative impact;

2. *Economic risks:* Rise in the price of essential commodities such as food items and utilities causes great hardships to the poor. Seasonal migration to other parts of the country in search of jobs and other means of livelihood force a very large number of men to remain away from their homes. This creates lot of hardships for the women and even results in break down of families;

3. *Social services risks:* Absence of or rise in the cost of social services (health, education, water supply, sanitation, etc.) also make life dearer for the poor;

4. *Social risks:* Rule of law, access to cheaper modes of conflict resolution and inclusion as equal member of the immediate society allow the poor some level of dignity. Absence of these factors negatively impact the poor more than others as the poor are less equipped to manage arising out of such inequalities;

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[12] Begum, Safida (2006): *A Female Professional Development Teacher's Journey in the Northern Areas of Pakistan*, paper presented at conference held at AKU-IED, Karachi, February, at
http://www.eenet.org.uk/resources/docs/Female%20PDTs%20journey%20Pakistan.pdf.
[13] Skardu and Ghanche were the second worst hit districts in terms of loss of life, with 56 casualties, mostly in Qumrah and Talis villages which were washed away by flash floods while the people were asleep. Ghizer was the third worst hit district in terms of inundation of cropped fields, destruction of houses and damages to infrastructure: *The Daily DAWN*, 19 Sep, 2010, also see http://gbpost.wordpress.com/2010/07/02/drowning-of-promises-in-the-hunza-river-lake/.
[14] Jamy, *op. cit.,* p. 27.

5.   *Seasonal shocks:* During the harsh winter season, cost of almost all commodities rise and there is hardly any economic activity due to lack of visitors and non-availability of electricity. Also, during heavy rains or flash floods, the poor suffer the most due to the already depleted nature of their dwellings;

6.   *Sudden/short-term shocks:* Death or prolonged illness of earning members of the family, loss of job for a temporary period and natural disasters are another category of shocks adversely impacting the poor; and

7.   *Security risks:* In a multi-ethnic society, fears of ethnic clashes and worsening law and order situation are not uncommon.

The above lines listed a range of factors that keep the youth exposed to vulnerabilities. While the risks listed above were in the context of a specific geographic region, such challenges are faced are faced by a considerable sections of Pakistani population elsewhere too.

Historically the Northern Areas remained detached from the mainstream development process in the rest of the country. Its peculiar constitutional status and geographic location have resulted in low level of economic development, persistence of subsistence level livelihood options and absence of reliable macro (and even micro) level data. Between 1947 and 1977, for thirty years youth in Northern Pakistan remained isolated owing to absence of developed road links. During the present decade, while the physical limitations are being overcome with an expanded and stretched Karakoram highway, social shortcomings and cultural constraints pose disadvantage to options the young person have for higher education and working careers. The discussion conducted during the fieldwork referred to historical factors influencing youth's choices under structural, cultural and social realities.

Literacy rates in the NAs have increased rapidly over the last few decades, rising to 59% in 2005 in the AKDN programme area, which is higher than the national average of 53%. The gains stem from greater school enrolment in the 1990s, as well as targeted literacy programs run by the AKRSP and Aga Khan Education Services, Pakistan (AKES-P). In some parts of the Northern Areas, children do not have access to schools, even at primary level. Isolated villages, scattered population and physical barriers mean that children may have to travel substantial distances to school (an issue particularly for girls). There are few boarding facilities at middle and secondary level.

A significant level of efforts and resources are allocated to improve the literacy indicators in the Northern Areas of Pakistan. It is equally important to assess despite its remote, mountainous how adequately the educated batches of young people are being prepared to participate in the workforce of the future.

Drawing on a survey of young adults currently aged between 18 and 24, a study identifies different factors that influence young people by shaping their post-school experiences particularly the factors which limited or constrained their choices. This tendency is not a isolated one. Despite its remote, mountainous location youth in Northern areas find themselves facing a wide range of difficulties as new entrants exploring the job market encounter elsewhere. The opinions and observations offered help to understand the evolving phenomenon (in a broader global perspective) the ways in which narrowing options and

limited choices available to young people leave them exposed to the insecurities and uncertainties of modern labour markets. [15]

Such conditions point towards some cause and effect trends regarding factors at work without addressing which it will remain difficult to make the youth's contribution to the society effective enough:

a)   The education providers do not adequately map out what subjects are losing currency and what specializations will be in demand in the years to come. Due to an absence of a vision, many young people end up selecting typical subjects which continue to be adding new graduates to an already oversaturated market.

b)   The youth remain without voice or weight in all spheres. They are not given adequate platforms where they can express their aspirations and concerns or air their grievances. None of the youth are given a share to become stakeholders in decisions that touch their lives directly. There exist no forums where the youth could be engaged and involved except for very narrowly defined cultural festivals or social events offering very confined contours of expression and interaction.

c)   Most male respondents spoke about economic hardships and shrinking prospects of finding a secure, reliable and lasting job. On their part, most male respondents referred to the limited higher study options they get to choose from and narrowly defined career paths they could pursue. There is an overemphasis to complete higher secondary education with pre-medical subjects so as to pursue higher studies in medicine which is considered a socially approved course for women folk.

d)   In many rural areas there is a significant number young men and women with higher education, mostly without jobs as the neighbourhood schools and colleges have limited openings every year. The government service sector too has limited absorption capacity and does not always consider addressing local needs as a high priority.

e)   If sincere elements that could lead to meaningful and positive collaboration among different sections of the society are ignored, sidelined or marginalized, there is a risk that individuals and groups with selfish motives and narrow interests can jump forward to claim the space. Such a tendency risks further aggravation if a society lives with a lack of accountability, fails to extent a patient hearing to genuine grievances thus leaving the people denied their voice and left in an increasing state of helplessness.

The above facts lead us to draw the following inferences:

Though individual responses may point to individual elements, but when taken together they all add to reflect the common concerns faced and pressures encountered

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[15] Furlong, A., Cartmel; F., Biggart; A., Sweeting, H., & West, P. (2003): *Youth Transitions: Patterns of Vulnerability and Processes of Social Inclusion*, Central Research Unit, Edinburgh, Scottish Executive. Also see Erickson, Tammy: "Ten Reasons Gen Xers Are Unhappy at Work", *Harvard Business Online*, May 15, 2008, at http://www.businessweek.com/managing/content/may2008/ca20080515_250308.htm.

Civil society as we understand it in Northern Pakistan's context has a few fully supportive but also many obstructive of components influencing the progress towards civil society.

A number of indigenous and non- indigenous/external factors in Northern Pakistan that keep the society and particularly its youth vulnerable and prone to risks are brought to attention in the following passages. The analysis sheds light over what factors cast a negative impact on attempts towards contributing for the society's betterment. All these components add up to frustrate any efficient functioning of the society. A selection of observations made below by the respondents points out as to what factors do not allow civil society from thriving.

Let's examine how local figures think about the conditions that affect the people especially the youth? A human right activist notes the following shortcomings: "Not many people possess adequate awareness on the prevalent social problems. Not many people think how the society should prepare itself for the future and invest more time investigating about who is working for which sect's interests. Not many opportunities are accorded to the talented and educated young men. Owing to such conditions, some men move out of the locality to seek opportunities in other places."[16]

Several local intellectuals including pedagogues, writers and cultural figures drew attention of the negative influence sectarian politics cast on the future of youth in Pakistan's Northern Areas. In the words of a columnist, as long as there is no realization of the challenges, the knots will remain untied. It is culture that can effectively bring people around, sit side by side and as a common value make people rise from their sectarian divisions. According to a playwright, while the youth wish to play their part, unfortunately some religious elements try to pin every aspect of life to religion. When some jobless youth fail to find any suitable employment, they turn to religious leaders for help. This observation points to a tendency when after being turned back elsewhere, some youth turn to religious figures to use their leverage to help them open the doors to opportunities.

A development activist notes that usually among the elder generation, external intervention is not welcome as local wisdom is given a higher consideration. Nevertheless, political divisions and sectarian groupings continue to cause frustrations. Analyzing the far reaching affect of sectarian led divisions in the society, a veteran pedagogue points out that "those leaning towards sectarian tendencies affected general education; have led to political, religious fractions and have thus marred the contribution years of investment on education could have otherwise brought. There are some localities that have been affected by sectarian tendencies. We have the educational crisis from those years in many forms i.e. disruption of the academic year, inability to timely complete the scheduled syllabus, a fall in the standards."

An atmosphere of sectarian frictions cast its cloud on economic prospects in general and tourism related businesses in particular. A few young men who completed a six month course with Pakistan Institute in Hotel and Tourism Management (PITHM) in Food Production do not see prospects improving much. While discussing the issue of prospects one needs to have a perspective of present situation as compared to one that exited five years earlier. Even with experience of five years, a PITHM graduate failed to get much positive response. "There aren't enough tourists to bring business and generate vacancies. Those running petty ventures

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[16] Meeting with Israruddin Israr, Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, Gilgit, Sadai Gilgit, on 14 July 2009, Gilgit.

will not be able to offer many jobs. There is no clarity over what is going to come in the wake of the economic crisis and recurring power shortages. Self-operated projects cannot survive owing to disruptions and closures caused by ethnic strife which makes running business difficult eventually ending up in losses. Once a person is laid off, it becomes difficult to return to regular employment."[17] Economic hardships are further aggravated by loss of business caused by insecure conditions posed by sectarian tensions and occasional clashes. When coping with declining revenues and increased risk of losses, employers not only stop new recruitments, they also reduce their staff strength.

A member of the Gilgit Youth Forum's Coordination Committee suspects that the sectarian issue which remains the most pressing problem is created by those authorities who neither uphold justice nor do they bring the culprits to the book. Why it is so that despite the majority condemning sectarian conflict there is no let up in the tension? Cornell Scholar, Dr. Nosheen Ali notes that a "strong sense of religious difference has emerged and become politically significant precisely since the formal integration of the Northern Areas into the Pakistan state, between 1972 and 1974. This integration was effected partly in response to growing secular nationalist voices in the region that challenged the authoritarian rule of princely kings as well as of Pakistani military-bureaucratic officials, and demanded equal citizenship." Ali also sheds light on the dilemmas faced by the central authorities. "By abolishing the princely kingdoms that hitherto controlled the region, the Pakistan state was able to pacify the local populace, but meeting local demands for political representation and fundamental constitutional rights was deemed problematic in the larger context of the Kashmir dispute (Ali, 2009). Thereafter, state institutions – chiefly the army, intelligence agencies, and the KANA bureaucracy – embarked upon a 'divide-and-conquer' project that aimed at creating disunity along sectarian lines, in order to thwart secular-nationalist aspirations and regional solidarity."[18] KANA refers to the Federal Ministry for Kashmir Affairs and Northern Areas and it's the bureaucrats.

An activist of Pakistan Human Rights Commission in Gilgit who has closely observed the recent tendencies in the area notes: "The religion continues to enjoy a strong grip over the society. Mundane motives also play a role behind religious politics as some elements pursue material gains and power." He refers to a tussle among contestants who are eager to get an upper hand to secure opportunities and resources solely for their own followers. In his comments he thus describes the situation as well as analyzes the root causes possibly contributing to such trends:

"People remain divided on linguistic and sectarian lines and live in a fragile harmony suspecting if his neighbor is scheming to inflict harm. In the city, a woman stepping out of her home is constantly under the watchful gaze of the zealous religious youth. Recently, when some local girls set up stalls during the silk route festival, they were harassed and intimidated by religious students' groups."[19]

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[17] A young graduate from Pakistan Institute in Hotel and Tourism Management (PITHM) in Food Production interviewed in Karachi in July 2009.

[18] Ali, Nosheen: "Sectarian Imaginaries: The Micro-politics of Sectarian and State-making in the Northern Areas, Pakistan", *Current Sociology*, vol. 58, no. 5 (September 2010), pp 738-754.

[19] Meeting with Israruddin Israr, Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, Gilgit, on 14 July 2009.

5. Negative Fallout

Sectarian tendencies cast a negative shadow over the society, notes a veteran pedagogue. "In the Northern Areas, there is considerable external influence that bids to keep the area unsettled and disturbed. Some authorities made false promises, wooing certain constituencies by extending reassurances that sects in Gilgit will be able to have a curriculum of their liking. This led to expectations raised high unnecessarily. An aftermath of the 2005 sectarian frictions led to divisions among teachers and students on sectarian lines where each side was bent on teaching lessons to the other side."[20]

For young men and women, the sectarian tendencies do not leave much to hope, notes a columnist.

"The local youth seems to be depressed as the local political and sectarian factors do not allow them enough space and opportunity to work constructively and productively. The true face of Islam is obscured by tribal and narrow turf approach of elements raising Islam's banner- a tendency clearly observed in the local society. These conditions leave the youth depressed. To wriggle out of the circumstances, the Youth Organization was established in Gilgit but it could remain active for hardly 6-7 months. Literacy alone cannot provide the knowledge, vision and sense of direction that prompts to contemplate and verify the realities."[21]

A number of respondents have drawn attention to explain how the exogenous constructs of narrow sectarian tendencies negatively influence the formation of social capital as they hamper healthy interaction between various sections of the society. Social capital is a product of mobilized social resources, the important question then becomes how social resources are in fact mobilized. Simply stated by Baassani, "social capital develops in groups when structural and functional social resource efficiencies are present and social resource deficiencies are not (i.e., youths have healthy relationships with their parents or other adults and/or youths within the groups to which they belong). It is easiest to think of social capital as having two fundamentally interconnected components: the structural (who is in the group) and the functional (how the people in the group interact). Both are essential to forming social capital because when deficiencies in either occur, the development of social capital is hampered."[22]

If the relationship between various sections of the society is constructive, it will contribute to these components mutually supporting and strengthening one another. If narrow individual orientations and selfish group interests develop their roots the communities will be bifurcated along ideological (sectarian) lines leading to one section of the society dismissing the interests of the others. Efficiency and deficiency do not have precise definitions, but rather represent 'healthy' or 'unhealthy' relationships, notes Journal of Youth Studies, adding: "A healthy relationship is one that produces social capital, while an unhealthy relationship is one that produces limited social capital. It is essential to remember that these definitions vary across time and space, and as a result need to be defined depending on the culture, region, and era that is being examined. Consequently, limited social capital also will decrease the human

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[20] Meeting with a senior pedagogue, Gilgit, July 2009.
[21] Meeting with Israruddin Israr, Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, Gilgit, on 14 July 2009.
[22] Bassani, Cherylynn: "Five Dimensions of Social Capital Theory as they Pertain to Youth Studies", *Journal of Youth Studies*, vol. 10, no. 1 (2007), p. 24.

capital that is formed within a group, since social capital is the mobilizing impetus of human resources."[23]

Going through the selected respondents comments related to the challenges young people encounter, one can conclude that the youth in the Northern Areas of Pakistan usually have been unable to escape the negative fallout of sectarian activities as it affects their education, their careers, job prospects and their pursuit to contribute to peaceful, stable and effectively working civil society.

The following conclusions are based on findings made during a July 2009 visit to Northern Pakistan concerning Prospects & Problems of Youth Development in Mountain Settings:

This research critically evaluates what it means to be a young person in Pakistan's Northern Area as they are about to enter the second decade of the twenty-first century and the problems, opportunities and dilemmas that emerge from the experience. The chapteris based on a field-based study of young people between the ages of 18 and 24 largely based on discussions with focus groups held at 15 locations in districts and sub-districts in NAP.

The researcher also conducted interviews in order to obtain information on the ways in which individual strategies or behaviours increase or diminish the risk of marginalization.

Among the aims served by the research two were (1) to highlight the constraints on active life management stemming from personal characteristics and opportunity structures; and (2) To develop a clearer understanding of the contemporary transitional experiences of young people in NAP to facilitate more effective development of strategies for youth.

5.1. Summing up the Factors Favouring and Frustrating Youth-Civil Society Interaction

What lessons can a research about civil society processes can draw under circumstances where the civility of Pakistani society is often shadowed and jolted by episodes of savagery? It was in this backdrop that the dynamics and dimensions of how young men and women interface with civil society in Northern Pakistan were explored to list the factors that either favour or frustrate such interaction. A society is said to be effective when the elements contributing a constructive role are heard, engaged and involved in activities touching their lives, especially the aspirations and concerns of youth are taken on board and they are allowed to be partners and stakeholders in the collective process.

We also refer to the conditions which contribute to the current set of circumstances both locally and nationally. In the context of Pakistan particularly, as far as the government's focus remains on winning the war on terror, it predominantly ensues from and encircles around security issues. Up till now the results of this uni-focal approach have been mixed at best and alarming at worst. A search for possible causes point a finger to mixed signals sent to the population Which speak of confusion owing to an absence of balance in the priorities of the government between people's welfare, economic stability and state's security.

The scope needs to broaden up to secure the youth from risks, protect them from injustice and neglect, safeguard merit and basic rights and ensure representation, accountability and fairness. Otherwise instead of bonding, one will face blocking, instead of bridges there will be barriers and in place of accord there may be alienation.

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[23] *Ibid,* p.23.

The responses also draw attention to several poignant questions that await answers by a large section of the population. Here are some quotes which serve as only just a few quick samples from the respondents' comments:

It is important that the youth are offered protection from the challenges looming on the horizon. Influential institutions must think what conditions and circumstances push the youth off track notes a broadcaster who raises several issues regarding the priorities set to spend public funding saying while the government spends big sums on training every soldier, what about preparing the youth for the civil sector? The broadcaster also pointed out that the youth's concerns are not heard and most pending problems are left to pile up unattended in the area. Furthermore, in the National Assembly there is no one to ask why talented sports persons from the area are neglected during national selections. There should be organized effort to encourage local players become part of the national team. All this contributes to a sense of frustration. [24]

A veteran school teacher points to absence of safeguards to ensure justice and merit is upheld for youth to secure them from falling prey to social evils. He wonders if an educated person should secure an appointment through paying a bribe what kind of character building would be expected from him.

A leading lawyer complains that instead of having harmony promoted only confrontation got spread. As a local intellectual explains it, there is a lack of engagement, interface and mechanism for attending to and redressing of youth grievances. In addition to neglect of youth's concern, it is said that instances of mishandling have contributed to the deterioration in the youth s situation. No steps are taken to address youth problems promptly and effectively. Under the circumstances, though many youth do think about improving its conditions, the sense of deprivation is prevalent.

5.1.1. Is there a Link between Neglect, Abandonment and Despair?

An overriding disappointment has been the case that the local authorities are yet to pay adequate attention for affectively address the unemployment in the Northern areas. A political activist who is a contractor by profession offered the following comments regarding a mismatch of government development spending vis-à-vis the local needs. Lately, the Northern Areas have come to be known as the graveyard of long neglected development priorities as there are no playgrounds, no funds for organizing tournaments, no outlets to keep the youth busy with and prevent them from going wayward. This area has clean air, good locations and abundant talent but lacks proper training. The area needs better attention from the federal authorities. However, some bureaucrats act as a barrier.

Youth social work pioneer, Gisela Konopka lists eight principles for youth development that include[25]: (1) Safe environments, (2) A sense of belonging and ownership, (3) Self-discovery, (4) Development of self-worth, (5) Ability to form values out of conflicting situations, (6) a chance to develop quality relationships with adults and peers, (7) Pride and accountability that comes with mastery and competence, and (8) A chance to expand capacity in order to know that success is possible.

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[24] Conversation with local radio broadcaster in Gilgit, July 2009.
[25] Knopka, G. (1973): "Requirements for Healthy Development of Adolescent Youth", *Adolescence,* vol. 8, no. 31 (Fall 1973), pp. 2-28.

The above list serves as pre-conditions for optimal creation of social capital a vital ingredient for any civil society's effective functioning. Thus having referred to the need to examine the capacities civil society can contribute to for benefitting from the most resourceful component of the population we now move to the following passages to examine as to what extent these preconditions are met and what factors continue to pose as impediments.

The below lines are selected from discussions held during a month-long fieldwork in Northern Pakistan that point their finger to list the factors that either favour or frustrate interactions that could promote the civil and collaborative actors of the society. They identify some recurring issues that cause concern to most respondents and also point to a number of factors that could potentially allowed to promote the civil society as well as a few factors which leave contributors at odds with each other.

We turn to specific aspects from a survey of responses provided by interviewees in Northern Pakistan reflects the perception about civil society and how it is experienced at layperson level to reflect how the standards of an effective and viable civil society measure up in the eyes of its participants and beneficiaries.

Below is a summary list of factors which facilitate or frustrate empowerment of youth to help analyze how the youth in Gilgit-Baltistan are faring when it comes to act on their own or take decisions at their own terms. So instead of referring to an atmosphere of positive connections and constructive collaboration, a number of respondents spoke of despair and disappointment which is caused by an absence of enfranchisement. Among many essential factors contributing to such conditions are: (1) Neglect (2) Lack of enfranchisement (3) Inability to address crucial problems; (4) Mismatch of priorities (5) Arbitrary allocation of resources (6) Short-sightedness (7) A fractured fraternity (Lack of collaborated efforts by the community for the development of community) (8) Lack of accountability (9) Pacifying and placating the populace; (10) Implications of sect-centered activism; (11) Extent of being voiceless and helplessness (12) People's inability to muster necessary strength (13) Prioritizing on personal preference (14) Frustration among youth, when qualified enough to serve elsewhere they opt for an exit.

Instead of paraphrasing or elaborating their views with added interpretation, at this stage, I offer a selection of the respondents' comments to let the readers draw their own inferences without much intermediary facilitation.

5.2. Neglect

A leading lawyer based in Gilgit points out that "the area continues to be neglected and doesn't get the attention given to other places in the country. The long overdue extension of the local airport continues to be pending. The whole country benefits from the water resources emanating from here but not enough projects barring a handful are setup to take advantage of this potential. As there is no enfranchisement, interests of the Northern Areas are not represented adequately."[26]

Experts who analyze the political processes point out to the fact that a continued lack of engagement and a failure to address people's genuine needs take public frustration to a level where they are angered by the broken promises of the politicians. People are increasingly cynical about trusting mainstream political leaders and political parties that promise the world

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[26] Meeting with President Gilgit Bar Association, Gilgit, 12 July 2009.

but never deliver. In a broader a political culture is noticed to be "operating on a cumulative record of broken electoral promises". [27]. Looking at local newspapers and talking to observers of the local social and political scene, one hears reference to a deficit of trust in the local political setup.

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5.3. Frustration among Youth

How the youth concerns should be perceived? A local intellectual admits, there haven't been much specific efforts to highlight youth related issues. Some local columnists have drawn attention towards pending problems like lack of a representative status. These writers point out that owing to lack of incentives or engagement opportunities many young men leave their family and homes behind to move to Karachi. Some teachers end up working as technicians or as technical labour.[28]

A local advocate elaborates this point further: After completing basic education, many youth prefer to get higher education. But, hardly 5% get appropriate jobs owing to limited opportunities. All young men think of having a bright future but find no practical outlets or opportunities. Owing to lack of options, people get frustrated. There were expectations that the Karakoram International University, Gilgit will lead to positive results. While every year up to 250 students complete higher education, there is no local industry where these educated cadres could get absorbed. Despite cheap labour and low cost of raw material there is no local industry. The area is endowed with reserves of marble, gold and precious stones and is also suitable for producing cement, bricks, and gem stones but there isn't enough investment made.[29]

The circumstances lead a civil society activist to conclude that it is "the untapped potential that leads to frustration among youth and serves as a reason for some indulging in street crime."[30]

5.3.1. Inability to Address Crucial Problems

A young physician also active participant in local youth forum points out that "the government has failed to pay adequate attention to address the unemployment in the area. If a major project was launched to upgrade the Karakoram highway plans should have been prepared to suggest how the local population could benefit from such opportunity. But there are hardly a few trading people who have developed some Chinese conversation skills."[31]

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[27] Drache, Daniel (2008): *Defiant Publics*, Cambridge, Polity Books, p. 117.
[28] Conversation with local intellectual in Gilgit, July 2009.
[29] President Gilgit Bar Association, Gilgit, 12 July 2009.
[30] Manager, Civil Society Programme, AKF, Pakistan Islamabad, 6 July 2009.
[31] Meeting with local physician, and activist of Gilgit Youth Forum, Gilgit.

5.3.2. Mismatch of Priorities

Below respondents draw attention to a few examples that illustrate a difference in ways things are prioritized in the different sections of the society:

Sharing his observation, a lawyer notes that whereas "issues considered important by a bureaucrat are solved in a few hours many outstanding problems faced by the local population for long decades remain unsolved."[32] This statement implies how one issue is attended on prompt basis while others are let to drag on for a long time such as the local demands to build a stadium and a theatre and fund activities of local young artists.

5.3.3. Arbitrary Allocation of Resources

A civil society activist with a respected NGO notes that when it comes to decide the fortunes the absence of voice still looms large as a factor. Over the past 26 years between 1983 and 2009, "budget allocation has remained a matter of total dictation as all funds are allocated by the chief secretary without any audit or accountability."[33]

As pointed out by a local advocate, there is an ongoing tussle over the distribution of resources as the Chief Secretary is entrusted as the sole arbitrator for allocating funds but the public interest is not always taken into consideration. Up until recent past, appointments for local vacancies didn't reflect holding local interests up as a high priority.

Until recently a government appointee acted as the peoples' representative and acts as sole authority. "For fifteen years organizers of Pakistan Peoples' Party in the Northern Areas have been asking their party's Central Executive Council that powers should be transferred to the public representatives vested in the bureaucrats appointed by the Federal Ministry for Kashmir Affairs and Northern Areas" [34] (KANA). Now it has been announced that many of the grievances will be addressed in a new package that has been prepared for the Northern Areas.

A group of MBA students at Karakoram International University, Gilgit offered the following candid remarks after turning in their responses on the survey questionnaire: There is more enfranchisement in Pakistan's Federally Administered TribalAreas than in Northern Areas. Here there are no forest officers are appointed and hence no check on how effectively trees are conserved. If and when any posts are created, usually candidates from outside Northern Areas get engaged who have less concern for local conservation. Comparatively, far more forest related openings are created in Punjab, NWFP while none in the Northern Areas. These concerns should not be dubbed as protests but be taken as genuine concerns.[35]

A senior administrator at a local girls' high school feels that despite all their good intentions, the NGOs can make only partial difference specially when there is neither recognition nor reward and even degrading of hard work and sincere efforts. It was the local cadres who won independence. Why an outsider with no understanding of local conditions is imposed as the Secretary of the local education department?

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[32] Head of Peoples' Lawyers Forum, Gilgit, 12 July 2009.
[33] Manager, Civil Society Programme, AKF, Pakistan Islamabad, 6 July 2009.
[34] Head of Peoples' Lawyers Forum, Gilgit, 12 July 2009.
[35] A student of MBA at KIU, Gilgit.

5.3.4. Short-Sightedness

In the opinion of a political activist in Gilgit: "No body concerns about collective benefit beyond securing the personal gains. There is much talk about local problems. Many political factions raise demands but fail to join hands to press collectively for their demands in a united manner."[36]

A coordinated approach among different sections of the society can increase their capacity for collective bargaining. Owing to a disunited and weak polity, the citizens position to bargain and extract positive results stakeholders remain limited. Even more so, when some elements of the society pursue a short sighted, narrow or sectarianapproach to secure limited gains at the cost of collective benefit to the communities at large.

It is such circumstances that makes a veteran political scientists thus assume: Perhaps it is still a long way from the stage when the state of affairs brought home the realization for publics and policy makers that people deprived of rights "are deprived not of the right to freedom, but of the right to action; not of the right to think whatever they please, but of the right to opinion…" [37]

5.3.5. A Fractured Fraternity

A political activist illustrates why the citizens voice usually remains unheard: "If the political elements close their ranks, the balance of power can shift to the people and their representatives. However, it remains difficult to assemble 500 citizens to press for their rights. At all places, people enjoy rights and have responsibilities. Here, people are just reminded about their obligations but no safeguards are accorded to their genuine rights. The local population remained unsuccessful so far to draw attention to their pending problems. Until political elements get stronger, not many public issues will get solved. [38]

It seems that some remain eager to disallow any possibility for a concept of a public system of checks and balances, a necessary part of creating alternatives. The above conditions point to a situation where dissent [is yet to] become an essential and effective counterpoint to the mainstream discourse of law, security, markets, and private accumulation. [39]

During the discussions in the field, many respondents pointed towards the dissatisfaction prevalent among different sections of the society. The quotes reflect the sentiments of some of the discussants hinting at what kind of misgivings they have and who they expect to address their grievances. The above passage illustrates the complex dynamics in which the youth of Northern Pakistan live in and the challenges they face on a day to day basis.

5.4. Implications of Sect-Centred Activism

A veteran pedagogue who has been closely observing the many challenges which the present period brings notes how sect-centred politics has encroached on casting a dark cloud on key spheres of life adversely affecting the academic process and jeopardizing long years of resources and efforts invested on education. Extending his analysis further, the veteran

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[36] Meeting with representative of Pakistan Muslim League (N), Gilgit, 12 July 2009.
[37] Drache, *op. cit.,* p. 156.
[38] Head of Peoples' Lawyers Forum, Gilgit, 12 July 2009.
[39] Drache, *op. cit.,* p. 140

pedagogue also raises the issue regarding an absence of effective governance which allows sectarian actors mobilize the religious pulpit to agitate for rights of their proponents and supporters. Suggesting a way out of the sectarian dead end, the pedagogue thus expanded further: "To benefit from future opportunities, we need to have an effective government that develops adequate conditions to benefit from future prospects in a way that does not seek support from or dependence on others. For that more educational, professional and technical institutional are required. But not in a way where there are more institutions, teachers are unqualified, standards are poor, and though more students pass out every year, there standard keep declining. No new vacancies are created and job openings are allocated internally.

5.4.1. Extent of Helplessness in Addressing Long-Standing Issues

The public concerns are not accorded a high priority. The poor law and order situation is linked with the sectarian problem which has not been addressed adequately. Getting disappointed by the political leadership, the people turn to those religious leaders who enjoy greater mobilization and bigger clout. Until political elements get stronger, not many public issues will get solved. For a long period, a government appointee acted as the peoples' representative and acts as sole authority.

Referring to the fallout of the rift between different religious factions, the professor points out how non-local elements stirred the situation and polarized the schools and colleges. – repeated!

The above lines elaborate how the public's trust in the leadership, policies and activities of the political party declines to a very low level and they seek to find alternate recourse for getting their grievances addressed. In the case of Gilgit it is noted that upon getting increasingly disappointed by local authorities and national political parties, some sections of the society went along with the sectarian elements to see if their rights could be better looked after. A political science professor, Daniel Drache, provides insights about the implications of such tendencies in general terms: What leads to further alienation from the political process is the authorities "attempts to control the intellectual agenda" so that activists can be "manipulated and kept on a short lease by elites for co-opting and controlling "forces of space, place and citizenship". Based on years of study of political development in different settings, Drache notes in important areas that regulate state violence we know that the public domain beyond the state lacks teeth and its weakness has allowed it to be co-opted…A mountain of social research teaches us that publics are infinitely capricious, often progressive, and sometimes reactionary – choosing demagogues over democrats especially in the time of security and upheaval.[40]

In Pakistan's Northern areas the fact that mainstream political parties do not have bigger appeal than localized and narrow sectarian groupings is reflective of the prevalent political currents and social dynamics in the society.

There is a failure of different sections of the society to mitigate tensions, and douse the sparks that pose a risk to be flared up by elements with ulterior motives.

This observation noted in a localized context finds an echo with a caveat voiced by a political scientist in connection with the present and future public space and public discourse in wider context. While seeking evidence from political theory about such tendencies one

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[40] *Ibid.,* p. 155.

comes across this caveat where political history Drache warns: When the public domain is weak and ineffective, society pays in hard currency of unilateralism, crude rent-seeking and economic exclusion. Here is the basic truth of why the public domain's boundaries are never fixed but are shaped by the changing balance of power between social actors.[41]

6. Conclusions

Voices from the field shed light about what factors are contributing for the society's betterment positively and what factors cast a negative impact. One component that will influence civil society considerably is trust. It is significant as it also generates social capital that allows participants to benefit from society's resources and skills. The region is rich in resources. Young men and women are both motivated for education, and many are both skilled and/or talented. Even then, owing to a lack of essential opportunities, they do not get to reap the benefits of the resources they are endowed with. It is mistrust that prevents different elements of the society in collaborating optimally.

Young people's choice of subjects and the geographical location from where they come could lead to disallowing competencies gain their full potential and may place them in a disadvantageous position when seeking employment with their competencies underutilized. For example, the choice of subjects available for study needs to be broadened to help young people with wider, flexible choices and to enable them become more competitive. Such measures will help youth move on to a virtuous trajectory rather than moving in a vicious circle.

For maximum effectiveness, youth participation need to expand beyond the occasional yet token consultations to real, meaningful involvement where young people are viewed not only as beneficiaries or targets of assistance but as decision-makers. Engaging with them in a token manner does little or nothing for the vast majority of young people – often the most marginalized ones – who do not belong to any youth organizations.

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[41] *Ibid.,* p. 155 and p. 21.