

1A.2. Young People's Participation in Civil Society and Political Life: Findings from the *Youth in India: Situation and Needs Study, Maharashtra*

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Background/ Significance: Youth participation in social, civic and political processes is increasingly recognized as an important development objective. Nonetheless, evidence that sheds light on the extent to which youth participate in such processes, and the factors that facilitate it remains limited in most developing countries including India.

Main Question/Hypothesis: This paper attempts to answer the following questions in Indian context: What extent do young people participate in social, civic and political processes? What are their perceptions about political processes? What extent do they hold pro-social values, as measured by, secular attitudes? What are some of the factors correlated with youth participation in social, civic and political processes?

Methodology: A representative survey of young people in rural and urban settings was conducted in December 2005-August 2006 in the state of Maharashtra, as part of a sub-nationally representative study undertaken for the first time in India of key transitions experienced by youth. Respondents included unmarried females and males and married females aged 15-24 and, in view of the paucity of married males in these ages, married males aged 15-29.

Descriptive data on youth participation in programmes sponsored by government and non-government organizations, participation in community-led activities, membership in organized groups, and voting practices will be used to examine the levels of youth participation in social, civic and political processes. Youth perceptions about whether they reported disillusionment with the commitment of political parties to work for change at community level and whether they believed that people could vote freely and without fear, and the extent to which they held secular attitudes will also be presented. Data disaggregated by age, sex, marital status and rural-urban residence of young people will be presented.

Multivariate regression will be used to explore whether such factors as age, gender, schooling, religion, caste, exposure to mass-media, agency, parental connectedness, peer support, socialization pattern and religiosity were correlated with youth participation.

Data: Findings are presented from a sample of 3,082 young men and 4,488 young women.

Findings: Analysis is ongoing, but preliminary findings show that youth participation in government and non-government organization sponsored programmes was limited – 9-15% of youth reported participation in such programmes in the three years preceding the survey. However, much larger proportions –29% to 63% -- of youth reported participation in community-led activities in the 12 months preceding the survey. In general, one fifth or fewer youth reported membership in organized groups, ranging from self-help groups to sports and social clubs. Young men than young women, and rural youth than urban youth were more likely to report participation in programmes and membership in organized groups.

Voting practice was far from universal; 88% of eligible married young men reported that they had voted in the last elections, compared with 64% of married young women and unmarried young men and 45% of unmarried young women.

Findings also show that a large majority (75-81%) of youth reported disillusionment with the commitment of political parties to work for change at community level. At the same time, most young people (80-88%) perceived that elections were fair and one could vote without fear. With respect to secular values, findings show that the vast majority of youth reported that they mixed freely with individuals of different religions and castes; however, the majority argued that it was acceptable to punish anyone who insulted their religion.

Knowledge Contribution: Findings fill a major gap in existing knowledge about a poorly researched theme, namely youth participation in civil society and political life. In the Indian context, findings provide the much-needed evidence base for the design and implementation of programmes to enable youth participation in social, civic and political processes.