

Harnessing Potential of Young Men & Women: The Need of a Youth Policy in FATA

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Abstract

In any society and country the youthful section of population is of critical importance as far as development of that society or country is concerned. The youth are the vehicles on which the process of development moves forward. In Pakistan, the youth have constantly been ignored in the state policies. Successful governments have been formulating policies with least concern for the development and interest of the youth. Consequently, the potential and talents of the youth cannot be utilized for the economic and social development of the country. As the FATA has been part of Pakistan, the youth of the region also suffered the same callousness from the official circles rather, the state itself. The tribal areas are the most neglected part of Pakistan in terms of state-sponsored socioeconomic and physical development. Resultantly, the youthful portion of the areas' population has suffered even more severely. Even today, the federal government, which is constitutionally responsible for overseeing the administration of the FATA, and the relevant government departments including the FATA Secretariat, FATA Development Authority and other line departments have no direction for doing anything concrete for the development of youth of FATA. This paper looks into the potential of the youth of FATA and the need of a comprehensive policy and its ingredients to harness these potential in the great challenges to the socioeconomic and physical development of the region.

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Introduction

The Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan on the border with Afghanistan has been under the lens of the national and international media for all the wrong reasons for more than a decade. Since the September 9/11 incidents in the United States and the ensuing getting of hideouts by foreign and Pakistani terrorist and militant networks in FATA, the world and Pakistanis have been interested in the news about the terrorist networks like the Al-Qaeda and the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) operating from the launching pads they created or found in FATA.

There has been a least interest in the region itself and its people particularly their needs and aspirations. This has created a lot of confusion in the minds of the outsiders about the inhabitants of FATA. The reality has been that the residents of the tribal areas or FATA are humans like any other place of the world. They are as genius, hardworking and desirous of development as people elsewhere. However, the social structures and the structures of governance that the state has designed for the region have prevented the people of the tribal areas to use their genius, to engage in hard work and have development.

Surprisingly, the need for having a comprehensive programme or policy to harness the potential of the youthful portion of population in FATA has never been felt by the state authorities. Politicians and political governments as well as the bureaucracy all are responsible for this callous state attitude towards the young men and women of FATA. However, as FATA constitutionally had been out of bound for the activities of political parties and politicians till very recently and have been directly administered by the civilian bureaucracy, the latter is largely responsible for state unresponsiveness to the development needs of the youth of FATA.¹ Political parties had not been allowed to carry out political activities, nor had the residents of FATA been allowed to take part in politics.² President Zardari proclamation of extension of the Political Parties Act of 1962 to the tribal areas legalized

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activities by the political parties in FATA and allowed the residents of the tribal areas to take part in politics.

Efforts to Formulate Youth Policy

It was Pakistan People's Party (PPP) leader Masud Kausar, who as Governor of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), in the last days of his tenure (early 2013) directed the authorities to formulate a youth policy for the tribal areas. Constitutionally, governor of KPK is also the ex-officio head of entire administration of FATA. The governor runs affairs of the FATA through bureaucracy headed by Additional Chief Secretary (ACS) and its administration, the FATA Secretariat, located in Peshawar.

Asking the administration to frame a youth policy was commendable on part of former governor Masud Kausar, however, it was surprising he himself or his administration did not feel the need of having such a policy after observing the situation personally, which as governor he and his predecessors should have in the first place. In fact, ex-Governor Masud Kausar issued the directives after meeting a delegation of FATA Youth Assembly, an organization formed by university students of FATA studying in different institutions in the KPK.³ In fact, it was this voluntary body of students who suggested formulation of a FATA Youth Policy to the governor. "Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Governor, Barrister Masood Kausar while conceding to a proposal from FATA Youth Assembly, a non-political, non-partisan and non-profitable organization, has directed the concerned authorities to formulate FATA Youth Policy. He further desired that a complete draft, encompassing views of the respective youth, should be presented to him within the shortest possible time." (The Nation, 2013) Most importantly the governor appreciated the proposal and said on the occasion "this is a genuine request and I will ensure that the proposed document must reflect aspirations of FATA youth to the utmost level." (The Nation, 2013)

This speaks volumes of government apathy towards the tribal areas in general and their youths in particular as it testified that the government did not have any policy to develop youth of FATA thus far. Ironically, by the end of 2013 no youth policy for FATA could be formulated let alone implementing it. This disproves, rather nullifies, all tall claims of the governmental authorities they have been making for a decade of having a full range of policies and programmes to develop the tribal areas. Personally, Governor Masud Kausar still made a great decision to formulate a youth policy. Perhaps coming from a learned and literary family of Kohat⁴ contiguous to one of FATA district, he may also have been taken aback to learn that his administration did not have any youth policy in FATA.

While the administration and bureaucracy role regarding FATA must be condemned in the strongest words, the educated youth of FATA must be praised for feeling the need of having a youth policy for their region. It means that the youth in FATA are more alive and responsive to the problems of the tribal areas instead of the concerned government departments. Keeping this in view, they should be given a lead role in policymaking regarding youth in FATA. Only the young men and women of FATA know their real problems, developmental needs and aspirations. This would give a new dimension to the policies regarding FATA and would make them more rationale, and thus having the potential of success. This is also important because the government policies and strategies in other areas regarding FATA have failed. The reason behind it has been that these policies have been formulated without participation of the relevant sections of society and communities in FATA.

The highest number of militants among the ranks of the Pakistani militant and terrorist groups comprise of young men from FATA. Moreover, since 9/11 FATA has become the largest terrorist staging and hiding region in the entire World. Against this backdrop, it was expected that the government must have a well-articulated policy in place for educating and employing the youth of the region. Lack of education and employment opportunities

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have been the biggest pull and push factors for youth to join militant and terrorist organizations using the name of Islam. The pull of becoming popular and have power and the push of adverse personal and family economic position have driven thousands of youth towards the terrorist and militant groups. On the other hand, it is also important to note that most of the militant commanders of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) are young men from FATA. Hakimullah Mehsud, the former head of TTP, who was said to be in his early 30s, was a case in point. In this context formulation and full-fledge execution of a youth policy for FATA was critical. When such a policy will be formulated is anybody's guess, but the more it is delayed the further the situation is going out of the state's control and more and more youth of the region are falling prey to the charm, propaganda and pull of the militants. Moreover, it is not a matter of merely formulation of the policy regarding youth of FATA, equally important is its execution in the best of manner so that it must benefit the largest number. Only then it would make some meaningful impact to reverse the process of radicalization of the young men and women from FATA, and would as well prevent further depriving the areas of socio-economic and physical development.

However, keeping in view the prevailing objective conditions one is absolutely doubtful that the administrative departments dealing with the tribal areas would be able to devise such policy any time soon. As mentioned above, there are many departments dealing with the affairs of FATA but they could not come up even with a brief document regarding the youth in FATA. This is despite of the fact that millions of dollars worth of foreign aid has been constantly landing in the government department managing the affairs of FATA but all of them seem to have gone down the drain. As is evident from the recent direction by the governor to formulate a FATA youth policy. Reportedly, Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) unearthed billions of rupees worth of fraud and corruption in the FATA secretariat. "The Federal Investigation Authority (FIA) had started investigations on alleged corruption by the FATA Secretariat and political agents of Khyber and Bajaur

agencies. They are accused of embezzling funds for different projects meant for the tribal areas.” (The Express Tribune, 2013)

The formulation of a policy to address the problems and issues of the youth as well as to enable them to use their talents in the best of manner for the country, society and community in FATA has been of extraordinary importance. According to statistics the proportion of young population of FATA⁵ is 37.8 percent. This is a significant percentage by any standard. Moreover, the percentage of even younger population⁶ is 43.4 percent. Noticeably, in the years ahead this section of the population would make the youth having large-scale implications. (Government of Pakistan, 2009)

The policies ought to respond to the needs and issues of the youth otherwise they cannot be termed ‘policies’. The reason is that policies are made to benefit the people rather their greatest number. In the context of FATA, there is no policy for the youth, what to say of its responsiveness.

This is indeed a grave situation with no solution in sight within the existing administrative structures of FATA, which are anything but an administrative apparatus. Despite being strategically of extreme significance particularly after the 9/11 incidents in the US, and the international, national and regional terrorist groups making FATA their hideout, there is no viable administrative set-up in place to establish and restore the state writ in the tribal areas and start development work there. The roots of the problem lies in the mind of Pakistani strategists who have always considered FATA from a military security point of view while overlooking the fact that it is the issue of human security for the inhabitants of the region which could result in military security. The manifestation of this mindset has been that FATA could not get a definite political-administrative status within the Pakistani state structure. Although constitutionally FATA is part of Pakistan but they do not have any clear status even to this date.

The status of FATA, for all intents and purposes, is still very much an undefined one. This can be gauged from the fact that

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FATA has a special status of being part of Pakistan but is still ‘independent’ as government documents call them. However, the successive governments since 1947 have always used the term ‘independent’ for the FATA tribesmen to exploit them while doing absolutely nothing to develop these areas. This independent status’ at best’ means that tribesmen (not tribeswomen) could decide their internal disputes of civil nature through the traditional *jirga* system. Moreover, tribesmen as per their traditions could keep and display arms publicly. Otherwise this independence has had nothing to do with the political, developmental or strategic affairs.

Without first addressing the problem of administrative status and structure of FATA, any policy whether regarding youth or about introducing local municipal corporations would remain a far cry. The best way to solve the issue is to make FATA a separate province. It is hoped that the present governor would implement the direction of former governor regarding devising a youth policy for FATA.

Potential of Youth of Fata to Formulate Policies

It is important to note that when a rare opportunity was provided to the educated youth of FATA to provide input to the development of their region, they responded splendidly. It was at the end of the last year that the authorities in FATA asked for the suggestions of the youths of FATA for development of the region. The FATA Secretariat organized a daylong ‘Pre-Development Budget (2014-15) Consultative Workshop.’ The event was organized as a rare opportunity for participants involving over 180 students from the University of Peshawar to pinpoint issues hampering peace building and development in FATA. (DAWN, 2013). On this occasion one of the participants, a student of Political Science at the University of Peshawar, very rightly argued. “Our institutions have failed to address people’s needs and would fail in future as well if they did not take prudent measures.” (DAWN, 2013). The group on ‘rule of law’ recommended separation of judiciary from executive and the establishment of

local government system on pure democratic lines, and setting up a system of accountability.

The young students of FATA during the consultative workshop gave a host of recommendations regarding measures for defeating militancy, resuscitating and galvanizing economic activities, formulating and transforming laws, strengthening institutions, reforming administration, and organizing community in the tribal areas. (DAWN, 2013) The youthful participants pointed at the flaws in the policy regarding FATA. For instance, a member of the group on 'agriculture and natural resources,' pointed out that 80 per cent of the people of FATA were dependent on farming and natural resources. "But this sector is allocated only two per cent of the ADP resources," he said, pointing out flaws in the development planning. Members of the 'non-farm economic development' group asked for private sector development by making sustained investment in the industrial, mineral, and technical education sectors. (DAWN, 2013)

These recommendations and pinpointing of flaws in the government policies demonstrate the potential of youth of FATA in helping formulating policies regarding all the sectors of their region. Thus policies in the FATA could only be effective when there would be fullest participation of the youth not only in their formulation but also their implementation.

Ingredients of FATA Youth Policy

In order to ensure the fullest participation of the youth in the formulation of developmental policies regarding FATA, the region ought to have a youth policy so that the capacity of the young men and women could be built regarding understanding issues, strategies and constraints or otherwise in this regard. The above-mentioned consultative process by the FATA Secretariat is a good beginning.

Insofar as the key ingredients of the proposed FATA youth policy is concerned, it must address the following aspects.

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Education:

The ratio of education among the youth of the FATA is extremely low. Without significant percentage of the population, that is at least 70 percent, being educated, the process of change in the tribal regions cannot be meaningfully started, implemented and sustained. Therefore, the proposed policy of youth in the region must lay out the ways and means to increase the rate of literacy.

Human Rights:

The FATA youth policy must emphasize on the issues of human rights and must be educated on the importance of human rights. Educating the youth in schools and colleges the history of human rights movements elsewhere in the World could do this.

Teaching Religious Beliefs:

It has been observed that many people in FATA due to the conservativeness of the region and the society there have a much distorted understanding of the principles and tenets of the great religion, Islam, which has fuelled insurgency and militancy there. Therefore, the proposed policy of the FATA must look into ways and means how to devise strategies to make the youths there understand the real spirit of Islam and the ways and means appropriate to use the Islamic principles to improve themselves and their society.

Women Development:

Although the men in the FATA are also socially, politically and economically quite deprived but the conditions of the women living in the FATA in this regard is the worst. The extreme socio-economic status of the women of FATA is even acknowledged by the government. The website of the FATA Secretariat, Women Empowerment Wing reads: "Since the independence of Pakistan,

the issues being faced by the women of FATA has not been addressed and nor was any effort made for their empowerment due to which they lag far behind the rest of the country. The recent mass displacement due to the war on terror has increased the miseries of the people of FATA in general and that of the women manifold.”

Keeping in view the potential of women in the developmental and change process, the proposed FATA youth policy must devise strategies for educating the women, enhancing their capacities in decision making and their role in the process of change and development.

Role of Youth in Economic & Infrastructure Development:

As the FATA lag far behind in economic and infrastructure development, the proposed youth policy must chart out the areas and the processes within these areas where the young men and women could play their role in the economic and infrastructure development of the region.

Conclusion

The youth have a definite role in the development and welfare in any society and community and FATA is no exception. Young women and men from FATA have by suggesting to the government the need of a youth policy and by pointing flaws in the existing policies of government regarding the tribal areas demonstrated their value and potential in helping devise policies. This could only be done when first the youth have their own policy in FATA that devises the ways and means in which the potential of the youth for their own and community development could be tapped to the maximum. Therefore, any further delay in formulating a youth policy for FATA by the government is going to be counterproductive.

References

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- ¹ Civilian bureaucrats known as ‘Political Agents’ are appointed as head of administration in each of the seven tribal agencies that are Bajaur, Khyber, Mohmand, Orakzai, Kurram, North Waziristan and South Waziristan.
 - ² It was under the former President Asif Ali Zardari (2008-2012) proclamation on August 14, 2011 that the Political Parties Act, in vogue in rest of Pakistan, was extended to FATA.
 - ³ FATA do not have any university and the one that has recently been planned is in a budding stage rather has hit snags due to bureaucratic red tape.
 - ⁴ Kausar is the younger brother of legendary Urdu poet, Ahmed Faraz.
 - ⁵ That is between the ages of 15-39 years.
 - ⁶ That is between the ages of 1-14 years.

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