

# Influence of NSS for the development of Social work in Youths– An Birds eye view

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## Abstract

National Service Scheme popularly known as NSS, the scheme was launched in Gandhi Centenary year, 1969 and aimed at developing student's personality through community service. The overall objective of National Service is Educational. This objective is attained through the service to the community. NSS is a permanent youth programme under the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Government of India and funded by Government of Tamilnadu and Government of India in the ratio 5:7. Bharath University Chennai is a large affiliating technological University with over 4 constituent and affiliated Engineering colleges involving over 12 thousand students. The activities of NSS mainly focused on Technology transfer to rural mass and help the rural youth for creating the job opportunity, through conducting different types of training programmes.

As a step towards this direction, Bharath University NSS cell has brought out this Guidelines with the rules and guidelines for conducting various Regular and Special Camping activities, to ensure uniformity in the programmes. The NSS volunteers will get the benefits from the NSS activities like job opportunities, self-confidence, leadership quality etc. The Guidelines takes care of modifications needed based on the feedback received from the Principals and NSS Programme Officers. National Service Scheme popularly known as NSS, the scheme was launched in Mahatma Gandhi Centenary year 1969 and aimed at developing student's personality through community service.

The overall objective of National Service is educational. This objective is attained through the service to the community. National Service Scheme (NSS) is a permanent youth Programme under the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Government of India and funded by Government of Tamilnadu and Government of India in the ratio 5:7. India is one of the most rapidly growing economies in the world. Culturally rich, with abundant soft power potential. With regard to achieving the SDGs11, India has also ranked 110th out of 149 nations assessed on where they stand, and despite significant progress, the country continues to face major challenges across all SDGs. The challenges that India faces are inter-generational issues for which today's young generation are future custodians. Therefore, the importance of the Indian youth as key stakeholders cannot be taken out of the equation as their ownership and participation in achieving the SDGs is critical.

*Keywords—NSS, SDG, India, youth Programme, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Government of India*

## Introduction

India is committed to democratic institutions, the rule of law and human rights. Along with a large workforce, it has a huge and talented diaspora. Ambitious programmes have been launched by the Government of India, aimed at boosting socioeconomic development in the country such as 'Make in India', 'Digital India', 'Smart Cities' and the 'Skill India' initiatives. However, in keeping with the global dichotomy, India is also home to the largest population of poor in the world. The country has one of the highest levels of income inequality in the Asia-Pacific region<sup>7</sup> and shows large increases in inequality since 1990 with its net Gini index of inequality<sup>8</sup> (based on income net of taxes and transfers) rising from 45.18 in 1990 to 51.36 in 2013. Additionally, India's Human Development Index value (HDI) for 2016<sup>9</sup> is 0.624. This is below the average of 0.631 for countries in the medium

human development and positions India at 131 out of 188 countries and territories. When the value is discounted for inequality, the HDI falls further to 0.454, which is a further loss of 27.2 percent.

India has an unrivalled youth demographic: 65% of its population is 35 years of age or under and by 2020, it is forecasted to become the youngest country in the world, with a median age of 29.12. As 250 million people prepare to join India's workforce by 2030, this group stands to be either India's biggest asset or its biggest vulnerability. To deliver on this asset, it is imperative that India invests in its youth by skilling them, creating new jobs and providing them with opportunities (through volunteerism or otherwise) to develop functional and soft skills such as interpersonal skills, time management and the ability to present their thoughts and ideas; all skills that are important for young people to emerge as future leaders. At the same time, through volunteerism, India can also leverage on the immense potential of its youth in addressing the persistent and inter-generational developmental challenges that it faces. Studies in developed and developing regions have found that former volunteers have an increased sense of connection with their communities, and feel more empowered to help and participate in community life beyond the volunteerism experience. By widening participation, volunteerism addresses social exclusion while building a sense of ownership and community<sup>13</sup>, and assists in developing a generation of young people who are willing to make a commitment to developing their communities<sup>14</sup> and themselves. Volunteering provides a number of personal benefits to youth volunteers – from building social and support networks to giving young people more opportunities, choice and power. The idea of engaging youth to meet India's developmental challenges through youth volunteerism is not a new one, India has a rich history of people's participation through volunteerism by way of religious commitments, philanthropy, mutual aid and value systems embedded within Indian society.

### **Objective:**

This paper seeks to investigate the impact of NSS at the national level for development of Social work in Youths pan India

### **Evolution of volunteerism in India**

Volunteerism has also played a significant role in the growth of social reform movements in India. In Indian culture, the values of charity, 'shramdaan' (giving of effort / labour) have been placed on a high pedestal and manifest in various ways based on religious or humanitarian beliefs, feelings of community, kinship and reciprocity. Although these take on different forms based on socio-economic, cultural and regional backgrounds, the spirit of volunteerism is intrinsically woven into the fabric of our society and communities. For example, it was observed that in Kerala, collecting and distributing parcels of meals by students and youth clubs to the less fortunate was a regular practice, in urban and rural areas alike. Another tradition, which has now almost disappeared in most parts of India, was witnessed in Rajkot, where "Chabutaras" or the more modern paper bird feeders, were kept outside people's houses to feed and provide a resting place for birds. However, to leverage the potential of youth volunteers, a supportive environment and opportunities are necessary. The Government of India has affirmed its intention to ensure that youth volunteers are a part of the conversation and action in meeting India's development goals. The Government formulated the first National Youth Policy during the seventh five year plan and launched the National Service Scheme (NSS) and Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan (NYKS), both volunteer-based programmes which now have a base of almost 3.6 million volunteers and 1.25 lakh youth clubs across the country, respectively<sup>15</sup>. More recently, in 2015, the Government also commissioned the NITI Aayog, its 'Think Tank' which is meant to provide directional and policy inputs. NITI Aayog aims to have a pro-people, pro-active and participative development agenda and in keeping with this, invites citizens' perspectives on policy matters through its MyGov

Group. Additionally, a strong Indian civil society complements the Government's macro social safety net using youth volunteers in many ways to tackle many of India's needs in human and social infrastructure.

### **Secular youth voluntary action : NSS**

There is no doubt that youth volunteers, through civil society or otherwise, are the primary actors, who have played, and are continuing to play a fundamental role in meeting India's development challenges. This has been witnessed among numerous youth in rural areas who tirelessly work on the causes they believe will benefit their communities or villages. This has also been seen among urban youth, as young people are increasingly coming forward to work with NGOs, join fellowships or start their own social enterprises. Others volunteer through their workplace or join social campaigns, movements or projects for causes that they believe in. The Government of India has also involved youth in the provision of public services such as health and education, and has leveraged on its population by making these services "peoplepowered".

All of this lays the groundwork for positive contributions and a demographic dividend from India's large population through volunteering. However, as one of the youngest democracies in the world, India is also witnessing a cultural shift where individual empowerment becomes the focus and young people are developing clear ideas of what success looks like. These are closely related to quality of life, freedom of choice, access to infrastructure and facilities, education, employment and recognition. Surging growth and employment in cities have been a powerful magnet, with predictions that India's urban population will soar from 340 million in 2008 to 590 million in 203016.

With increased urbanization, the traditional culture that has been held together by relationships- immediate family, extended family, clans, tribes, and communities – is seeing a natural breakdown. Growing up in an era of continued globalization, Indian youth today are experiencing development processes that simultaneously bring people closer together and yet widen the divisions between them. This division is particularly felt among urban and rural youth due to the vast differences between them along social, economic and infrastructural lines. While rural youth from certain socio-economic backgrounds often have aspirations that reflect those of their urban counterparts, many sections of people in India's rural areas have, to a large extent, not been able to reap the benefits of globalization.

### **Youth volunteerism in India**

Cognizance must also be given to the fact that almost 30 percent of India's population falls under the World Bank's USD 1.90-a-day poverty measure<sup>17</sup>, and spiritual development and expression of values can be brought about only after basic requirements for human existence are adequately met. Understanding the varying realities and contexts of Indian youth – urban and rural, students and young adults, regional and state-wise differences – will be important areas of consideration while developing frameworks to broaden and deepen the participation of youth and engage them in India's journey towards sustainable development. Since the United Nations' International Year of Volunteers (IYV) in 2001, there have been strong efforts to define and map volunteer movements and impact of volunteerism across the world. This report on the 'State of Youth Volunteering in India' is one such effort in India. The 'Volunteering in India: Contexts, perspectives and discourses' report published by United Nations Volunteers (UNV) in 2012 provided a perspective on volunteering in India and its various dimensions based on the experiences of eminent personalities and volunteers from diverse backgrounds and disciplines. It is an important document that through its interviews and case studies has become a major source of information and knowledge on volunteering in India.

This report on the ‘State of Youth Volunteering in India’ does not aim to duplicate this existing work but wishes to add to it by exploring the understanding of volunteerism in India with a specific focus on youth. This, however, has not been without its challenges. Within the Indian context, it is important to understand that the expression of volunteerism takes different forms that are often determined by the cultural and socio-political-economic context within which volunteering occurs. Spanning 3,287,263 square kilometers, India is home to all the major religions of the world. Its Constitution lists 22 “scheduled” languages, and with over 2000 ethnic groups, has faced the challenge of “welding together into one body” various ethnic groups. Further, India’s 29 states and seven union territories are at different stages of demographic and economic evolution.

The per capita gross domestic product of states, a marker of their inhabitants’ affluence or deprivation, depicts that the gap between India’s many people remains large. For example, the GDP per person of Bihar, one of India’s poorest states, is only a fifth of Haryana’s and little more than a tenth of Goa’s. Considering this diversity, there are various challenges in ensuring representation of all states or of all stakeholders engaged in volunteering initiatives in the nation. Therefore, to account for state-specific differences in terms of culture, society, and economic evolution and in light of the limited secondary information available on youth volunteering in India, the research involved visiting 12 states across India to ensure regional representation across the north, south, the northeast, east and central India. Exploratory in nature, the research drew insights from literature review as well as primary research and met a variety of stakeholders including Government representatives, representatives from NSS and NYKS, civil society and beneficiaries of programme, faith-based institutions, academic institutes, experts and youth volunteers.

Additionally, an online perceptions survey was conducted to understand youth perceptions of volunteering, their areas of work, their motivations to volunteer as well as the challenges faced. Working group discussions / consultations were also held with the objective of seeking insights from the Government, international agencies, civil society, private sector and youth volunteers on the key findings and conclusion of this report and the way forward. Furthermore, the term ‘volunteerism’ is understood in many different ways with definitional boundaries that are not clear.

The concept of ‘volunteering’ has been interpreted as per the UN working definition of volunteering: “Activities ... undertaken of free will, for the general public good and where monetary reward is not the principal motivating factor<sup>18</sup>.” The concept of ‘youth’ is also interpreted in a variety of ways. The National Youth Policy (NYP) 2014 defines youth as those within the ages of 15-29. The United Nations (UN), for statistical consistency, defines youth as those persons within 15-24 years of age, while UNESCO uses different definitions of youth depending on the context. For activities at the international or regional levels, UNESCO uses the United Nations’ universal definition. For activities at the national level, for example when implementing a local community youth programme, UNESCO will then adopt the definition of ‘youth’ as used by a particular Member State<sup>19</sup>. For the purpose of this report, this action research understood ‘youth’ as those persons between the age group of 15 and 29 years as per the NYP 2014. However, it also maintained a certain amount of flexibility to take into account the on-ground realities, which saw people up to the age of 35 or beyond actively participating in youth-led organizations, activities and clubs. Another area of concern is that there has been little systematic research on civil society in India. There are therefore associated challenges in understanding the diverse contexts and identities of volunteers within civil society.

## **Discourses around youth activism**

At the macro level, the Government of India’s statistical system does not currently take into account those initiatives / activities, which are not paid for. Similarly, the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and institutions that engage volunteers do not have measures in place to gauge the contribution of volunteers. This challenge therefore, exists both at the micro and macro

levels. Despite the fact that the overall volunteer participation rate is estimated to be high in India, the absence of any precise statistics and impact assessment of efforts of volunteers makes it difficult to estimate the number of volunteers and staff engaged in the NGO sector, or their contribution.

Thus, this report aims to delve into the heart of youth volunteerism in India and its evolution, right to its various manifestations today. Chapter one therefore explains how the concept of volunteerism has evolved in India and the current discourse around youth volunteering. It explores the various notions of 'youth volunteering' as understood by stakeholders, how volunteering is being manifested and expressed and the subsequent challenges in measuring the contributions of volunteers. The ecosystem surrounding youth volunteering has been explored in chapter two along with the role of stakeholders and the platforms and avenues they provide for youth to volunteer. Chapter three seeks to understand how and why youth volunteer, what their motivations are as well as the barriers and challenges faced in order to appropriately develop strategies to engage youth in volunteering. In chapter four, the report also highlights stories of impact that youth volunteers have created in order to understand the different models that are used by various stakeholders to engage and maximize their contributions. By showcasing successful models where youth volunteers created positive impact and identifying factors that contributed to its success, this report suggests that if appropriately coordinated and channeled, youth volunteers can be important drivers of inclusive growth in India. The final chapter details out conclusions drawn from the research and analysis and the way forward to strengthen future volunteer engagement.

The first State of Youth Volunteering in India report, therefore, seeks to understand the many manifestations of youth volunteerism in India and provide information on the depth and breadth of volunteer action, taking into account on-ground realities and good practices. It aims to establish a preliminary evidence base of the contribution of youth volunteers towards India's developmental goals and provide recommendations for future volunteer engagement. It is meant to be the beginning of a larger discourse on volunteerism to ensure that this information can translate into tangible and far-reaching change, which will enable the post-2030 development agenda in India. The moral obligation arising from such theological beliefs and societal relationships in ancient and medieval India, may therefore be seen as one of the major motivating forces behind the concept of volunteerism in India, often manifested in the forms of charity and philanthropy.

### **Youth volunteering Evolution India**

During the colonial period, voluntary efforts received a boost with new religious, cultural and social surroundings. The Laissez Faire policy of the British Government in economic, religious and social matters encouraged the 'self-help' form of volunteerism. Schools and colleges were established by educational societies set up by English-educated natives and affluent businessmen, traders and zamindars (land owners). Voluntary organisations proliferated and actively participated in various fields of social action during the British rule and were mainly engaged in social welfare activities, literary and relief works. The introduction of western ideas and Christian faith by the end of the eighteenth century also precipitated the widespread emergence of religious and social reform movements in India during the first half of the nineteenth century (1800-1850) such as Brahma Samaj, Arya Pratinidhi Sabha, Arya Samaj, Prathana Sabha, Indian National Social Conference etc. Social reformers such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Rabindranath Tagore, Jyotiba Phule, Dayananda Saraswathy, Iswara Chandra Vidyasagar, Kesava Chandra Sen, Ram Krishna Paramhansa, Sayyed Ahmed Khan, Swami Vivekananda, among others, created organisational structures which were based on social support and participation and focused their social actions against social evils and practices like Sati (practice of a widow throwing herself onto her husband's funeral pyre), child marriage, prohibition of widow remarriage, caste-directed



practices and rituals driven by superstition. In addition to this, Christian missionaries began to participate in charity reform activities by providing services in the fields of education and health, particularly in rural and tribal areas.

Further, the development of organized charity and volunteer work in the country received an impetus with the formation of the Ramakrishna Mission in 1898 by Swami Vivekananda, which through the effort of numerous volunteers, provided high quality services for education, health and relief. Other organizations such as the Arya Samaj and Swami Narayana sect also undertook social / community service activities. The second half of the nineteenth century witnessed a process of further consolidation and institutionalisation of social and religious movements. For example, the establishment of 'Servants of India' in 1905 by Gopal Krishna Gokhale which united and trained Indians of different ethnicities and religions to devote themselves to the underprivileged, rural and tribal people, emergency relief work, the increase of literacy, and other social causes, was one of the movements that laid the foundation for secular voluntary action in India. The wave of the 'Swadeshi Movement' also marked the beginning of the mass involvement of people thereby inculcating the spirit of strengthening voluntary action through self-help and autonomy.

### **National consultation on youth volunteerism and NSS movement**

The concept of active citizens has been growing in India as part of a larger global discussion on young people as agents of social change; this has been given further impetus in this age of fast-paced information flow and social media. Active citizens, previously seen in different forms (Swadeshi movement in 1905, Anti-Corruption Movement by Anna Hazare in 2011, Nirbhaya Movement in 2012), inspire young people to understand and engage on social issues while allowing them to increase their self-awareness. This puts an emphasis on stakeholders, including Government, civil society and other organizations that work with young people to create a facilitative ecosystem for active citizenship and to provide young people with exposure and opportunities. Any discussion on youth volunteerism primarily brings into context the definition of youth. Youth is often best understood as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood's independence. Hence, as a category, 'youth' is more fluid than other fixed age-groups. Thus, given the socio-cultural context in each country, the definition of youth tends to vary. In countries such as Jamaica, those from the age of 12 years are considered youth; and in Bangladesh, from the age of 18 years. In some countries it is not strictly defined, as in Hungary, where the youth secretariat deals with both 0-14 year-olds and 15 to 26 year olds. The upper age limits for defining youth range from around 24 (Jamaica) to even 35 or 40 (Kenya, Pakistan). The United Nations defines youth as those between 15 and 24 years of age<sup>30</sup>. In India, the definition of youth has also changed between the National Youth Policies (NYP) of 2003 and 2014. While the NYP 2003 defined youth as persons between the age groups of 13 and 35 years, the NYP 2014 defined youth as persons in the age-group of 15-29 years<sup>31</sup>. However, youth volunteers in the Indian context do not strictly fall into the specified age groups; it is common to find persons in older age groups (beyond their thirties) being part of the youth wings of CSOs and participating in many youth schemes promoted by the Government. For example, in many youth clubs (formed under the NYKS), persons in their thirties or forties also contributed to community development as club members.

### **Measuring and monitoring youth volunteering in India**

As per discussions with NGOs and youth clubs, this fluid practical application of the term 'youth' allows a larger group of people, many of whom have settled in their jobs and have time and money to spare, to give back to society. Similarly, while defining volunteerism, various definitions have been posited in literature. Although "volunteerism has transcended all cultural, linguistic and geographic boundaries"<sup>32</sup>, each country has developed its own values of giving and sharing and arriving at a commonly

accepted definition has been challenging<sup>33</sup>. A multitude of definitions exist depending on regions, contexts and considerations. Each country and even individual organizations and Governments posit their own understanding and definition of ‘who a volunteer is’ or ‘what constitutes volunteerism’. For example, the Australian Government defines volunteering in the formal space as ‘an activity which takes place through not for profit organizations or projects undertaken – to benefit the community and the volunteer; of the volunteer’s own free will and without coercion; for no financial payment; and is designated in volunteer positions only’. Within the context of youth volunteerism, the NYP 2014 of the Government of India states that “Youth must be encouraged to participate in community service and development activities, especially in the most backward regions.

The youth of India must have a strong sense of moral responsibility towards their fellow citizens, especially those that are less fortunate than themselves. Youth of the country must be encouraged to fulfill their duties as citizens and thus create an environment in which all citizens enjoy the rights guaranteed in our Constitution”<sup>34</sup>. Academic literature however, often refers to Debbie Haski-Leventhal’s definition, which defines volunteerism as ‘an activity that is done completely of one’s free will, with no material rewards whatsoever, to complete strangers and within an organization or as long term behavior’ (ibid, 29). In recent times, the most widely accepted definition of volunteerism is the UN working definition that states that the terms volunteering, volunteerism and voluntary activities refer to a wide range of activities, including traditional forms of mutual aid and self-help, formal service delivery and other forms of civic participation, undertaken of free will, for the general public good and where monetary reward is not the principal motivating factor. India is seeing an increasing trend where structured volunteering programmes may pay stipends, provide scholarships, offer opportunities for travel / employment within the organization and / or cover living expenses of volunteers.

This is a motivating factor for many to volunteer and serves to create an inclusive environment where young people from all backgrounds can volunteer. The SWVR 2015 also adds another dimension to the term volunteerism, by understanding volunteering as overlapping with social activism. It recognizes that not all activists are volunteers, although the terms volunteerism and social activism are not mutually exclusive. It is therefore important to recognize the multifaceted nature and manifestations of volunteerism - whether managed formally or expressed informally, whether rewarded or unpaid, various differences in volunteers’ time commitments and scale of impact - in order to fully understand the contribution of volunteerism in India. Within the Indian context, the UNV definition appears to be the most relevant; it is suitably broad and allows the encompassing of acts of volunteerism outside the formal context. Scholars however, are still attempting to define volunteerism in a manner that accurately encompasses all its forms.

The most well understood expression of volunteerism is philanthropy. Several schools of thought also consider formal service delivery as a form of philanthropy. A thin line of distinction between philanthropy and service delivery would be that while philanthropy is usually considered as donation of resources, service delivery is an actual service provided to those in need. This form of volunteering – philanthropy or service delivery - normally takes place through established structures or groups and could be undertaken in a range of social, cultural and development fields.

## Conclusion

Youth from different walks of life come together to contribute time and resources towards the wellbeing of fellow citizens. While youth volunteers who are studying or unemployed tend to donate their services of labour, employed youth volunteers donate financial resources or their skills / expertise based on their time commitments. Service delivery models of some organizations have demonstrated such success, that they have been adopted by the Government.

For instance, the model on newborn care, established by Society for Education Action and Research in Community Health (SEARCH), Gaddchiroli<sup>36</sup> in 1986, in a tribal location in Maharashtra, was later adopted as a model for new born care and to reduce infant mortality by the National Rural Health Mission. Similarly, the Participatory Learning and Action model to improve birth outcomes in Jharkhand, established by Ekjut<sup>37</sup>, was adopted by the health systems in Jharkhand and Odisha between September 2010 and December 2012. There are several such examples, across sectors where service delivery initiatives with the help of volunteers, have had a great impact on communities. The second form of volunteerism is mutual aid or self-help, where people with shared needs, problems or interests cooperate to address them. Consequently, a larger population may also benefit from this engagement. India has a strong and successful Self Help Groups (SHG) movement, where women across the country are part of local village-level groups. Members of these groups make small regular savings until the group has sufficient capital to begin lending. This helps inculcate a culture of saving, which enables funds to be lent to those in need. SHGs have also been used as a medium to impart skills and education to women and raise and address issues of concern to them.

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