Problems and Prospects of the Youth of Modern Uzbekistan

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Abstract: In today's Uzbekistan, children and young people under 30 make up 60% of the population. In 15-20 years, they will become the largest workforce Uzbekistan has ever had, providing a unique opportunity to take the country to a new level of social and economic development. Developing a strategic long-term vision for youth capital formation based on evidence and the views of young people will help to leverage the available demographic dividend. In this article, the author reveals the opportunities and positive impact young people can have on the future, as well as the possible threats and challenges to social and national identity of uzbek youth.

Keywords: youth, generation, national identity, obstacles, youth capital, workforce, development, children.

INTRODUCTION
The USSR left behind not only a shattered economy and political turmoil, but also a huge impact on the culture, lifestyle and even the national identity of the population. Since independence, Uzbeks have worked hard to restore national values, traditions and the spirit of a shared identity. Thirty-one years after independence, people have been able to separate and consolidate the position on the track back to Uzbek culture and identity. Today, Uzbek youth are exploring and restoring remnants of traditions and the nation. The main goal today is to reconstruct the former Uzbek nation, to create a modern technological society while preserving traditions and national culture.

In order to reflect the current status of uzbek youth n the path to a better future the lives of young will be studied through the following aspects: education and training; professional life and economic opportunities; social inclusion; accommodation and mobility; social influence; digital life and the internet; problems, leisure and the end of youth. It is worth noting that each of these spheres of youth life has its own particular significance in both the development of society as a whole and in the formation of the person as an individual.

Based on observations of young people's transition to adulthood in other countries, it is expected that young people in Uzbekistan also face characteristic problems and experience discrimination and exclusion, and that their rights may not be sufficiently protected. However, for the purposes of this study, no assumptions are made about possible violations of young people's rights. The study explores in an unbiased manner what rights young people cherish, what rights they may not have access to, and what may be the main reasons for this.

MAIN BODY
The main objective of the article is to examine how youth transition in Uzbekistan is currently taking place from the perspective of young people themselves and how these changes affect their development in their present and future lives.

One of the key terms and concepts used in this paper is youth. According to the UN definition, youth is an age category encompassing people between the ages of 15 and 24. However, for this
study, the definition of youth provided by the Law №406 on «State Youth Policy» (2016) is used, which covers all citizens between the ages of 14 and 30. Youth is usually seen as the stage of transition: the stage of graduation and entering the workforce; the stage of finding their own place to live and becoming independent; the stage of creating one's own family. Broadly speaking, this is the transition from dependence to autonomy. In modern world most of these transitions are becoming increasingly complex and multifaceted for many young people not only in Uzbekistan, but also around the world.

The lives of today's young people are made up of many aspects, with some areas of life taking precedence over others. The work is done to create balance and to stabilize the scale of interests young people obtain. The President and the Government of Uzbekistan have always given priority to supporting the positive development and self-realization of young people. Youth policy has been implemented since 1991, the first days of independence of the Republic of Uzbekistan. With the political transition in 2016, the importance of youth policy has increased dramatically. In addition to Law №406 on «State Youth Policy» [5] (2016), which introduced a rights-based approach to youth policy, and Presidential Decree №5106 on «Measures to Improve the Effectiveness of State Youth Policy and Support the Activities of the Youth Union of Uzbekistan» [6], and the overall «Government Action Strategy for 2017-2021» [7] identify youth as one of the five priorities in shaping state policies.

The increased attention shows how important it is to make immediate investments in youth development. The most recent Presidential Decree №6017 «On radical reform and raising state youth policy to a new level» refers to the need for effective solutions to the problems faced by young people and the creation of a Youth Affairs Agency to develop a universal youth strategy, monitor its implementation and protect the rights and interests of young people. Furthermore, youth policy is one of the key areas of cooperation between the government and the United Nations (UN) under the Cooperation Roadmap for 2017-2020.

Currently, Uzbekistan does not have a national indicator to measure the well-being of young people and provide a comprehensive overview of youth transition. This study is based on two international indicators - the International Youth Development Index (YDI) and the Youth Wellbeing Index (YWI).

The International Youth Development Index (YDI) is based on publicly available data on eighteen indicators in five areas: education, health and well-being, employment and opportunities, political participation and civic engagement. According to data provided by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in 2016, the Youth Development Index (YDI) was also calculated to assess youth development in Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan scored 0.683 out of a maximum score of 1, placing it 53rd in the world among the 183 countries assessed. In Central Asia, Uzbekistan outperformed its neighbours: Kazakhstan ranked 61st (0.668), Kyrgyzstan 64th (0.664), Tajikistan 98th (0.614) and Turkmenistan 122nd (0.566). However, Uzbekistan scored relatively low in education (rating 90) and in employment and opportunities (rating 81).

The International Youth Wellbeing Index (YWI) takes into account young people's feelings, concerns and aspirations, going beyond statistical data. This multi-pronged approach provides a better understanding of how young people see and experience life. The International Youth Wellbeing Index (YWI) is based on indicators in seven areas including gender equality, economic opportunity, education, health, safety and security, citizen participation and information and communication technology. The International Youth Development Index (YDI) is calculated for the 30 countries with the largest youth populations, which together account for almost 70% of the world's youth population. However, the International Youth Wellbeing Index (YWI) does not include Central Asian countries, however, among the former Soviet republics, it includes Russia.

Based on the approaches and dimensions proposed by both the International Youth Development Index (YDI) and the Youth Wellbeing Index (YWI), this study applied an inductive approach to
processing empirical data and identified the following thematic categories as most relevant to today's youth in Uzbekistan:

- Education and Training;
- Economic opportunities and professional life;
- Social integration;
- Residence and mobility;
- Social influence;
- Digital life and the Internet;
- Challenges, leisure time and the end of youth.

To provide an in-depth and detailed analysis, data from the UNICEF report "Youth in Uzbekistan: Challenges and Prospects"[13] (2020) will be analysed.

Education and Training. Although most young people in Uzbekistan expressed satisfaction with the existing educational infrastructure, the situation in rural areas is less favourable than in urban centres. Students want their learning environment to be more positively motivating, practice-oriented and provide a better education (especially in the areas of language skills, business literacy and preparation for professional life). It is noted that the cost of education is a source of stress and feelings of hopelessness. Young people note costs such as private tutor fees, bribes and high tuition fees in higher education institutions. It is pointed out that students consider it important for fruitful learning to maintain a balance between the quality of education and the social order.

Economic opportunities and professional life. Among respondents aged 19-30, the percentage of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) is an alarming 54.6%. In terms of gender differences, the NEET rate reaches 74.0% among women, while for men it remains at 24.8%. Young people in Uzbekistan want their profession to be "their own choice" (rather than their parents' choice) and for their work to bring "a decent income" and to be surrounded by a supportive "team" of colleagues in their working life.

Factors hindering young women's aspirations to earn their own income are household and family care responsibilities and their low mobility in terms of being able to travel/move around in search of economic opportunities. Education and employment opportunities for young people in rural areas are limited, and therefore rural youth are strongly interested in self-employment or entrepreneurship. Survey participants note the significant role of their family's existing ties (familiality) and individual economic opportunities when it comes to raising their social status.

The three main barriers to employment cited by young people were "lack of funds to study for a profession", "lack of connections or acquaintances for the desired profession" and "decision to be made by parents". While young women and men said that a lack of connections and acquaintances was a factor that hindered them from finding a job, a lack of money for studies is a greater obstacle for men, and the parents' decision affects young women's employment opportunities twice as often as men.

Social integration. Young people in Uzbekistan trust and rely on their parents almost completely. Survey participants feel that they are generally expected to be 'obedient', especially in local communities. Young people assess the present and future of gender relations in their country in terms of maintaining conservative patriarchy (which was more the position of men) versus a shift towards equal rights (which was more the position of women) [11].

In terms of family relations, the questionnaire data emphasize the importance of "trust and understanding" for young people - 70.9% of the participants in the 70.9% of the survey participants linked the concept of a "happy family" with "trust and understanding".

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Residence and mobility. Young people in Uzbekistan generally agree that both rural and urban areas can be "good places to live". The most important thing is that the family can lead a quiet, healthy and peaceful life in the place where they live. Youth apply the three most important features to their "ideal place of living": "proximity to family and relatives" (61.9 %), "good quality drinking water" (46.1 %) and "uninterrupted electricity/gas supply" (44.9 %). All these factors are particularly important for women and young people living in rural areas. Two other particularly important factors for them are the proximity of schools/kindergartens and medical facilities. For men more important factors are proximity to friends, to work, good public transport and quality of roads. Such factors as "spacious house, flat" are more important for young people living in urban areas than in rural areas (16.5% vs. 8.5%).

Social influence. Young people show great interest in "political news" and are "not shy" about expressing their opinions publicly, but few are actually active in civic or political organisations. Survey participants share the perception that they are excluded from decision-making and activities at the local (mahalla) level because of the public perception that 'adults know best' [12]. Young people advocate a change in the practice of communication between themselves and the older generation, and they believe it is important that a serious interest in the life experiences of young people and an active engagement with young people emerge. There is a widespread belief that existing youth movements, in particular the Youth Union, should focus their activities on developing skills and providing information on topics relevant to the educational and professional success of young people.

Digital life and the Internet. Although young people in Uzbekistan are very interested in learning more about computers, there is still a significant group (37.8%) consisting in particular of women and rural youth with no computer skills. The survey revealed a gap between the larger group of respondents (53.9%) who "never" use the Internet, mainly young people from rural areas and women, and the smaller group who use it "daily" (25.4%), mainly urban men. For young people in Uzbekistan, the Internet appears equally as a "useful" tool to maintain social contacts, study or work, as a potentially dangerous place to "waste time" or be "badly influenced" (which disproportionately limits women who fear stigmatisation) [13].

Challenges, leisure time and the end of youth. Survey participants reported high levels of satisfaction with their health, but critical comments about the health care system pointed to inadequate conditions in rural areas and the overall high cost of quality treatment or medicines. The main areas that young people feel need to be improved are better education and training, effective measures to combat unemployment and low income among young people, and addressing social problems related to early marriage/divorce and the gap between the older and younger generations. Leisure time potential is lower in rural areas and among women due to increased farm, household and care responsibilities. Young people's perceptions of when youth ends range from marking a certain age (under 60) to getting married or becoming a parent.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study, the following recommendations can be made to enhance the development and implementation of youth policy in Uzbekistan. First and foremost, a rethinking of approaches to youth work as support and positive motivation with a focus on the most vulnerable young people is needed. Moreover, for a successful transition from school to work, opportunities for all young people to acquire foundational, life, technical, digital, innovative and entrepreneurial skills need to be expanded. If these conditions are met, the labour market can integrate the country's young country's human resources as an investment that contributes to (longer-term) long-term economic success.

It is also possible to create sustainable youth platforms for them to express their opinions, concerns and aspirations. Participate in local and national decision-making levels. Improve the health system to deliver basic services to young people and their families. Conduct further in-depth research on the situation of young people in Uzbekistan for evidence-based youth policy development and implementation.
CONCLUSION

Despite all that has already been done through youth policy, Uzbekistan is still at the beginning of the journey of rebuilding and developing its youth and their national spirit. The country still has many aspects to improve as well as to rebuild. But it is safe to say that the country is in the hands of promising young people.

REFERENCE

11. Investing in children and young people for a demographic dividend.