

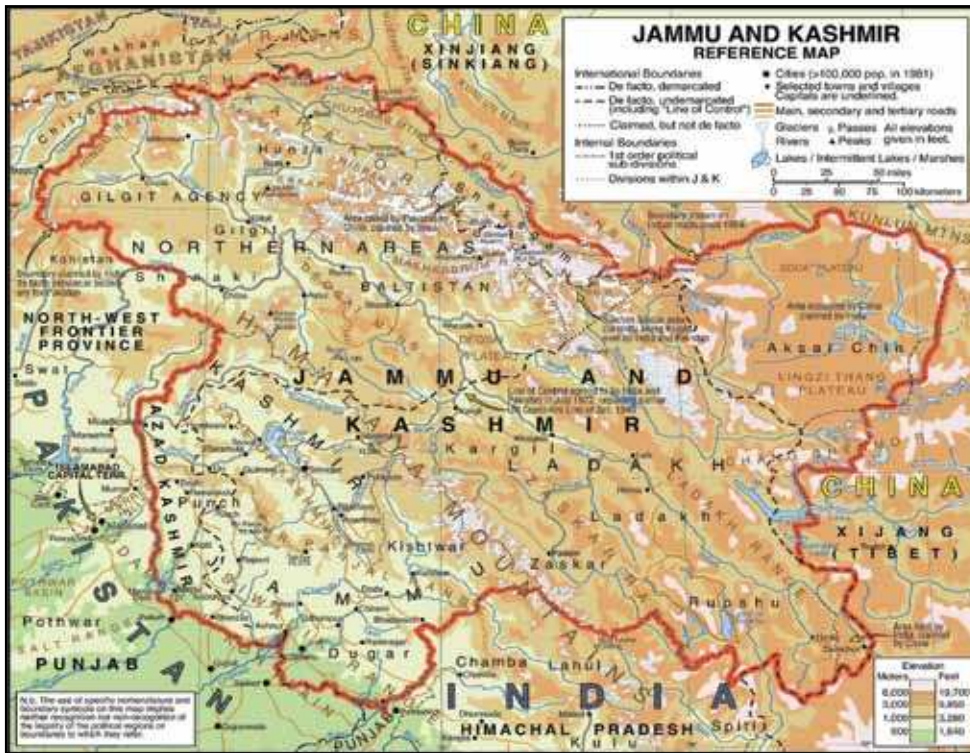
# 'Living in a pressure cooker situation'

A needs assessment of youth in India-administered Kashmir

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Supported by Conciliation Resources

August 2011



**Map of Jammu and Kashmir region**

*Courtesy: Kashmir Study Group*

Note: This research was conducted in the Vale of Kashmir, which has a population of about seven million. According to the Indian government's 2011 census, the population of the India-administered part (also called Jammu and Kashmir) is about 12.5 million.

## Acknowledgements

This research was only possible because of the resolve shown by participants and the research associates, as representatives of Kashmir's youth, by taking part in the interviews, surveys and group discussions despite the dangers that people voicing independent opinions face in Kashmir. I am grateful to them.

I am also grateful to the many journalists, academics and social workers in Kashmir, Delhi and the US, who were more than willing to share information and resources with me and contributed to the design of this research.

It is with gratitude that I mention Conciliation Resources, an NGO based in London, UK, whose support and encouragement was crucial for conducting this research.

I am grateful to Professor Mari M. Fitzduff of Brandeis University for her continued help and guidance with various aspects of this project. I would also like to thank Professor Tara Brown of Brandeis University for her timely help with the design of this research.

I am grateful to Charlie Clements and his colleagues at the Carr Center for Human Rights Policy at the Harvard Kennedy School for their guidance, support and encouragement, which was crucial for this research to take shape.

Thanks are also due to my colleagues, friends and family in Kashmir and other places whose help and support made it possible for me to conduct this research.

I recognise this with pleasure and thank you all very much.

Any errors in this paper remain those of the author. This paper should not be taken to represent the views of Conciliation Resources.

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**Cover: Paradise Bleeding: an image drawn by a girls' group during discussions.**

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## Introduction

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Youth empowerment is an attitudinal, structural, and cultural process whereby young people gain the ability, authority, and agency to make decisions and implement change in their own lives and the lives of other people. Such empowerment is often addressed as a gateway to intergenerational equity, civic engagement and democracy building. Many local, national, and international government agencies and nonprofit community organisations provide programmes centred on youth empowerment. Activities involved therein may focus on youth-led media, youth rights, youth councils, youth activism, youth involvement in community development and decision-making, and other methods.

The world is increasingly valuing the role of youth in leading the continuing transformation of societies. The United Nations (UN) and international community share a longstanding belief that the imagination, ideals and energies of young people are vital for the continuing development of the societies in which they live. To raise awareness about this again, the UN designated 12 August 2010 to 11 August 2011 as the 'International Year of Youth'. This not only highlights the responsibility the world community places on young shoulders but also points to a belief in the ability of younger generations.

This however is not necessarily true for the youth in the Kashmir valley part of India-administered Jammu and Kashmir. The region's youth live amid a painfully lingering political conflict marred by violence and human rights violations. The current stalemated phase dates back to 1947 when India and Pakistan fought to gain control of the region followed by a UN-brokered ceasefire ultimately resulting in the creation of the line of control (LOC) that divides the region between the Pakistan- and India-administered parts. Since then, China has also gained control of the sparsely populated Aksai Chin area. India and Pakistan have fought two of their three wars over Kashmir.

In 1989 a Kashmiri armed rebellion against Indian rule began.<sup>1</sup> The rebellion was spearheaded by Kashmiris who faced severe repression following

their participation in the 1987 elections to the local assembly, and was supported by Pakistan. The Indian government launched a full military counter offensive against the militant uprising, leading to a severe human rights crisis in the disputed region. Over the years, the strength of the Indian troops has reached nearly 600,000, armed with laws to give them special powers, which has made Kashmir the world's most militarised zone with basic rights of the people suspended.<sup>2</sup> Human rights groups and news agencies report that the counterinsurgency offensive by Indian troops, and the insurgency it was supposed to curb, has resulted in more than 70,000 killings (47,000 as per Indian official claims) and around 8,000 enforced disappearances (4,000 as per Indian official claims), most of these civilians. They also report that civilians have been subjected to gross human rights violations including widespread torture and rape. This has taken a huge toll on the economic, social and psychological state of people in Kashmir. Kashmiris have largely given up armed resistance and resorted to voicing their dissent through youth-led street protests and other non-violent means. India and Pakistan's handling of the conflict has created an environment that prevents the region's citizens from fulfilling their political, social, cultural and economic aspirations.

At a time when young people worldwide are recognised for taking the lead in changing their societies, this research is aimed at finding the perception and level of awareness of Kashmiri youth about their rights and duties, the social and political issues they want to change in Kashmir and what they need to effect this change. It reveals what young Kashmiris want to change, and that they share many ideas on how they can achieve this. However when it comes to actual engagement to accomplish the transformation they desire, they feel left with few options but the mass protests for which they are persecuted. In Kashmir, the democratic space that can transform needs and ideas into a practical strategy is missing and has been taken over by the (in)security apparatus and the fear it spreads.

## Methodology

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This research started with review of the existing literature about the issues faced by youth in conflicts around the world and in Kashmir in particular. The participatory framework was designed in consultation with the target respondents and people working on the ground on these issues.

A team of 21 research associates from the target respondents' group was trained and helped conduct interviews, surveys and focus group discussions. The participatory framework also facilitated sensitisation of the respondents on these issues through interaction with the research associates and dissemination of information through handouts.

The target age group for this research was Kashmiri youth aged between 15–30 years. The research was mainly conducted in four shortlisted districts: Anantnag (Islamabad), Baramulla, Ganderbal and Srinagar of the India-administered part of Jammu and Kashmir (see map page 2). The four districts represent a diverse mix of socio-economic, rural-urban areas and are spread across the three zones of south, central and north of the Kashmir valley. The research questions were divided into three basic categories. These were:

1. What do the youth in Kashmir think about their civic and political rights and duties while the world is increasingly valuing the imagination, ideals and energies of youth for continuing transformation of societies?
2. What social and political issues do the youth in Kashmir identify as critical issues for transformation of the Kashmiri society?
3. What do youth in Kashmir identify as their critical needs to be able to participate fully in community transformation that are not met or are only partially met by the current civic, institutional and organisational setup?

In addition, the focus group discussions also considered the critical issues an NGO wanting to work in Kashmir could help with.

## Literature review

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Conducting a literature review on the 'needs of youth in Kashmir' is a tough task as little has been done on the subject so far. This paper therefore starts with a review of the UN World Programme for Youth and similar reports to get an overview of global developments, and then examines some relevant pieces of work from Kashmir, including news and journalistic reports.

Young people represent agents, beneficiaries and victims of major societal changes and are generally confronted by a paradox: to seek to be integrated into an existing order or to serve as a force to transform that order. Young people in all parts of the world, living in countries at different stages of development and in different socio-economic settings, aspire to full participation in the life of society.

(UN World Programme of Action for Youth, 2010<sup>3</sup>)

The history of the youth rights movement can be traced back to the 1800s following the industrial revolution when young men migrated to big towns, resulting in the emergence of youth culture in urban areas. In 1844 George Williams set up the

More than 1600 youth participated in the surveys against a structured questionnaire-cum-interview schedule, focus group discussions and seminars on initial findings. The surveys were completed between November 2010 and March 2011 in which 1,170 youth participated, eight focus group discussions were held between August 2010 and February 2011 in which 83 youth participated and four seminars on initial findings were held between May and July 2011 in which about 400 youth participated. Responses on the findings were also sought from experts at the University of Kashmir who have made significant contributions in some of the areas that concern young people. The sample breakdown was as follows:

- 30 per cent of the respondents were female
- 30 per cent were aged between 15–19 years, 44 per cent between 20–24 years and 26 per cent between 25–30 years
- 54 per cent had university or college level education, 39 per cent had completed 10–12 years of education and seven per cent were dropouts or had no formal education
- 77 per cent of respondents were students, 10 per cent were employed with the government, 10 per cent were self-employed and about three per cent were not working or unable to work.

Young Men Christian Association<sup>4</sup> to address the emotional, spiritual and physical needs of young men. Youth rights, however, emerged as a distinct movement around the great depression of 1930s in the United States and were concerned with civil rights and intergenerational equity. Further developments in the area finally lead to a UN 'declaration on the promotion among youth of the ideals of peace, mutual respect and understanding between peoples' in 1965.

The United Nations has long recognised that the imagination, ideals and energies of young are vital for the continuing development of the societies in which they live. The member states of the UN acknowledged this in 1965 when they endorsed the Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding between Peoples.

The above opening lines are from the UN World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY) 2007,<sup>5</sup> which also stated, "two decades later, the UN General Assembly observed 1985 as the International Youth Year: Participation, Development and Peace. It drew international attention to the important role young

people play in the world, and, in particular, their potential contribution to development". In 1995, the UN adopted an international strategy – the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond – to strengthen its commitment to young people. The 15 priority areas identified by the UN include education, employment, health, drug-abuse, decision-making, leisure-time activities and armed conflict. Proposals for action include the following:

- *Education*: basic education, promoting mutual respect and human rights education.
- *Employment*: self-employment and voluntary community service.
- *Health*: health education, HIV/ AIDS awareness and elimination of sexual abuse.
- *Drug abuse*: demand reduction programmes, rational use of pharmaceuticals and treatment and rehabilitation.
- *Leisure-time activities*: include these activities in education programmes and in urban planning and rural development.
- *Armed conflict*: protection from direct involvement, reintegration of ex-combatants and promoting involvement in maintaining peace and security.

The above areas are highlighted because they appear to be of major concern to young Kashmiris. The WPAY demonstrates a comprehensive approach and makes some very good proposals for action. However the challenge, as with many other UN programmes, remains implementation by governments. The UN World Youth Report 2007<sup>6</sup> notes, "youth development in all world regions continues to be constrained by persistent obstacles at the community, national and international levels." The UN's focus on youth dates back to 1965 but is almost unknown among Kashmir's youth. This is also the case with UN human rights and other humanitarian law instruments. Despite the UN recognising human rights education as a basic right of everyone, the goal remains elusive for want of implementation. Populations oblivious of their rights bode well for the dynastic politics of many so-called democracies in the world, more so in South Asia.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Report on Youth and Violent Conflict (2006)<sup>7</sup> argues that even though it is important to try to understand the motivations of youth in becoming combatants we must realise it is only a small percentage of the overall youth population. The report says: "We should also keep in mind that combatants are only a microcosm of heterogeneous and multifaceted universe, that much for the sake of convenience, we call youth." It also quotes

Samuel Huntington writing about 'youth bulges' – an unusually high proportion of young people in the total population. Huntington argues that "youth bulges lead to increasing insecurity and make such countries especially prone to conflict". It also quotes Fareed Zakaria who argues that "youth bulges combined with small economic and social change provided the fundament for Islamic resurgence in Arab world".

Subramanian (2010)<sup>8</sup> briefly talks about youth bulges in Kashmir after estimating there are about 700,000 youth aged between 18–30 years, about 50 per cent of whom remain unemployed despite attaining higher education. "From policemen to policy wonks and politicians, everyone is talking about Kashmir's problematic youth bulge," she says.

Much of the UNDP report is based on writings or research in Africa on child soldiers. Some of its arguments, such as the increase in youth numbers, educational opportunities and awareness coupled with insufficient employment prospects have been made also with regard to Kashmir, mostly by the pro-government or pro-India lobby. These are only partly true in Kashmir where one of the main priorities for most people is also to address their political aspirations stemming from a protracted, deadlocked and violent political conflict, long history and experience of domination and misrepresentation. The UNDP report does point out that some "new research reveals that there is an important element of volunteerism that should be more closely considered when looking at young combatants". It quotes Rachel Brett: "While children rarely go looking for a war to fight... for adolescents, war is also an opportunity: for employment ... for adventure or to serve a cause." Thinking of Kashmir one could probably expand the 'cause' to include increased awareness of their history and rights coupled with the experience of decades of oppression and deceit. The report also notes, "political participation is not providing a channel for young people to express their needs, aspirations and grievances". In Kashmir the history of rigged elections,<sup>9</sup> human rights violations<sup>10</sup> and implementation of special laws<sup>11</sup> to prevent even the basic experience of democratic functions serve as major causes for youth taking to streets and participating in passionate protests against the government and Indian rule, and to make their aspirations known to the world.

Somers (2006)<sup>12</sup> argues that while progress has been made, programmes for youth in conflict and post-conflict areas "continue to call for evaluation". He observes there are many ideas for programmes but not many tested and tried methods of organising them. In situations where the government is a party

to the conflict, it can prevent implementation of meaningful programmes that it may perceive could benefit its opponents. This argument rings true in Kashmir and is also a major concern for its youth. Somers recommends psychological support for children who have grown up in conflict zones, even if they are not directly harmed. Observing there is no alternative but to engage youth, he writes, “engaging youth... appears to have surfaced as a humanitarian and post-war necessity because there really is no alternative”. The paper points out that adults (who may not have gone through what the youth have experienced) often dictate the programmes for youth affected by violence. This also seems pertinent in Kashmir where decision-making processes have been hijacked by the security establishment. The minority of powerful elite is rarely exposed to the wrath that security agencies subject upon ordinary Kashmiris, and yet remain responsible for devising and putting in place programmes and policies for change.

Gender parity is another issue Somers brings to the fore. Women including female youth are often absent from decision-making and do not form part of the core programming. He quotes the International Labour Organisation (ILO), which puts it well, “though gender considerations are increasingly being adopted in development contexts, they remain largely absent from practice in emergency and relief operations”. Women have suffered immensely as direct and indirect victims of violence in Kashmir. Although they play an active role in civil society, there are few women in leadership positions.<sup>13</sup> Referring to UNICEF studies, Somers argues that exposure to violence can “significantly and negatively affect brain functioning and learning capacity” of children aged 11–18 years and “ultimately limit the adolescents’ future choices and opportunities”. Much of his paper focuses on child soldiers and youth bulges and identifies lack of economic opportunities, poverty, peer-group pressure and weak governments as major causes. The paper does not discuss the cases of repression, oppression or occupation where youth justify their participation in resistance movements, which also include the use of violence in cases such as Palestine, Kashmir and Algeria. The paper also reviews six programme areas: vocational training, reproductive health, basic skills training, peace education, youth empowerment, and psychosocial programming. Of these, Somers finds youth empowerment the weakest programme. One of his stronger recommendations tackles how adults dictate programmes without much input from the youth. He says:

Despite consistent advocacy for a featured youth role in programming, many youth programmes

still do not effectively demonstrate this. Indeed, there are signs that some agencies developing programmes for youth focus on what they are prepared to provide rather than what youth need or want most. This is a disturbing trend that promises to yield negative results.

Somers (2007)<sup>14</sup> further analyses the discussion around youth bulges and the problem of relating it to fear, instability and a threat to security. He argues that most youth resist involvement in conflicts and that “a necessary component of successful security, governance, and development policy for war-affected and other insecure nations is an effective method for including and engaging with youth... there is need to reverse trends toward viewing youth in negative terms, carrying out actions that unintentionally worsen situations facing youth and inadequately evaluating youth programmes”.

This speaks to the situation in which youth in Kashmir find themselves. The policy of dealing with the aspirations, questions and needs of youth through military means only adds to their alienation and does not leave them with much except to give up or express dissent through street protests. He recommends:

“...more investment for them, and it should be carried out in a way that is youth-centred, participatory, and empowering... avoid employing a security framework toward youth... highlight youth inclusion as a test of democratisation and good governance... ensure investments in youth are balanced by gender and directed at the particular needs and concerns of male and female youth... network with and learn from those already working with youth – this would include religious organisations, which are often the only groups working effectively with marginalised youth.”

Somers also recommends working with youth to design programmes that address their most important concerns including peaceful conflict resolution. Contrary to this, the Indian government in collaboration with a section of the population<sup>15</sup> continues to use excessive military force and its intelligence network to quell dissent. It undermines the demands for rights led by youth without responding to the questions they ask or accommodating their aspirations. The repression that voicing dissent invites in Kashmir has created doubt in young people’s minds about their ability to facilitate change. Older generations have chosen not to be actively involved in protests, resulting in many young people feeling let down by them.

The most relevant work on this subject in Kashmir is a 2003 Oxfam-sponsored study<sup>16</sup> to assess the

impact of violence on students. The study tries to assess the impact on 'young personalities' and to find what living through the years of violence and insecurity does to young minds. Using in-depth interviews it studied a sample of 100 respondents. The study found 90.38 per cent enjoyed their studies and felt education would get them employment. The study notes that, "Kashmir today is a sea of unemployed youth, a place where infrastructure is crippled and there is almost no effort to encourage private enterprise and self-employment". The study found that opportunities for professional education were very limited. It further notes that a sizeable number of student writings are about the "need to reform education" in Kashmir. It says, "...education and social life are remote from each other. Though the youth is full of energy and zest, it needs to be channelled properly and infused with optimism". The study found students demanding "greater exposure, facilities, counselling, accountability and promotion of creativity". All of this rings true today and with more severity.

The Oxfam-sponsored study also found that 90.38 per cent of respondents were angry, and families of 63.46 per cent of respondents were directly affected by violence. Students demonstrated grave impacts of the violence, which were portrayed in their limited paintings, writings, and conversations. Seventy-five per cent of respondents were unable to move freely. The study notes that, "the only collective activity possible in Kashmir is participation in weddings or attending prayers at the mosque". The students ask,

If children are said to be the future of a nation then are not the youth its present? ... what if youth are the most vulnerable section of the society, what if the youth are deprived of their basic rights, what if their psyche is subjected to trauma and torture from every side and on every day of their lives? How can we expect the future to be bright when the present is so traumatic?

The study's recommendations include "short orientation courses ... to help students develop links with the community, building organisational skills for students to mobilise themselves to seek and safeguard their rights". Establishing student help and counselling services, and promoting curricular and co-curricular activities to build awareness and skills are also stressed. It demanded an end to victimisation, intimidation and violence against students. Today, many needs remain the same except their severity has multiplied.

Looking at some recent reports and small surveys by NGOs, there is no doubt that youth have borne

the major brunt of the violence in Kashmir. Not only do they make up the majority of dead and missing but also of arrests, beatings, detentions, rapes and other forms of everyday harassment.<sup>17</sup> A study in 2006 by Doctors Without Borders (MSF)<sup>18</sup> found that the ongoing conflict related violence "exact a huge toll on communities' mental well-being". It also concluded the suicide rate had increased by 400 times because of such violence.<sup>19</sup> Another study by a group of doctors in 2006 found that 58.69 per cent of youth had experienced traumatic events, most commonly gunfire and explosions.<sup>20</sup>

Mental health and drug abuse are other problems that youth in Kashmir face. A valley-based psychiatrist in 2008 estimated the number of drug abusers in Kashmir at 211,000.<sup>21</sup> Indian security forces have aided the spread of drugs by giving people free access to drugs and alcohol and often exchanging drugs for information from ex-militants.<sup>22</sup> Youth again make up the majority of drug abusers. Studies have found that 90 per cent of abusers in the valley are aged 17–35 years and 35 per cent of Kashmir's youth aged 15–25 have taken to drugs.<sup>23</sup> Action Aid in a 2006 survey<sup>24</sup> found that 14 per cent of young Kashmiris were considering committing suicide, 11 per cent were prepared to take drugs to ease stress and 12 per cent took sleeping pills to overcome anxiety. However it attributed these findings purely to unemployment and seems to have ignored the impact of the security and political situation.

Most Kashmiri youth despite their dire situation do not believe in extremist ideologies. A 2010 study of students aged 15–18 years by the Department of Sociology at the University of Kashmir found that 72 per cent of respondents believed in religious tolerance and coexistence of religions.<sup>25</sup>

A constant feeling of living under siege in their homeland with repression, economic deprivation, indiscriminate violence, loss of life and denial of democratic processes has resulted in psychological and social dejection of the general public, particularly young people.<sup>26</sup> In recent years many youths have engaged in stone throwing against the Indian armed forces and police. The summer of 2010 saw more than 116 civilian protesters and bystanders killed, most of them young including an eight-year-old, by bullets and teargas canisters fired by the Indian security forces.<sup>27</sup> An Indian civil society fact-finding team concluded that 27 were juveniles.<sup>28</sup> Their report gives detailed account of the protests, killings and harassment of youth and the general public. "Images of boys as young as nine and ten being dragged off into police vehicles, or shot dead by the paramilitary forces, have begun to dent conventional truisms about what is happening



in Kashmir. Startling photographs of middle-aged (and middle class) women in the ranks of the stone-pelting protesters have also destabilised those who have hidden behind a morbid panic of the 'Islamists', or the fear of Pakistan's venality, to obscure their understanding of events in the Valley," wrote Sanjay Kak (2010).<sup>29</sup> "It is being called a 'cyber-intifada' — a violent rebellion in which youths, armed only with stones and cell phone cameras, are challenging Indian rule in the Himalayan valley of Kashmir," reported Goodspeed (2010)<sup>30</sup> in the *National Post*. "The soldiers regularly respond with volleys of tear gas and rifle fire." About 5000 persons were arrested between March 2010 and May 2011, many under the dreaded Public Safety Act (PSA) that allows without trial detention for up to two years.<sup>31</sup>

The summer 2010 civil society protests spearheaded by young Kashmiris and the killings resulting from shots fired by the Indian armed forces and the police, to quell these protests, forced the international community to take note of the situation in Kashmir. These events not only resulted in an outcry by sections of the international community but also from some sections of Indian civil society. The Indian government responded by sending a delegation of lawmakers to the valley in September 2010. Despite much hype the visit resulted only in the appointment of three non-political interlocutors. "While New Delhi awaits the assessment of the visiting lawmakers, Kashmiris have already added another chapter to their unforgiving memory: year 2010 is the 'year of killing youth'," wrote Parvaiz Bukhari (2010) in *The Nation*.<sup>32</sup> "In the battle of stone versus bullet, the 'Gen Next' of Kashmir feel they have a moral advantage over the might of the Indian state."

## Conclusion

The UN's longstanding belief in the imagination, ideals and energies of young people began with its declaration in 1965. Since then it has designed many programmes to improve the participation of the young people in decision-making. However the challenge, as with many other UN declarations, remains implementation by the governments of member states. These programmes or recommendations are yet to have any impact on the lives of youth in Kashmir; a huge gap exists between the UN declarations and actual treatment of young people in Kashmir, be it their empowerment for leading community transformation, their education, employment or healthcare.

The UN resolutions on Kashmir, calling for demilitarisation of the region and a plebiscite to settle the conflict, are by far its most popular acts amongst the people in Kashmir. However, its

inability to get them implemented is seen as an example of UN's failure by the youth in Kashmir.

People working on youth issues have focused on youth bulges, education, employment, health, leisure activities and armed conflict. The discussion around armed conflict has however been skewed by youth being viewed mostly as a contributing factor and not as a solution. This includes discussions around child soldiers and lack of employment opportunities leading to radicalisation. Only lately have people, such as Marc Somers, started recognising that the programmes for youth empowerment should be designed by youth themselves. Arguments in favour of the need to avoid employing a security framework toward youth and the possibility that youth may be pushed into using violent means to serve a cause have also started to gain ground. Young Kashmiris certainly see themselves serving a cause when they protest or raise their voice against Indian rule in Kashmir and the human rights violations by Indian armed forces. Their needs for quality education, meaningful employment, proper healthcare and recreational activities are also genuine but these all have been made complex by the unresolved political conflict, and the full potential of their lives is thus held hostage.

No comprehensive work has been done on Kashmir's youth although much has been reported in the news media particularly in the past three to four years. Some NGOs, academics and professionals have conducted studies on mental health, drug abuse and other issues faced by students. These clearly show that youth in Kashmir not only bear the brunt of the conflict and related violence but also are continuously struggling to change their situation. They face unemployment, poor quality education, corruption, drug abuse and mental health issues. But the more urgent issues are the unfulfilled political aspirations, lack of freedom of speech, rights violations and repression by Indian security forces who enjoy impunity under special laws.

This action research project is an attempt to document the situation of young Kashmiris as they see it and in their language. It is an attempt to hear what they have to say. This report documents their perceptions and understanding of rights and duties. It also prioritises political and social transformation and lists the needs raised by young people in the individual interview-cum surveys and group discussions.

# Presentation and discussion of key findings

## Youths' perception and understanding of rights and duties

### Highlights

- Youth have an overwhelmingly negative perception of their rights.
- Youth have good ideas and are willing to lead the desired social and political transformation but feel engaging in it as something impractical in the current situation and dependent on the guarantee of their rights.
- The majority of youth have limited systematic understanding of rights and duties. Some, however, demonstrate a good understanding.
- A negative experience and lack of faith in the present setup of 'democratic governance' leads to disillusionment with and questioning of 'democracy' as a system of governance.

### Experience and perception of rights

Overall about 91 per cent of youth in Kashmir feel their right to self-determination is not respected. They also say their freedom of speech and peaceful assembly has been taken away. Eighty-seven per

cent feel their right to life is not respected. The only right that a majority (65 per cent) feels is respected is the right to education.

Participating in such a discussion is not a normal thing to do in Kashmir. It is not considered safe. The sample indicates that youth are fearful of talking about their aspirations unless they are assured of the purpose and identity of the person they are talking to. They complain of an environment of distrust and are fearful of various state agencies and to a lesser extent non-state agencies trying to spot people with independent views. The chart presented below details the youths' perception of their rights.

As the sample indicates, youth in Kashmir feel deprived of their basic rights, such as the right to life with dignity, freedom of expression, right to travel, right to self-determination and other civil and political rights. They complain the Indian government has suspended their rights through its use of security forces with special powers. They feel their lives are always under threat and that abuse, beatings, torture and arrests for speaking out are commonplace. The

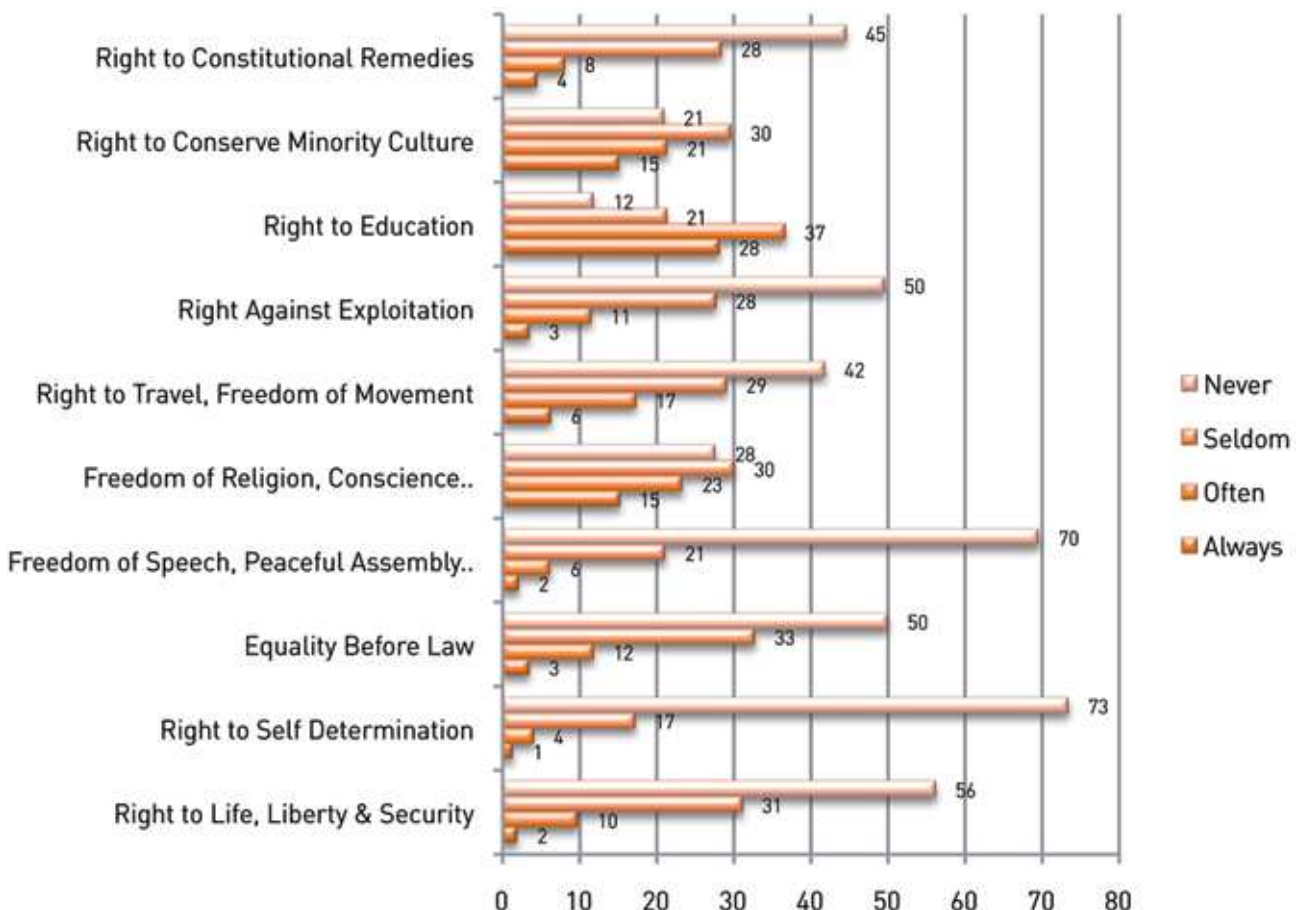


Chart 1: Whether rights are respected

top three rights that youth particularly highlight are the right to self-determination, freedom of expression and the right to life with dignity. They feel their opinion to decide their political future has never been taken into account, that they cannot express themselves freely and are humiliated individually and collectively, and that their safety and lives are under constant threat from the Indian security agencies.

*'We have rights in the constitution, yes, but... what kind of a democracy is this, we are getting bullets for throwing stones.'* (Group discussion)

Youth often raise examples from 2010 (when security forces fired upon protest marches and stone throwing clashes, killing over 116 protesters and bystanders) and point to the arrests of people who took part in those protests, even after the protests stopped when winter began. They also bring up examples of harassment based on comments posted on social networking sites like Facebook<sup>33</sup> to reiterate the lack of freedom of speech in Kashmir. Many young people in Kashmir use fake names and profiles on such websites. This is a telling comment on what fear does to them – they can chat on Facebook using their real names but to express their opinion on serious social or political issues they opt for fake identities to safeguard themselves from harassment.

According to the youth interviewed, the purpose of the police and paramilitary action against the protesters was not just to suppress the protests but also to punish protesters and send a message that they cannot get away with protesting.<sup>34</sup> Young people feel victimised and say they are deprived of opportunities for education and jobs if they take part in protests demanding their rights. Youth from a particular area in the valley complained that after the protests prospective employers told them they could not apply for jobs because their village had been 'banned for seven years' for spearheading protests. They cited examples of seriously injured youth, many of whom were incapacitated, prevented from receiving any medical help because they were injured during protests. One young man narrated an incident from his area where a protester was killed in a raid by the security forces on a hospital where injured protesters were being treated.<sup>35</sup>

*'These rights have turned into political charity that the politicians with power give to people. For Kashmiris these rights have no meaning. The government gives these to who they like and don't give it to those they don't like.'* (Group discussion)

Female youth complain also about sexual harassment by the security forces. They cited security forces making lewd remarks and asking them to reveal their veiled faces as common occurrences. Living with the constant fear of worse crimes, many mentioned examples of Kashmiri women being raped, and in many cases then killed (such as Kunan Poshpora<sup>36</sup> and Shopian<sup>37</sup>) by Indian security forces and no one ever receiving justice. The process of so-called inquiry is often complicated and carried out in a way to harass the victim rather than to punish the guilty.<sup>38</sup>

*'The first article in the 1948 UN Declaration is right to life. We have not been given right to life here. Animals are treated better than us ... you cannot expect anybody to help when they are in fear.'* (Group discussion)

Youth say no credible mechanisms exist for registering complaints of human rights violations, including deliberate killing of civilians. Laws are instead used to violate basic principles of human rights and natural justice: the Armed Forces (J&K) Special Powers Act (AFSPA) and Disturbed Areas Act (DAA)<sup>1</sup> give impunity to the Indian army through powers to kill on the basis of mere suspicion, and the Public Safety Act (PSA)<sup>2</sup> is used to imprison political activists and civilians for years without trial. Young Kashmiris feel abandoned by the UN and international community, who they believe work for the interests of the powerful and do not contribute much in practice except rhetoric about human rights and democracy.

### Feelings of discrimination

Many young Kashmiris feel discriminated against by the Indian government and mainstream media. They believe most Indian media works in collusion with the state and say both Indian mass and official media paint a stereotyped image of Kashmiri Muslims, often using 'terrorist' or 'extremist' as a synonym for them. Youth feel that a popular slogan like "we want freedom" is translated to the Indian masses and the world as "we want to accede to Pakistan" and that Kashmiris are branded as Islamists, whereas what Kashmiris are doing is fighting for their rights. This leads to their victimisation – an example often given by respondents was about having trouble finding accommodation when travelling outside Kashmir.

1 Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958, enacted in Jammu and Kashmir in 1990 and the Disturbed Areas Act, 1976, enacted in Jammu and Kashmir in 1992. These grant legal immunity for the armed forces.

2 The Jammu and Kashmir Public Safety Act (PSA) of 1978 provides police powers for administrative detentions, without trial.

Young people also cite the presence of over 600,000 army and paramilitary personnel and laws like AFSPA and PSA (referred to as 'draconian laws') as a proof of discrimination. The use of live ammunition in Kashmir to control protests, as opposed to water cannons elsewhere, is another example they often mention. They talk about how the government came down heavily on local Kashmiri media, forcing it to shut down for many days in summer 2010. Local TV channels were ordered not to air news reports and newspapers were seized and not allowed to publish for many days. Often journalists were not allowed to operate professionally and many were detained and beaten.<sup>39</sup> Many youth also mention how mobile phone services were stopped in parts of Kashmir during summer 2010 and many times beforehand. Prepaid mobile text messaging remains banned in Kashmir despite repeated rounds of tedious subscriber verifications.<sup>40</sup> Young Kashmiris complain that youths arrested for protesting and stone throwing have often been booked under PSA or slapped with charges of 'attempt to murder'<sup>41</sup> whereas the security forces enjoy complete impunity for killing civilians.

*'Kashmiris are discriminated against... called terrorists... hotels refuse to admit them.'*  
(Group discussion)

"Previously people were not familiar with birth of the rights because they remained in an isolated enclave of the globe. Now they have exposure to the whole of the world," says Dr Sheikh Showkat Hussain. "For example a student of Kashmir University looks at how students at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) or Delhi University (DU) are free and in what way they can express themselves. Then he compares his own situation with the situation of those places. He feels that he is emasculated and most of his rights continue to be denied. So automatically this mindset develops."

### Understanding and awareness of rights

Thirty-three per cent of the respondents said they had heard about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 18 per cent knew about the Geneva Conventions, 18 per cent about the Convention Against Enforced Disappearances, 17 per cent about the International Criminal Court, 13 per cent about the International Covenant on Civic and Political Rights, and 13 per cent about the Convention Against Torture.

Most youth in Kashmir have a very basic idea of their rights and duties, which mainly comes through

the media. This includes college and university educated youth. They may not be aware of the precise terms and instruments but they have a basic sense of rights and duties. However, overall there is no systematic understanding of rights and duties among the young. Many admit ignorance is one of the reasons for large-scale violation of rights and accuse the establishment of preventing widespread rights education. A small section of young people however do have a good understanding of rights and duties – primarily those who have chosen to study fields like journalism, law or political science and many of whom have also studied outside Kashmir. They are the most willing and are trying to engage in political and social transformation despite the adverse situation.

### Youths' perceptions of rights

- Overwhelmingly negative perception of rights
- Deeply entrenched feelings of discrimination
- Limited understanding of rights – education prevented by powerful vested interests

For many young people, knowledge of rights, however limited, has given them a ray of hope. Many from the border areas explain they have experienced and witnessed these atrocities by the security forces since their childhood and so accept it as a way of life. That is how their parents lived their lives. But with education and new information coming in they learnt about the concepts of human rights and struggles of people elsewhere. This has given them confidence to challenge the prevailing system and change their situation. They say many more young people and older generations, especially in rural areas, are yet to gain the same understanding.

Even though the UN has proclaimed the right to know your rights also as a human right, the opposite seems the reality in Kashmir. Dr Sheikh Showkat Hussain explains that low levels of awareness among youth stem from oppression. "The system (of governance) here does not want people to be familiar with their rights and duties. If people are familiar with their rights, it becomes difficult for the oppressive power to deprive them of their rights because they are conscious to assert themselves. Let me give you a few examples. We were running a course – a postgraduate diploma in human rights – here at the University. About three years back that was mysteriously closed. We had



Chart 2: Fulfilment of duties

another programme of dissemination of human rights information with International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC) through programmes in colleges and universities. ICRC was made to abandon this programme in 2005," says Dr Hussain. "The system here is oversensitive, they don't allow human rights education. We wanted to establish a separate centre for advanced studies in human rights at the University. Several times we sent a proposal to University Grants Commission but they were not positive."

*'Freedom of expression is a right that I can't speak about, because if I do I'll be put behind the bars... And nobody is there to bring you back.'* (Group discussion)

#### Perception and understanding of duties

Eighty per cent of the respondents think they respect the freedoms of others, 78 per cent say they promote spirit of harmony and common brotherhood and 71 per cent say they meet the requirements of morality and public order. Sixty-six per cent say they protect public property and reject violence, 64 per cent say they protect the environment, 63 per cent say they strive for excellence and 54 per cent say they try to develop a scientific temper and humanism in accordance with the duty outlined in India's Constitution.

Talking about duties evokes an initial reaction of dismissal and the question seems to cause irritation. They protest that everybody lectures them to not use violence, to be peaceful, perform duties and so on, whereas those people who have guns, laws and power on their side should be taught non-violence and peace. They feel they are on the receiving end, and expecting them to be peaceful while they are killed, raped, tortured and humiliated is not fair.<sup>42</sup> They say that unless we get our rights we are not liable to respond to the questions about duties. But then they mention examples of people helping each other during difficult times, such as in summer 2010 when community kitchens were established in many areas suffering food shortages and some rural people voluntarily supplied foods such as vegetables. Such goodwill exists among people outside the government system. Once they are in that system, complain the youth, corruption becomes the norm.

Youth in Kashmir do understand and accept that ignorance about their rights and duties is a problem not only when they work but also at a basic level as citizens and human beings. They understand that challenging wrongs such as corruption is their duty and they must stand up to it; young people need to be educated on this issue and public awareness raised. The youth feel their society is fast losing its cultural and moral values and increasingly becoming a materialistic society by emulating the wrong examples from outside. Lack of concern to stop

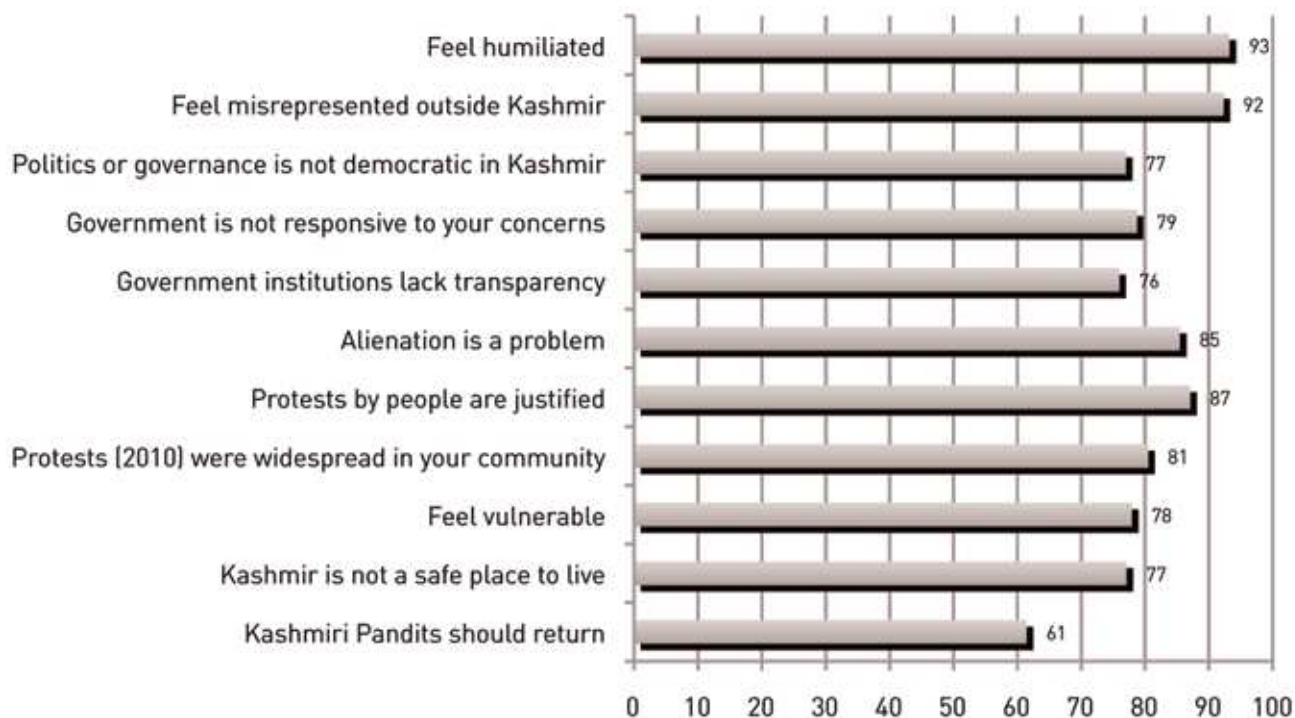


Chart 3: Youth experiences of politics and governance

environmental degradation and preserve natural resources is also recognised as a major problem.

*'We have to play our part. We have to help our community. It is our moral responsibility. We don't do that because it is in the constitution but because we are human.'* (Group discussion)

However, as previously mentioned, young people complain of feeling helpless in the present political and security situation. They do not feel in control of their lives and crave space and support to bring change in their society. They are discouraged from thinking about the community and encouraged to focus on their individual careers. They say, "everything is dependent upon getting our rights" – and that rights and duties are the two sides of the same coin. Staying alive and out of sight of the security forces while trying to change things is a constant challenge. So changing this situation takes precedence over everything else.

#### Losing faith in democracy – their experiences of politics and governance

Any discussion with young people about living conditions in Kashmir evokes frustration and anger. They want to say so much but often seem to be wondering where to start or how best to articulate their situation. The following statistics (percentage of affirmative responses) are quite telling:

Ninety-three per cent of the respondents felt

humiliated by the various entities operating in Kashmir. Ninety-two per cent of the respondents felt misrepresented outside Kashmir, primarily by media and politicians.

The negative experience of rights and the violence used to suppress the demands for these rights has resulted in loss of faith in the existing avatar of 'democratic governance'. Many admit they are confused by their experience of democracy because they are unable to change anything in the existing system – not even when they risk their lives protesting. Asked whether Sharia<sup>3</sup> was a feasible option for Kashmir, 83 per cent of the respondents answered yes. Responding to that question many young people seemed to take offence and show discomfort. They give the impression you are asking and forcing them to respond to a question too personal for public debate. A section of youth in Kashmir do think Islamic Sharia Law is the best way to end Kashmir's problems. The argument they gave to support this is that Islam treats everybody equally and so they would get all their rights. However many young people challenge the idea of a religion-based system of governance and many chose to reserve their opinion. Youth opposing this idea think religion is a personal issue and any system of governance must be truly democratic and good for people of all faiths in the region. They also want minority rights safeguarded. Pertinently,

<sup>3</sup> Sharia law is the ideal 'law' according to Islam which can be divined from Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet<sup>PBUH</sup> (Hadith and Sunna). Its human interpretation is called Fiqh or Fiqh-ul-Asul.

61 per cent of respondents agreed Kashmiri Pandits (Hindus) were an integral part of Kashmiri society and should return.

*'When we say we want Sharia Law to be implemented - we have to see can we do that... Agreed, we are not getting our rights. But we are also lacking in many aspects. We are not even aware about rights. We are ignorant.'*  
(Group discussion)

This is also indicated by another statistic. Asked to list their top three concerns and suggest possible solutions: 49 per cent of respondents raised the political conflict and its impacts like militarisation and human rights violations, 34 per cent spoke of the economy, unemployment and infrastructure-related issues, 11 per cent about the need to reform the education and learning system and six per cent about other issues that included drug abuse, gender discrimination, pollution and references to religion or Sharia law.<sup>43</sup> So, if it is not brought up, religion does not rank high in the minds of most Kashmiri youth – neither as a problem nor as a solution.

## What young Kashmiris want to change in their society

### Highlights

- Unresolved political conflict.
- Human rights violations – insecurity, fear and humiliation caused by the presence, behaviour and impunity of Indian security forces.
- A grossly inadequate and restrictive education and learning system.
- Misuse of Kashmir's resources – an economy unable to provide opportunities for Kashmir's workforce to engage in meaningful employment.
- Unending corruption – both in anything that the government or state is involved with and in social customs.

*'Thinking about development, when you don't know whether you will be alive tomorrow or not or you'll get a bullet, I don't think it is right.'*  
(Group discussion)

Kashmiri youth believe that tentativeness, shortcuts and a 'just-get-by' approach have become the norm for everyday living in Kashmir. Process-oriented work or long-term thinking is generally missing. This is as true of academic institutions as it is of basic administrative functioning. This short-term view has severely affected all spheres of society and the quality of life in Kashmir, and is both a cause and a symptom of rampant corruption.

No matter what question one chooses to start a discussion with, it eventually leads to the political situation and human rights violations. Once these and the effects of the conflict are debated, the other top three issues that bother youth are:

- an outdated and grossly inadequate education system
- an economy unable to provide meaningful ways of earning livelihoods for all its workforce
- corruption in everything that the administration or politicians are involved with.

### Summary

The responses of the sample indicate that young Kashmiris are sensitive, thoughtful and willing to identify issues, contribute ideas and engage in bringing change. From the discussions it is clear they are not oblivious to the issues that permeate the region. But they feel helpless because they are deprived of their rights, do not feel safe and have very limited opportunities to fulfill their aspirations. Many question the outcome of research such as this study and what it can achieve. They live under great pressure – the pressure to spearhead political and social change; to escape the wrath of the Indian security forces; and to fulfill the expectations of their families and their own aspirations. Many aptly describe Kashmir as a 'pressure cooker situation'.

### Identification of political problems

#### Political dispute

Ninety-two per cent of the respondents identified political conflict as a major problem and 72 per cent were willing to engage in addressing it. Eighty-five per cent identified alienation as a major issue.

The foremost issue for young Kashmiris, as the sample indicates, is the political conflict and its

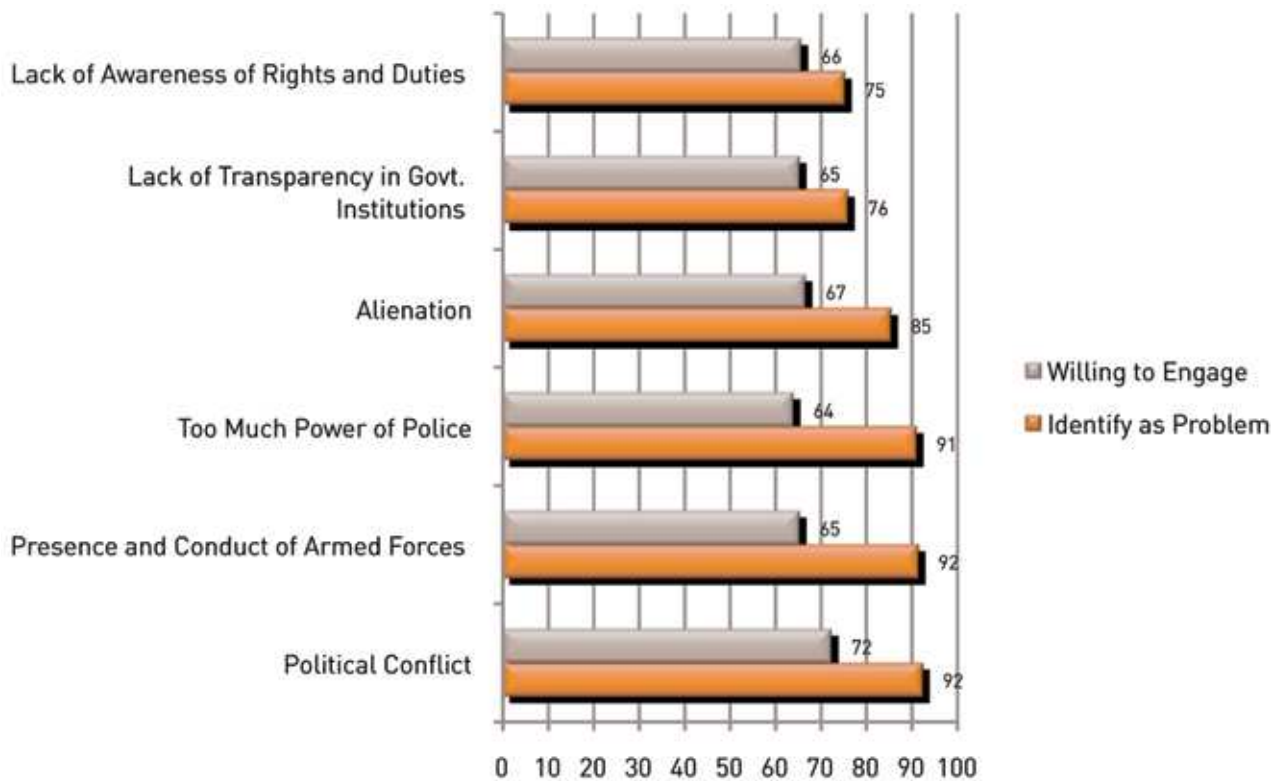


Chart 4: Identification of political problems

impact. They want this settled above all else. They demonstrate varying degrees of awareness and understanding of the related issues. What concerns them most is the militarisation and its effects – killing of civilians, curbs on freedom of speech and peaceful assembly, repression of resistance or independent thinking, presence, behaviour and excessive powers of security forces, humiliation and misrepresentation. They feel exercising their right to self-determination to settle the political dispute is the only way forward.<sup>44</sup>

*‘Freedom is basic. Once we get freedom we’ll automatically get our rights... and take our responsibility.’ (Group discussion)*

As gathered from the group discussions, most Kashmiri youth seem to have reached a point of no return in their strained relationship with India, which many of them see as an occupying power. They say this is because India has prevented the settlement of the decades-old political conflict by propaganda, manipulation and the use of excessive force that results in very serious human rights violations. They complain that India has repeatedly failed to keep its promises since 1947, and about how Kashmir and its resources are exploited by the Indian, and also Pakistani, governments. They also point to lack of awareness about the real issues and about rights and duties. Many

young people feel they are forced to resort to violence because of the continual repression and humiliation. A few of them also warn that if the situation continues they will have no choice but to take up arms to fight Indian forces. For some the stalemate and repression seems to have resulted in disillusionment with the fight for their rights, leading to unwillingness to engage in political transformation and instead focusing on creating economic opportunities. Nevertheless, they want their rights guaranteed and the political conflict settled. Overall a common understanding seems to exist – that a final decision should be made through the right to self-determination, with the options of an independent state, a merger with India and or merger with Pakistan, allowing everyone in Jammu and Kashmir to decide for themselves.

*‘There are other forms of protests like signature campaigns, protests in schools or colleges... we have to make people aware who are outside Kashmir in US, England, China etc., they should hear our voice. Those are the powers who are permanent members of the UN.’ (Group discussion)*

Young Kashmiris are constantly thinking of ways to change their situation and in the group discussions debated many different ideas. They are



grappling with questions of sustainability of the resistance movement and, when that succeeds, the future shape Kashmir should take. They also raise questions about class difference saying it is those from the lower strata of society who suffer most in this struggle for rights and freedom. They complain that the situation inside Kashmir does not allow open discourse; any attempt by Kashmiris to reach out to other communities is sabotaged. Also, the government is trying to isolate the pro-resistance leadership by not allowing them to hold public meetings and by severely restricting their movement. The use of terms like 'mainstream' and 'separatist' is also mentioned – they say that what is called 'separatist' is actually the mainstream of Kashmir.

The Kashmiri youth who took part in the group discussions see the shift of the armed struggle towards street and online protests as a positive sign. Peaceful protests with improved planning and raising the international community's awareness about Kashmir's situation are what most young people want to continue doing. They mention many examples of such attempts and think these have started bearing fruit. They appreciate the impact of objective reporting by Kashmiri and other journalists, and of the books written by Kashmiri writers, such as *Curfewed Night*, *The Collaborator* or *Until My Freedom Has Come*. They also acknowledged with pride the impact of films and other art forms that Kashmiris have started using – including examples such as Sanjay Kak's '*Jashn-e-Azadi – how we celebrate freedom*' and the work of young Kashmiri artists cartoonist Malik Sajad and Rapper MC Kash. Youth also acknowledge the importance of the work done by organisations such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, International People's Tribunal for Human Rights and Justice in Kashmir (IPTK) and others. Multiplying such things seems a way forward to many young people interested in exploring alternate spaces, even though they may not result in much immediate change. Many other examples given include Facebook groups, websites and blogs. These however often are penetrated by the security agencies and many young people have been arrested and or questioned for what they write. This has resulted in these discussions often being led by people who live outside Kashmir and India. Inside Kashmir, people who take part in such discussions are either willing to risk it all, use fake names or are covert agents of security agencies. Nevertheless, more young people are joining these forums every day.

This however seems to be only happening on a limited scale. These methods are yet to catch up

with a rural population that has no or very limited access to the Internet, media and civil society organisations and their programmes. The group discussion participants in rural areas had very limited knowledge of such activities or discussions taking place in cyberspace. The networks developed by Indian intelligence agencies and the police also tend to be stronger in rural areas barring a few exceptions. These seem to be both causes and effects of low levels of awareness about issues, rights and duties in these areas.

"Basically everything hinges on the resolution of the political dispute," says Dr Sheikh Showkat. "We have militarisation over here, because the prevailing system has a deficit of legitimacy. Once there is a deficit of legitimacy it tends to impose itself through use of force and that leads to militarisation, which irritates people. Because the military present here is not the military of this place, it is the military from somewhere else, that makes it even more allergic and the sense of deprivation and sense of alienation increases."

### Views on the unresolved political conflict

- No space for free and frank discussion to talk about a vision for the future
- Militarisation, repression
- Forced to use violence
- Stalemate leading to disillusionment with fight for rights
- Need for freedom of speech
- Need for right to self-determination
- Need to raise awareness among the international community

On the issue of terminology Dr Showkat adds, "[In] every place that is dominated (by outsiders), there is a problem of terminology, and so many discourses have been imposed over here, directly or indirectly. You know we have embedded journalism, controlled journalism, controlled media. It is that controlled media, which invents these terms and uses these terms. Appropriate terms should have been those who are for freedom and those who are for integration with India. Instead the terminology that has been continuously used over here is the terminology of separatists and mainstream. Whom they call separatists, they are the mainstream of J&K."

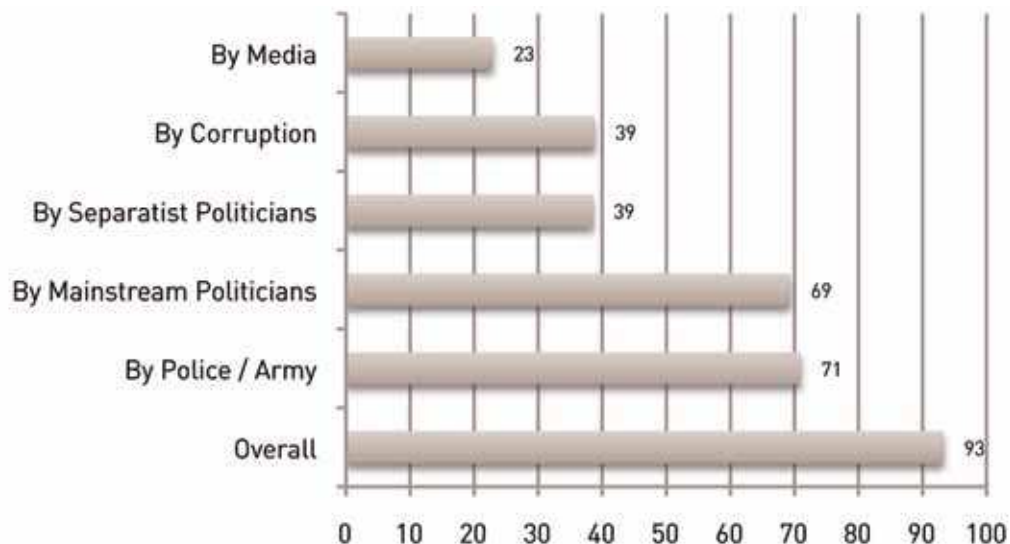


Chart 5: Whether youth feel humiliated, and by whom

Fear and insecurity – presence, behaviour and impunity of Indian security forces

Ninety-two per cent of the respondents identified the presence and conduct of armed forces as a major problem and 91 per cent said police exercise too much power. Ninety-four per cent of the respondents indicated that the police do not respect or protect people and 71 per cent feel humiliated by the police or army.

In group discussions, the participants complain that the enormous trust deficit in Kashmir is mainly because of tremendous fear created by the presence and overwhelming number of Indian security forces (army, paramilitaries, police, intelligence agencies, collaborators and their fronts) and the way these forces treat Kashmiris. They say the continued deployment of so many security forces with special powers despite the very low number of remaining active militants<sup>45</sup> is proof that they know what the population here wants, which is what they want to control. This is why the government gives unquestioned support for the security forces and police no matter how they use their powers or their actions to control the protests. They complain it does not even condemn civilian killings let alone punish the guilty. The youth also live with the looming threat of laws like AFSPA, which gives the Indian army powers to kill on the basis of suspicion, and Public Safety Act (PSA), which is used to imprison political activists and civilians for years without trial. Most young people do not mention the presence of militants as a concern. This is mainly because they empathise with the militants and feel they support Kashmir's larger cause, even though most respondents do not recommend use of violence. Their major complaint is the continuous excessive force against peaceful

protesters and resisters, and the daily humiliation of Kashmiris. And they want to put an end to it.

*'[Security] forces interfere in all aspects of our day-to-day life – be it business or even education. Unless that stops and we have a political solution, it is not possible to focus on social and economic transformation.'*  
(Group discussion)

"Not only youth – everyone here is a victim of these laws because AFSPA and DAA give arbitrary powers to police and army," says Dr Showkat. "And through these arbitrary powers they can even kill a person merely on the basis of suspicion and the only thing they have to do is to report that to the nearest magistrate. And if you want to initiate a case against any personnel of the army, you need clearance from the state. That is against the basic principles of natural justice. Because they are the instruments of state and you have to seek permission from the state for their trial."

Humiliation by the Indian security forces, politicians and media

Ninety per cent of the respondents felt humiliated by the various entities operating in Kashmir. Of these, 71 per cent said they felt humiliated by police or army (security forces), 69 per cent by mainstream (pro-India) politicians, 39 per cent by the separatist (pro-freedom) politicians, 39 per cent by the level of corruption and 23 per cent by media.

Humiliation by security forces including the police, the bureaucracy and politicians is a major concern that also dominated group discussions. Youth participants complain that gun-wielding battle-ready foreigners

ask them for identity cards in their own homes and streets where they have lived all their lives. They are supposed to address these foreigners as 'Sir' and are sometimes forced to say *Bharat Mata Ki Jai* (Hail Mother India). After elections,<sup>46</sup> pro-India politicians turn their back on the people and portray the situation in a way that suits the Indian establishment but is far from reality. Many young people also feel let down by decisions by the resistance leadership, saying that on occasions they backed down when people were ready to continue protests until they won the right to self-determination. Recent examples are the protest movements in 2008<sup>47</sup> and 2010.<sup>48</sup> They also feel humiliated by some sections of the local media that publish government propaganda and do not challenge it sufficiently on issues that concern the public.

### Top political problems

- Unresolved political dispute – no space for free and frank discussion to talk about a vision for the future
- Fear and insecurity caused by presence, behaviour and impunity of Indian security forces
- Humiliation caused by Indian security forces, politicians and media

Youth also feel humiliated by Indian politicians and its mainstream media.<sup>49</sup> They complain that before every election the politicians ask for votes for day-to-day issues and development works. Politicians say they will work to ensure people's rights and that elections do not reflect any stance on a final settlement of the political dispute. Yet, invariably, after every such election many Indian politicians and media reports term them as a mandate for Indian democracy. Some youths say they understand people have no choice but to participate in an election or have a governance setup in place, however corrupt. That this can – at least in their imagination – act as some kind of a cushion between them and the security forces. Some feel it is an exercise that is more of an extravaganza and less of an election, and people engage in it because they don't have anything more interesting to do. In the process they can make some money and perhaps build contacts with the people in power. For many people it also is a vote against more corrupt politicians.<sup>4</sup> Many blame the older generations for all the aforementioned issues and recognise the need to raise awareness about actual issues, rights and duties among them. They think it is a weakness and people should boycott

<sup>4</sup> See Sumantra Bose in *Kashmir: roots of conflict, paths to peace* (p198); Harvard University Press; 2003

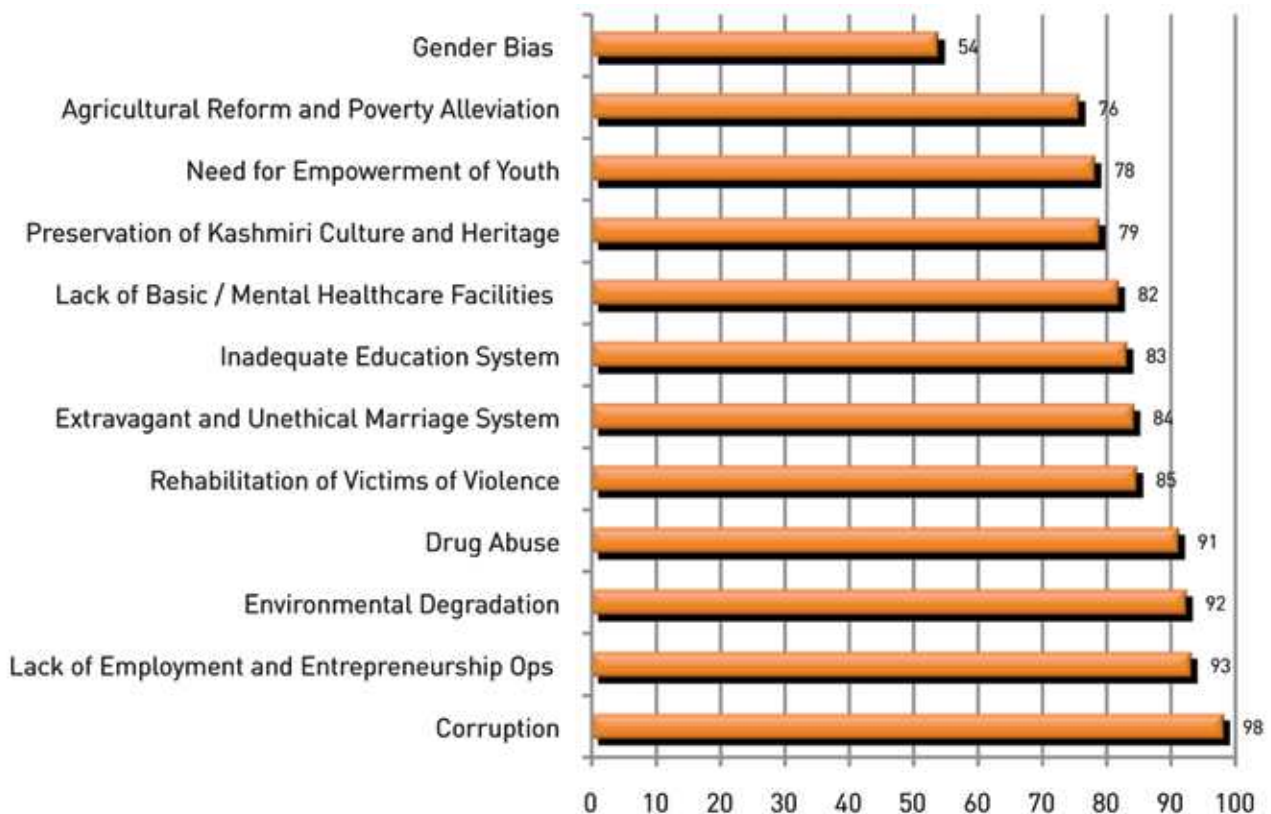


Chart 6: Key socio-economic problems identified

elections and any government-supported activity, and instead press for resolution of the political conflict first. They think participating in elections only strengthens the corrupt collaborative class and perpetuates the inhuman situation for the majority including those that vote. People who tried to join politics and bureaucracy, thinking they could change things from within, have failed. To do that is impossible – as the experience of the past six decades shows. Youth complain that people who give up or talk of working within the Indian system get all the opportunities and end up with lucrative careers and people who resist, talk about independence or self-sufficiency struggle to survive. They argue that once somebody joins the pro-India political parties or bureaucracy, it corrupts them. They become part of a privileged minority that obtains all their rights over those who are not part of that system. And when people complain they feel threatened and manipulate the complainers.

### Key socio-economic problems identified

#### Inadequate and outdated education and learning system

Sixty-five per cent of the respondents say their right to education is respected. Eighty-three per cent of them say that the education system is inadequate and 59 per cent say that people in their communities do not get a quality education.

As the sample responses indicate, education is highly valued by youth in Kashmir. People who have higher degrees or have travelled outside for education are thought to have an advantage. Although 65 per cent say they are not prevented from attending school, youth feel the education system in Kashmir is stale and does not teach them much. Most Kashmiris get their education from government run schools where even basic facilities like computer education, creative expression or co-curricular activities are missing. This is also true of some privately run schools, although there are some good examples too. Technologies like IT are not yet part of mainstream education – youth complain that college and even university students are rarely exposed to IT, especially in rural areas. The following statistics (percentage of affirmative responses) can help us understand this better:

Kashmiri youth say the educational curriculum is outdated and does not reflect the reality of their lives. An example shared is that the information about their recent history and troubled relationship with India contained in prescribed schoolbooks is contrary to what they experience. Youth are not only unhappy with today's education system but think that

in its current shape it is part of the problem. Many have to choose subjects that do not necessarily work for their interests or strengths because of a lack of options and quality. Little they learn is drawn from their own culture and tradition. They are encouraged and sometimes forced to get degrees with the only goal of becoming eligible for a government job.

*'We need better, practical education that enables youth to fulfill their responsibilities. Our education system does not include our own culture or language. We are learning English but not Kashmiri. Many of us are ignorant about our own culture.'* (Group discussion)

When asked what they feel their school or college education lacked, 47 per cent pointed out issues related to inadequate infrastructure, outdated curriculum, lack of choice, and poor quality teaching and administration. Fifty-three per cent mentioned the lack of co-curricular activities, for example students' unions, debating societies and public talks, that could give them life and soft skills, a good understanding of their culture and history, and make them socially and politically aware and productive. Many young people expressed feeling betrayed by the kind of education available in Kashmir. They complain the learning system does not teach them effective self-expression, decision-making, critical thinking or leadership skills, and is out of sync with their changing needs. They feel the education they receive does not get them meaningful employment or make them productive citizens. Overall, the region's learning environment is grossly insufficient.

Professor Nisar Ali, a retired economics professor at the University of Kashmir says, "Our education system created supply of educated labour needed to be absorbed in 1960s and 1970s... thereafter we did not create any change in the system. We needed skills [-based higher education] for which there is a demand in the society. But our education system is the same since 1947. There is a huge gap between the absorption capacity and supply side..."

#### Top socio-economic problems

- Inadequate and outdated education and learning system
- Misuse of resources and poor management of economy leading to lack of opportunities for meaningful livelihood generation
- Corruption and lack of transparency in the society especially in politics and governance

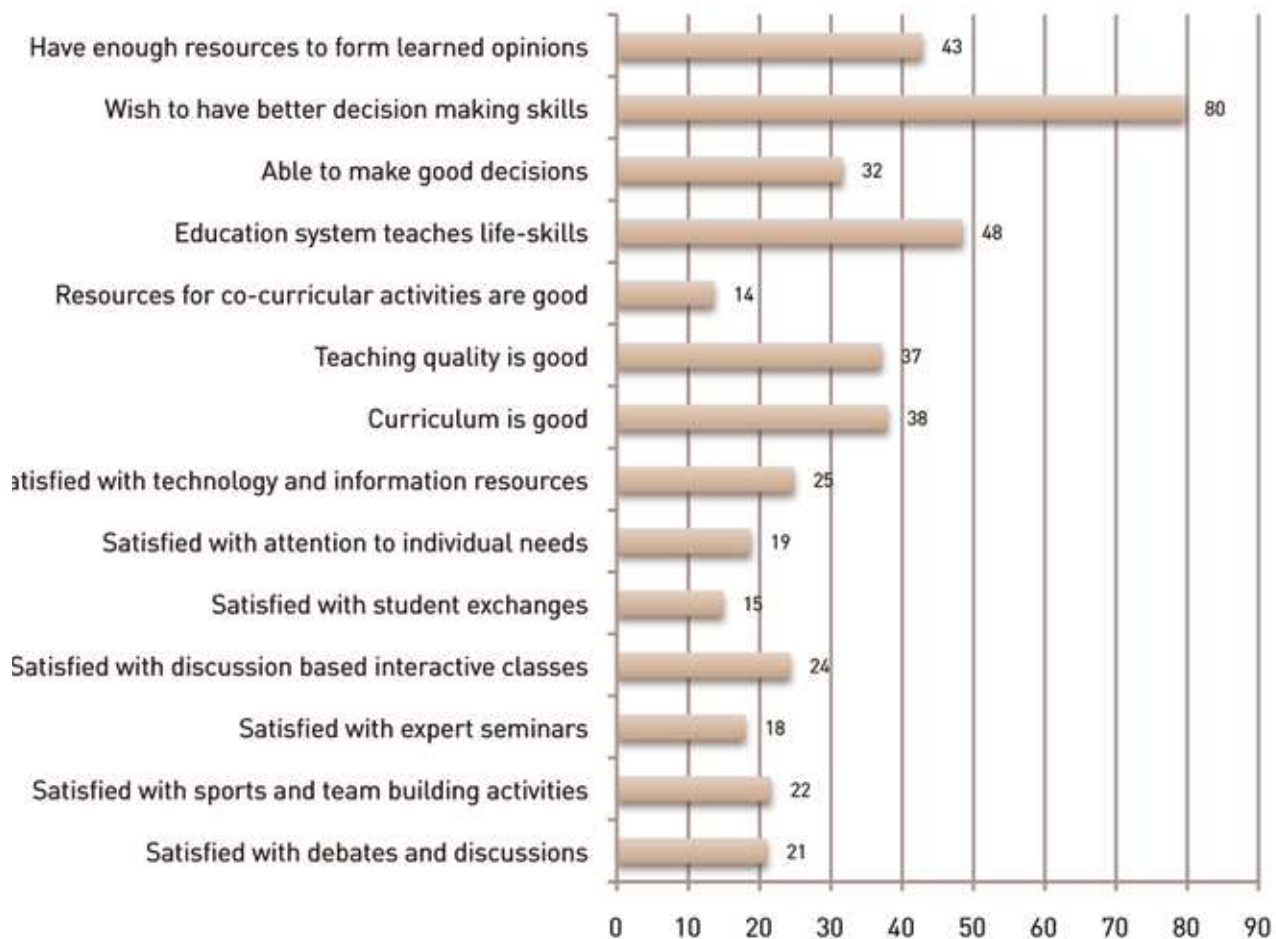


Chart 7: Education and learning system

Professor Bashir Ahmad Dabla, head of the Department of Sociology and Social Work at the University of Kashmir adds, “Educationally we have suffered the most. No government in the state has got the time and dedication to understand the problems in education of the people of Kashmir. There is no innovation, there is no vision in the education policies, no targets are made, there are no objectives – it is just that the system goes on. Thousands of students come out of the system, whether they are relevant or have the needed skills is not the government’s concern. They hardly care about it.”

#### Poorly managed economy, unemployment and misuse of resources

Ninety-three per cent of respondents identified lack of employment and entrepreneurial opportunities as a major problem and 90 per cent said people within their communities experience difficulty finding a job.

Engagement in meaningful livelihoods plays as much on the minds of young people in Kashmir as anywhere else. Estimates of unemployed youth run at more than 500,000. Kashmir’s economy mainly consists of agriculture (including animal

husbandry), horticulture, handicrafts, tourism, transport and small enterprises including traders. Large industries are non-existent. The services sector, largely constituted of government jobs, is also a major source of employment generation. The absence of a vibrant private sector and large industries coupled with an increase in population is a major concern for Kashmir’s youth; it adds to the pressure on them. Government policies coupled with increased education based on an imported style has also prompted many people to stop engaging in agriculture and related businesses. Young Kashmiris think that unemployment is the reason for many other social problems. A section of youth feels it can also be an opportunity for them to be innovative and think of new, sustainable and meaningful ways of earning a living. However they complain of lack of opportunities, support and an enabling environment.

*‘Unemployment is a very huge problem – there are no private companies. Our local resources are devalued. We are so dependent on the limited number of government jobs and those are marred by corruption.’ (Group discussion)*

As the sample indicates, youth feel that the Indian government is exploiting Kashmir's resources and is responsible for undermining its economy to make Kashmiris dependent on the government jobs, schemes and aid. The local government, complain the youth, is only an 'eyewash' and it is actually New Delhi that makes all the decisions. Group discussion participants often cited how Indian government-owned power projects are situated on Kashmir's water resources, with the power generated by them supplied to northern India, whereas Kashmiris are left mostly in the dark and are insufficiently compensated. Rough estimates are that Jammu and Kashmir is losing \$1.5 billion per year from this.<sup>50</sup> Youth also mention the decline in agricultural produce – the subsidy on imported rice has devalued the price of rice that Kashmiris grow. Poorly managed sectors like tourism and handicrafts, which the government promotes as the mainstay of Kashmir's economy, are relatively small contributors to GDP. An issue raised repeatedly by the youth, especially those living in border and rural areas, is the thousands of kanals<sup>5</sup> of agricultural and forestland occupied by the Indian security forces' camps. This brings back the discussion to the need for political resolution of the Kashmir dispute, which the youth consider the root cause of this problem.

Professor Ali, who is also involved in discussions of the economic problems faced by Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) and judicious use of its resources, sums up the issues. "J&K's main resources are water, minerals, cultivable land and tourism. The total revenue is about 4000 crore rupees. If we look at expenses, only one component ie the wage bill of the government employees is about 14000 crore rupees. So JK lacks capital needed to develop and harness its resources." Taking water as an example, he explains, if we approach international investors asking them to generate hydroelectricity and then sell it to governments of India and Pakistan, they ask for a guarantee. They know JK has limited revenue so they want a counter guarantee from India. "To date government of India has refused to give counter guarantee... What, on the other hand, they do is they ask their own corporation, NHPC, to have power projects on runoff in JK. (Projects like Salal, Uri Civil and Dulhasti; a total of over 1000 MW is operational; a few projects are undergoing construction and a few more are in the planning phase). They use their capital; they take [our] land, use [our] water resources. Once the power is generated they give [J&K] 12 per cent of power [88 per cent they take]... We did an exercise, asking the government of India compensation for all this... we did not get any

compensation and at the same time we did not get any response from the government of India." JK falls short of power by more than 50 per cent and has to buy it from government of India. "Out of that 88 per cent, they sell the same power back to us on a cash payment of 2400 crore rupees (payment for 2010)... the power produced by Salal, Dulhasti and Uri Civil."

Professor Ali believes the main problem is that Jammu and Kashmir public policy is directed towards creating a market economy and not a development economy. It does not lead to self-sufficiency or self-reliance. He points out that Jammu and Kashmir's import basket is 96 per cent of its total requirement. "Most of the consumer goods (and) non-consumer goods J&K state is importing. Whether it is mineral water, vegetables... even fish, construction industry items, capital goods, everything is being imported." In the process J&K has emerged as a market for its neighbours and has not been able to develop its economy in any meaningful way. Professor Ali terms the situation a "politico-economic crisis".

### Poor economy and unemployment

- Misuse of resources such as water and forests – not used to benefit Jammu and Kashmir
- Public policy directed towards creating a market economy as against a development economy
- Capacity of sectors like handicrafts and tourism choked because of the conflict - border and travel restrictions, and limited infrastructure
- Huge chunks of arable and forestland rendered inaccessible by Indian security forces
- Corrupt and shortsighted politicians with no vision and commitment to political, social or economic transformation

Professor Dabla agrees. "We have more than sufficient resources, water, forests, handicrafts and tourism. We can sell these throughout the world. We can sell our energy like hot cakes. But the political leadership and the government need to take a decision that they have to serve the people and entire resources must be used for the people. It should not be like that they give all the projects to NHPC and they give us only 12 per cent power and

<sup>5</sup> A land measure used in Kashmir, standardised under British rule to equal one-eighth of an acre.

they take 88 per cent. This is sheer exploitation. Our politicians are responsible for this. They have done this for petty gains... Our state has no serious policy or serious strategy for economic development for 21st century. How can they form any programmes or schemes? Livelihood problem is there for every Kashmiri youth.”

Dr Sheikh Showkat gives another example of how potential contribution from tourism to the economy is held hostage by the conflict. “J&K shares only five per cent of its border with India, whereas most of its border is with China and Pakistan. It is also in proximity to Central Asia. That way it is a potential tourist destination for people living there,” he says. “On account of the continuous conflict over here, and ...strained relations between India and China, and India and Pakistan, those natural routes remain blocked. And Kashmir is unable to tap in to the potential tourist market of more than two million in its vicinity – from Central Asia, the Muslim world (Middle East) and China.”

## Corruption

Ninety-eight per cent of the respondents recognised corruption as a major problem, 92 per cent believe most government officials are corrupt and 76 per cent say government institutions are not transparent.

Corruption is a dreaded subject that adds to the hopelessness of young people. The group discussion participants complain of corruption being the norm, from getting a certificate issued at the university to getting a job. Talking about it is not taboo in Kashmir anymore if you call it by any other name like *chai* (literally means tea and indicates cost of it / bribe) and *mithai* (literally means sweets and indicates cost of it / bribe). Everyone that has had to deal with any part of the government or administrative setup has experienced corruption. They feel the government promotes corruption and complain that jobs are given in quotas to the cadres of the pro-India political parties. In a 2005 survey,<sup>51</sup> Transparency International rated Jammu and Kashmir as the top two most corrupt states in India. Yet little has been done to address it, and the situation has only worsened since.

The discussions also show that youth are also worried about moral corruption in Kashmiri society, including the prevalence of counterfeit drugs and currency, drug abuse, dishonesty, malicious behaviour, backbiting, dowry demands, extravagance, timber smuggling, evading taxes, mixing kerosene in petrol, and so on. They blame corruption and government policies. They also largely blame the older generations for living

the wrong values and passing these on to new generations. An example they give is that instead of instilling strong morals or encouraging youth to follow their interests, adults give them a sense, and often encourage them to believe, that success is defined by how much money they make. Youth, in the perpetually unresolved political and security situation, are encouraged to think of their individual interests and benefits rather than of community wellbeing or collective good. And it is common that people ignore ethics, morals and their conscience to do that. Another reason they cite is how many young people in Kashmir are emulating the wrong examples like materialism from foreign cultures.

*‘Corruption is the biggest issue. This has emptied us of all meaningful things. Unless corruption stops nothing much will change. In government offices from peons to the officers you have to pay everybody to get even a basic thing done.’ (Group discussion)*

Professor Nisar Ali explains the background to the region’s corruption. “From 1953 to 2011 where the public fund flow takes place, political leadership has a mindset, *Government of India ka paisa hai, aish karo* (it is Government of India money, make merry). There is no accountability for it... it is the same non-judicious and misuse of resources.” He adds, “That society where there is a patronage, *Government of India ka paisa hai*, nobody is committed to the development process. Therefore, corruption will be order of the day ... corruption would be the rule of that society, top-to-toe, none exception, in one form or the other.”

“Every sector of society and every layer of society is involved in corruption,” adds Professor Dabla. “It is a collective and cumulative phenomenon.”

## Gender discrimination and violence against women

Overall 54 per cent of the respondents identified gender-based discrimination as a problem and 51 per cent were willing to engage in addressing it. This includes 61 per cent of the female and 51 per cent of the male respondents.

Generally youth – male and female – believe that in Kashmiri culture women are treated much better than in some neighbouring cultures. Most girls hesitate talking about it in groups where boys are in majority and seem to talk about it more freely in all women or women majority groups. Many young girls tend to think that they have and can play an active role in social transformation but can only

be supportive in political transformation, which is basically led by men. Invariably they share all the concerns that men have but when it comes to effecting political change, only some are active.

*'We (women) don't have a role in political transformation but (we) definitely have a role in social transformation...'* (Group discussion)

Young people seem proud that most of the population gives equal importance to the education of girls. Many women are part of the workforce. They do however bring up issues of different treatment at home and complain that boys get a preference if an either-or situation arises. They don't necessarily have the same say in decision-making as the boys. Some girls also complain about being teased by men. Dependence of women on men for economic reasons or for providing a sense of security and issues of related discrimination like the prevalence of dowry are also raised.

Another issue some girls allude to is that the youth are emulating wrong examples from the 'modern' influence of the west. They feel that they care more about how to present themselves or look beautiful, than focusing on substantive issues. Traditionally women in Kashmiri society have had stronger roles

and decision-making powers. They would work hard in the fields alongside men. But with the influence of western style education and image of women, they are giving up harder roles to pursue soft careers. This also is reflected in their perception of their overall role in society.

*'There have been some changes at basic level like even poor people want their girls to get education but discrimination still exists.'* (Group discussion)

Female respondents also bring up women-specific issues of conflict-related violence (harassment, rapes, mental health problems and suffering caused by killing or enforced disappearance of husbands, fathers or sons). They bring up the examples of Kunan Poshpora and Shopian rape cases, which received some media attention but no justice. They also complain that many such incidents have not been noticed despite being reported and many more go unreported because of the taboo associated with rape and the non-existence of any credible mechanism to register complaints. Enforced disappearances have also had a severely adverse impact on the situation and psyche of women in Kashmir. Human rights

### Political problems according to the youth

- Political Dispute
- Occupation
- Militarisation
- Human Rights violations
- No Freedom of Speech
- Alienation
- Draconian Laws
- Discrimination
- Fear of Security Forces
- Illegal Takeover of Land for Military Camps
- Humiliation / Helplessness
- Ineffective Leadership
- Corruption/Misuse of Natural Resources
- Violence Against Women
- Lack of Awareness of Rights / Duties

### Social problems according to the youth

- Restrictive Learning Environment
- Brain Drain
- Inadequate Education
- Lack of Support for Higher Education
- Lack of Employment Opportunities
- No Private Sector / No Entrepreneurship Opportunities
- Corruption Moral Degradation
- Inadequate Health-care Facilities
- Poor Administration
- Poor Infrastructure / Road Accidents
- Gender Based Discrimination
- Environmental & Cultural Degradation
- Drug Abuse / Sale of Fake Drugs



groups estimate these disappearances at around 8000.<sup>52</sup> The women whose husbands have been disappeared are called 'half-widows'; in Kashmir there are about 1500 such widows.<sup>53</sup>

Professor Dabla agrees that gender discrimination is a problem for Kashmiri society. "Fifty per cent of women face minor or major discriminations. But there has been a lot of progress and in many households women are treated well."

### Summary of the problems identified

Asked to identify the key issues or problems in Kashmiri society that they want to change, youth cite many examples. But often the discussions revolve around the conflict, presence and behaviour of security forces, violation of rights, education, employment and corruption. These are considered

the problems that lay the ground for other problems to take root. When we try to group those issues into broad categories it provides an interesting statistic. Forty-nine per cent of the overall responses are about the political conflict, its long pending resolution and related issues like militarisation, violations of rights, killings of innocents, impunity of the armed forces and police brutality. Thirty-four per cent cite issues of unemployment, poor infrastructure and agricultural reform, 11 per cent mention inadequacy of the education system and wider learning environment, and six per cent bring up other issues including drug addiction, gender discrimination, pollution and religion-related issues.

The participants believed that youth can play a critical role in bringing the change needed but are afraid that the space for doing so does not exist in Kashmir.

## What young people felt they need to achieve the change they desire

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### Highlights

- Guarantee of rights and safety.
- Creation of a safe democratic space for free and frank discussions – including in schools, colleges and universities – without interference of government or security agencies.
- An unbiased education system that allows holistic learning and encourages independent thinking.
- A learning environment that provides free and unbiased awareness of the issues involved in political and social transformation in Kashmir, understanding of rights and duties and training on life skills like self-expression, decision-making, negotiation and conflict management.
- Taking control of Kashmir's resources and the development of a sustainable and localised economy able to provide opportunities for the entire workforce to engage in meaningful employment.
- A conducive environment for and support to engage in independent livelihood generation – development of entrepreneurial capacity based on local resources and strengths, and encouragement of private enterprises.
- A corruption-free society – ending corruption both in social customs and the functioning of the government or state bureaucracy.
- Improved infrastructure and healthcare.

### Summary

Seventy-seven per cent of the respondents believe that young people can lead in changing their societies. They were significantly unsure when asked a more specific question; do they have the ability to change the government if they did not like what it was doing: 53 per cent said no, 46 per cent said yes. Self-belief and despair seem to run parallel. Teenagers were more optimistic at 51 per cent, as against those aged 25–30 years at 38 per cent. Sixty-six per cent of the respondents felt often or always depressed. However, 69 per cent felt they could have a productive life despite the situation they live in.

When asked if they have the ability to change the government, youth in Kashmir seem at a crossroad; they believe in themselves but simultaneously feel hopeless because of the repression they have experienced in recent times. They feel that resolving the political conflict and ending violence should be the top priority before anything else is addressed. They believe most social problems cannot be dealt with in the current situation and many actually stem from it. There exists however a sizeable opinion that thinks all issues should be addressed together, including corruption, education and employment. What perpetuates chaos and unrest in the valley is lack of sustained engagement for resolution of the conflict, and for other issues and ideas. Many young people think that the government, NGOs and general public get involved only when provoked. There is no sustained engagement with issues and recommendations are never implemented.

Unaddressed issues result in disillusionment. This, in addition to the fear of security forces and lack of forums to voice their concerns, results in frustration and anger among the youth.

*'I can't focus on my life until the political conflict is resolved. I am not able to follow any of my plans. It has made us lazy for everything else. Our future is getting destroyed.'*  
(Group discussion)

"The first step that can relieve Kashmiris of so many problems is the demilitarisation of the state," recommends Dr Showkat. "It is the first step towards securing a sense of dignity and a sense of security because once they see the security forces they feel traumatised and haunted. They are unable to live a dignified life and they feel insecure all the time. So demilitarisation is the most important step, which everyone must pursue."

Resolution of the conflict, guarantee of rights and safety: creation of democratic space that is free from fear; strengthening an independent, vibrant and effective civil society

The frustration with the prevailing situation is immediately evident. Kashmiri youth, as the sample responses and discussions indicate, feel so bottled up that they run with the first opportunity where they get to speak – once they trust the space. Safe spaces for such discussions do not exist in Kashmir. When asked what young Kashmiris need, the first thing they want fulfilled is their rights, leading to the resolution of the political dispute. This is what their daily struggle is about. The state and its security forces humiliate them and when they protest, it only worsens and often results in beatings, arrests, disabling injuries and killings.

They understand that only when the whole region, which includes India-, Pakistan- and China-controlled parts of Jammu and Kashmir, is looked at together, can Kashmiris find a practical vision for their future. For a lasting political solution, the group discussion participants say that India and Pakistan need to give up their respective positions and start an honest and unconditional dialogue with Kashmiris to devise a mechanism for reintegrating the divided parts of Kashmir, and facilitating a democratic and inclusive process for Kashmiris to formulate a vision for their future. This process, they say, could begin with the guarantee of rights and safety especially of those that voice independent or different opinions.

*'In Kashmir University the students' union is banned. Look at other universities in Jammu or in Delhi, you can see all political ideologies being part of the discourse. We have the courage but the space is not there. You can see these youth who go on protesting facing bullets.'* (Group discussion)

A democratic space, free from fear and intimidation, must be created to help engage young people. This will not be easy to achieve, not because such a space cannot be provided but because of the challenge for youth to trust that such a space can actually exist in Kashmir. The insurgency, counter-insurgency and promotion of proxy spaces by the government that were used to target people with independent opinions have left a deep trust deficit in Kashmiri society. Most want resolution of the conflict through the right to self-determination but feel that their voices are muzzled and confusing messages are manufactured and spread to mislead people outside Kashmir.<sup>54</sup> Many participants also point out the divisions in Kashmiri leadership as a reason for lack of a concerted effort for resolution of the conflict. Young Kashmiris want to stop the victimisation of those who voice independent opinions, and to create safe spaces for discussion and voicing dissent. The need for this cannot be overemphasised.

*'If you want to do anything that is really needed and would be most useful, according to me - first, there must be right to freedom of expression. Guarantee that to us... Most of the people would like to talk about their experience of human rights violations but they can't, they are afraid. So they feel suffocated.'*  
(Group discussion)

Kashmiri youth recognise the value of a vibrant civil society. They are trying to find ways to engage in creating an effective and transparent civil society that can ensure their rights are not violated and that real progress is made towards resolving the conflict, and achieving social transformation. They want to form partnerships with transparent non-governmental, multilateral and development organisations. Youths offer many suggestions on how to achieve the creation of a safe space and the strengthening of civil society, such as:

- Guarantee of rights and safety – all human rights violations must stop.
- End militarisation – revoke laws that are discriminatory or suspend rights of the people in

any manner, enforce anti-corruption legislation and limit the powers of police to only basic policing services.

- Allow non-violent protests – formulate coherent, strategic and practical plans for non-violent ways to resist and register dissent.
- Prepare the ground for final resolution of the conflict through exercise of the right to self-determination / plebiscite:
  - Ensure a truly democratic space for all citizens of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir<sup>6</sup> irrespective of their opinion – one free from fear and interference from security or other government agencies – to facilitate dialogue for a way to resolve the political conflict.
  - Raise unbiased awareness about political and social transformation issues in Kashmir, rights and duties among the youth and general public.
  - Allow student unions and youth groups in educational institutions, and the organising of discussions and debates, use of media and work with different organisations to sensitise youth and adults.
  - Allow on and off-campus and online discussions and debates, free from fear.
- End corruption (see page 28 for more detail).
- Provide aid and rehabilitation for poor and people affected by violence without discrimination.

### Needs of Kashmiri youth

- A democratic space free from fear
- Guarantee of rights and safety
- Resolution of the political conflict
- Unbiased and enabling education system
- Meaningful livelihood generation opportunities and improved infrastructure
- An independent, effective and vibrant civil society that engages young people
- Transparent and corruption free governance and society
- Improved infrastructure and healthcare

## Reform of the education system and an enabling learning environment

Youth want an education system that is unbiased, allows holistic development and provides life skills to the students. There is a serious need for drastic curriculum reform – modernising and localising the system and adding resources. Some of their suggestions include:

- Academic freedom:
  - End corruption in educational administration and institutions, and stop interference by security or state agencies.
  - Free curriculum from bias and make it practical, localised and progressive.
  - Allow and promote research, documentation and discussion of history, culture, economy, politics and other practical issues faced by the society.
- Improve the academic and learning experience:
  - Incorporate life skills training and moral education into the curriculum and co-curricular activities to promote values of team spirit and cooperation.
  - Increase choice and range of subjects, courses and institutions – for example a course for education and research on human rights and duties.
  - Add institutes with courses and research facilities based on local needs and resources.
  - Add colleges and universities with professional / technical and religious / philosophical programmes.
  - Introduce interactive teaching, innovative and locally sensitive learning methods.
  - Provide exposure to relevant technologies specially IT in schools and colleges.
- Improve infrastructure and support for education:
  - Provide competitive scholarships for higher education.
  - Build libraries in schools and colleges with a varied range of books, journals, magazines and newspapers.
  - Build public libraries in localities with a varied range of books, journals, magazines, newspapers, including on local history and culture.
  - Improve and increase the number and quality of laboratories, libraries, IT and co-curricular activities.

<sup>6</sup> The phrase 'erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir' refers to pre-1947 Jammu and Kashmir.

- Allow free and frank exchange of ideas through student unions and youth groups:
  - Facilitate exchange programmes
    - for students and subject experts
    - between local and non-local institutions.
  - Organise on and off-campus and online discussions, debates, seminars and quizzes on varied subjects including on local art, culture, history, etc.
  - Use media and work with different organisations to sensitise youth and general public, facilitate discussions and raise awareness about rights, duties and political and social transformation issues.
- Rethink the education system to address the culture of schooling in Kashmir.

### Conducive environment for and support to engage in independent and localised livelihood generation

There is a grave need for innovation in employment generation. Youth are concerned by and want to prevent brain drain. They recommend it would be best to focus on the local resources and initiatives that are sustainable and in sync with the local climate, culture and situation. Creating more jobs in the government is an option that youth are wary of. They consider this a tool to tame the voices of dissent, enlist support for the government and perpetuate corruption. Some of their suggestions include:

*'Jobs are given in quotas to the cadres of the pro-India political parties. The best parts of our land are under the camps of Indian security forces.'* (Group discussion)

- Demilitarisation and end of restrictive laws and policies – ensure that the security forces vacate and do not limit people's access to their farms and other lands.
- Take control of the state's natural resources like water, land and tourism, and appropriately harness them for the benefit of the people of Jammu and Kashmir.
- Facilitate local entrepreneurial development:
  - Bring in technology and promote research to experiment with agriculture, horticulture and animal husbandry to ensure optimum land use. Much of Kashmir's agricultural land is used only for a single crop in the summer, so Kashmiris could consider how to make the land productive during winter.
  - Encourage engagement in farm-based livelihood activities.
  - Facilitate livestock-related businesses – Kashmiris are meat eaters and have to import most meat. Given its natural resources, Kashmir could instead develop the capacity to export meat.
  - Establish more agriculture, livestock and other local resource-based programmes, courses and research facilities in the educational setup.

*'We have to find ways to be economically self-sufficient. Then we can assert our rights.'* (Group discussion)

- Make efforts to map local needs and local resources to ensure maximum self-sufficiency and educate public about it.
- Enhance infrastructure and facilities – like healthcare, electricity, roads and IT.
- Develop and promote sustainable and eco-friendly tourism:
  - Develop local capacity in terms of trained manpower and environment friendly infrastructure.
  - Promote Kashmir as a destination for people from the Middle East and other Asian countries – for example allow direct air travel to attract them.
- Build and promote healthcare infrastructure:
  - That caters for the needs of the indigenous population.
  - That makes Kashmir a destination for world-class health tourism.
- End discrimination and corruption in providing government jobs and allocating resources – raise awareness about business opportunities and government-sponsored support schemes for making use of local resources.
- Ensure transparency in government spending.

### A corruption-free society

Corruption in anything and everything that the government is involved with bothers youth greatly. Most believe the government not only condones corruption but also actually promotes it by preventing any effective anti-corruption policies to take effect. They complain that no politician, let alone the government ever raises the issue strongly enough. Kashmiris grow up witnessing corruption

as the social norm. Suggestions by youths to address this issue include:

- Permanent resolution of the political conflict to pave way for a democratic system of governance.
  - Reform the political system and put in place a democratic setup that is actually of the people, by the people and for the people.
- Educate politicians, bureaucrats and other government officials about what it means to be a public servant paid for by the taxpayer.
- Ensure complete transparency in governance and administration: make the anti-corruption legislation (including the Right to Information Act), and resulting institutions effective and free of interference from politicians and security agencies. Involve and allow civil society to ensure this. Make all politicians, bureaucrats and other government officials declare their assets plus those of their families.
- Make recruitment for government jobs and allocating public resources transparent, and end discrimination.
- Make the judiciary independent and limit the powers of police and security forces.
- Implement anti-corruption legislation strictly – all corruption cases must be investigated and losses to the public property made good. Suspend lawmakers who are under investigation for corruption.
- Make mechanisms to register complaints and their redress easy, transparent and effective. Ensure protection of the complainants and whistleblowers.
- Training and raising awareness:
  - Encourage and help people to use right to information (RTI) act.
  - Raise awareness and sensitise the bureaucrats and government officials to their duties and obligations, anti-corruption laws, RTI and their responsibility to ensure compliance.
  - Raise awareness about issues, rights, duties and penalties for default among the general public.
  - Raise awareness about rights and duties and incorporate moral education in school and university curriculum.
  - Use forums like schools, colleges and mosques to encourage people to play their roles as responsible citizens and establish high moral standards.

## Improved infrastructure and healthcare

Young Kashmiris experience a severe lack of the infrastructure that is needed for society to operate smoothly. This includes electricity, transportation and roads, healthcare and other public services. They complain that people have to travel for hours to receive basic healthcare and then wait hours to see a doctor, at best for a few minutes. Also of major concern is the lack of accountability of doctors and other health professionals, in part because they need to treat so many patients.

Problems of mental health and drug abuse in Kashmir have also reached epidemic proportions<sup>55</sup> and are major concerns. The number of drug abusers is estimated at 211,000 and the health services department offers no de-addiction or rehabilitation services. There are only two de-addiction facilities – an eight-bed facility operated by the police and a 12-bed facility operated by a local NGO. Much work is needed to increase and improve mental healthcare and drug abuse treatment facilities.

Many young Kashmiris also point to the role played by the Indian troops in spreading drug abuse<sup>56</sup> and to their increasing interference in civil and development matters. They believe that political conflict and corruption are the main reasons that cause and prevent these problems from receiving serious attention.

## Suggestions for the kinds of interventions needed

### Expectations of the international community

As the sample indicates, most youth in Kashmir feel let down by the international community, including the UN and NGOs. The UN has been unable to push implementation of the many resolutions<sup>57</sup> it has passed on Kashmir and is unable to intervene when Kashmiris' rights are violated. Young people think the international community could have at least expressed solidarity with the Kashmiri struggle for rights. The youth believe that with India's success as an emerging business destination, most Western governments have almost conceded to India's position that Kashmir is an 'internal issue'. The protests spearheaded by youth in Kashmir over the past three summers and the killings resulting from the Indian armed forces and the police firing upon them have forced the international community to finally pay some attention. Young people are hopeful that more NGOs and the international community will speak up and perhaps even allocate resources to work with Kashmiris.

*'UN is the highest-level forum but it cannot ensure if any Kashmiri is getting his right or not, if he is safe there... They are not looking at the grassroots level! What is the fun of having such an apex body.'* (Group discussion)

Many participants were sceptical about the work of some NGOs. They complained that the government has sponsored many NGOs in order to manipulate Kashmiris and mislead the international community.<sup>58</sup> Government control over who can or cannot work in Kashmir is a major cause of this scepticism. Dependency upon government permission often means that those organisations allowed to work in Kashmir are forced to limit or change their scope of work, or worse, accommodate the government's agenda.

The discussions indicated that young people in Kashmir want to form alliances with transparent non-governmental, multilateral and development organisations. They hope the international community can allocate more resources and put pressure on the Indian government to allow an independent and dynamic civil society to develop in Kashmir.

### Summary of needs

As is evident from the discussion earlier in this report, the conflict has held Kashmir hostage for so long that its society has been left bereft of

peace, trust and transparency. The main needs of young Kashmiris in particular and the wider population include:

- stopping the human rights violations
- settlement of the political conflict
- establishment of a democratic space to allow a free discourse on all issues of concern to the people including dissent
- reforming the present educational setup into a progressive, localised and enabling learning system
- development of an economy that uses resources optimally and provides meaningful employment for all its workforce
- providing an environment where youth and women could engage fruitfully
- development of a healthcare system to take good care of the sick and promote wellbeing
- development of an effective and inclusive social security setup.

### Suggested interventions

- Facilitate resolution of the conflict (Right to self-determination)
- Prevention and documentation of human rights violations
- Strengthening Kashmiri civil society
- Facilitating a dialogue within Kashmir for a vision of the future
- Action Research Centre
- Capacity building and reforming the education system
- Entrepreneurship and livelihood based interventions
- Facilitating transparency – ending corruption
- Improve general and mental healthcare

Instead of addressing these needs, we see deepening problems such as lack of democratic space, rights violations, fear of the armed forces, corruption, alienation, extreme posturing on political issues and lack of meaningful dialogue to end the political conflict. This prevents any process-oriented

meaningful progress and so governance continues to function in a piecemeal fashion.

Youth in the discussions seemed to recognise the importance of involving all sections of society and respecting the rights of others. They complain however they are not given the space to have a dialogue among themselves to enable them to formulate a vision that could be shared with everybody and debated.

Not enough time and effort has been invested in seriously exploring the interests or needs of Kashmiris. In fact, these issues are never debated in the public domain inside Kashmir. It is not allowed. Moving forward is possible only once the governments of India and Pakistan move beyond rhetoric and engage Kashmiris seriously in a dialogue to settle the dispute taking into account the wishes of the people of Jammu and Kashmir.

### **Suggested interventions**

Kashmiris will of course have to come up with solutions for their own problems. They want to, and are trying. However, the international community could and should play a vital role in some areas.

The following suggestions are based on the conversations with young Kashmiris and the current situation.

#### **Facilitate resolution of the conflict – helping provide a safe democratic space**

In light of the youths' needs, the top intervention by the international community would be to facilitate resolution of the conflict in accordance with the aspirations of the people of Jammu and Kashmir. To achieve this, both the Indian and Pakistani governments have to change their policies and let people of the whole region play their rightful role as the main stakeholders to determine the shape of the final resolution. They have to play the roles of facilitators, to allow people to talk about and formulate a common vision for their future in a democratic and safe space. This would mean ending the militarisation and sabotage, restoring the people of Jammu and Kashmir's rights and creating a joint or neutral interim arrangement to ensure a free, just and transparent transition. Examples of what could be done to facilitate this include:

- Lobbying in international forums to draw attention to the prevailing adverse and dangerous situation in the Kashmir region, and to pressure India and Pakistan through the channels and partners who hold influence over them, to resolve the conflict as per the wishes of the people.

- Formulate partnerships with Kashmiri civil society actors, help build their capacity and access to international forums to talk about their situation and advocate their rights and interests.
- Lobby for and facilitate raising the issue at various UN bodies, urging them to renew the efforts to push for a just solution in spirit of the UNSC resolutions.

#### **Prevention and documentation of human rights violations – putting pressure on India to end impunity of its security forces**

Although some people already work in this area, young Kashmiris think not enough is being done. They recognise that systematic documentation of human rights violations would help stop violations and view facilitating this as a top priority. This also means advocacy and lobbying for the rights of Kashmiris in and outside of Kashmir especially with the Indian government and the international community. So far India's government has only allowed very selective work by international NGOs or groups such as Human Rights Watch (HRW), Amnesty International (AI) and the International People's Tribunal for Human Rights and Justice in Kashmir (IPTK). These groups have only documented some human rights violations in Kashmir. The youths argue that India must allow unhindered access for human rights bodies and other credible international organisations to report from Kashmir. This mirrors what those organisations are advocating.

Building public awareness and the capacity of youth and independent workers in different parts of the region to facilitate objective, timely and authentic documentation of violations is also vital. The goal of this initiative should be to prevent human rights violations by networking activists with each other and with people and organisations that can respond immediately to an adverse situation.

#### **Strengthening Kashmiri civil society**

Many young Kashmiris are trying to find ways to engage in helping create a vibrant, effective and transparent civil society in Kashmir. Youth articulated an aspiration to create a civil society that can provide space for a progressive, honest and informed discourse on issues of common concern, stand up for peoples' rights and thereby pave the way for real progress on the political and social transformation desired by Kashmiris.

The nascent civil society in Kashmir was severely destabilised by escalation of the conflict and has

only just begun to resurrect itself. Conditions for an independent civil society to function as an auditor of the power circles do not exist in Kashmir. The independent members of civil society risk everything – their livelihoods, their families' safety and their own lives. Their courage, commitment and resilience must be admired, encouraged and strengthened.

Helping independent voices to build their capacity, connect with the international community and expand their sphere of influence is an initiative that could go a long way to improve the life experience of those affected by Kashmir's conflict. One idea is to provide fellowships to deserving individuals or institutions to undergo specialised programmes of study, research or professional development in the fields of conflict transformation, leadership, human and citizens' rights, educational reform and culture education, organising and strategic planning, self and community expression, sustainable and localised development.

### Facilitating a dialogue within Kashmir to develop a vision of the future

Youth expressed the view that an action research based dialogue should be facilitated among youth groups of Kashmir and various sub-regions of Jammu and Kashmir to develop a practical vision of the future for the whole region. This would include defining issues that the youth talk about most, such as the need for a democratic space, rights and duties, peace, equality, justice, cultural schooling, gender equality, an enabling learning environment, self-sufficiency and sustainability.

A complementary exercise could be to map the region's needs and resources, recommending practical ways to make the best use of resources to fulfill regional needs. This would also be useful to policymakers. The framework would be prepared in consultation with experts in the relevant areas who have worked in or are familiar with the situation in Kashmir.

### Action Research Centre: building capacity for the long term

Youth expressed a desire to address community transformation issues in the long term through establishing a research centre. This would help instill a sense of process-oriented and long-term thinking, planning and working. The scope could include imparting research training and conducting action research on local issues, such as people's empowerment, corruption, community health, gender equity, culture, history and economy. Focus areas could include restoration of culture,

learning from history, finding localised solutions for economic progress and achieving political and social transformation that the people desire. One function of the centre would be to make policy recommendations. This would also help build local capacity to address local issues with local resources.

### Capacity building and reforming the education system

The participants expressed that one intervention (or a part of it) could be to help build awareness, training on life skills and sensitising Kashmiri youth about their rights and duties. This could also include exploring safe, non-violent and effective ways of seeking rights and achieving the desired social and political transformation. Introducing a programme on cultural and moral education based on locally developed curriculum is another idea. An initiative for comprehensive reform of the education system could also complement this intervention. This could be achieved through working with schools, colleges, universities and grassroots civil society organisations, and by training the administrators and lobbying for reforms as society demands. Recommendations for changes would be formulated based on detailed research with people in the region. The research framework would be prepared in consultation with experts in relevant fields.

### Entrepreneurship and livelihood-based intervention

Youth expressed a view that a practical intervention to improve the entrepreneurial capacity of young Kashmiris would directly benefit them and the wider population. This could involve assisting with entrepreneurship development based on locally available agriculture and other resources. A complementary module could be to support youth skills training. This could help lower dependence on government jobs in the long term. Economic independence would also boost young people's confidence and help them become more assertive in effecting the political and social change they desire.

### Facilitating transparency – ending corruption

Another useful intervention, said the participants, would be to raise awareness about corruption, its effects and effective ways to eliminate it. The public would be informed about their rights, relevant laws and the processes through which they can file complaints and get them addressed. Corruption is very deep-rooted and widespread in



all spheres of Kashmir's government and society. Awareness of grassroots corruption, corruption in bureaucracy and in politics should be tackled at different levels. Sensitising politicians, bureaucrats and government officials on their duties and responsibilities and reorienting them to the public servant facet of their work would be critical for this initiative. An advocacy-cum-lobbying campaign to bring transparency in governance could also form a part of this initiative – for example in allocation of jobs, contracts and resources. The use of the right to information act and information technology could be pushed as a trigger to help end corruption and bring transparency into the system. This could be done in collaboration with the government and civil society organisations. Developing and disseminating a local curriculum on moral

education for use in schools and higher education could complement this intervention.

### General and mental healthcare intervention

The young participants expressed their desire for healthcare interventions, with special attention to mental health issues and the promotion of wellbeing. Mental health problems in Kashmir have reached epidemic proportions. The few existing mental health experts and limited facilities are unable to cater to the actual need. Another challenge is that discussion of mental health problems is taboo; any interventions should also help raise awareness. The need for urgent improvements in healthcare facilities and infrastructure could also form a part of this initiative.

## Notes from the findings sessions and team members

### Notes from sessions to share research findings

Participants at these sessions seemed surprised this research was happening and eagerly contributed to the discussions. At the end of sessions, some whispered to the research team that they wanted to join this 'movement'. This reflects the lack of opportunities and their restlessness to engage in community transformation, and also the absence of trust. Youth seemed to be more comfortable in responding to things in groups rather than in individual interviews. More so when they were reacting to what others said in the sessions where the research findings were shared and feedback was sought.

Youth said the political problems impact more people than the percentages indicated by the research. Most agreed with the findings about the experience of rights being overwhelmingly negative. One participant said, "Kashmiris are living under an illegal occupation... the whole population has no rights".

In response to the question of duties, youth invariably felt the number of people who actually performed their duties on a regular basis is much lower. They felt the same about the response to the question on implementation of Sharia Law.

All agreed that the awareness of the issues, rights and duties among Kashmiri youth and the general public is low. They felt that the political conflict, government policies and an inadequate education system were mainly responsible for keeping people ignorant. Except for a few who felt that the police had too much responsibility, all endorsed what the

research revealed about youth attitudes toward security forces and police. Many said the problems created by their presence and behaviour were actually more severe.

#### Feedback on findings

- Impact of political problems more severe
- Violation of rights by Indian security forces more severe
- Number of people who perform their duties less than the findings indicate
- Low level of awareness of issues, rights and duties a major problem
- Democracy nonexistent in Kashmir
- Inadequate education system responsible for many problems

The youth agreed that foremost in their minds is settlement of the political conflict, ending human rights violations and the creation of a democratic space that is free from fear. They also agreed their major needs include reforming the education system into an unbiased, enabling and high quality education, and knowledge-creation system, ending corruption and generating meaningful employment opportunities. Women participants raised the issue of women's empowerment, which they wanted to feature in the list.

Responding to the questions about the current situation, participants mostly agreed with the

overall findings. About the findings on questions of democracy, most said it is non-existent. A few raised the issue of people participating in elections as meaning some kind of democracy was in place. Many however argued against it. They also raised issues of land taken over by the security forces, the government's misuse of natural resources, and lack of sustained commitment to achieve political and social transformation among youth. Regarding the findings about the education and learning system they indicated that the problems were more severe. It seems that many students have stopped noticing the absence of co-curricular activities such as debates, discussions and students' unions. At the session held at the University of Kashmir, many students did not know whether the students' union existed or not.

*'Political conflict is the mother of all our political problems. Corruption is the mother of all our social problems. And they are interrelated.'*  
(Feedback Session)

### Reflections by the research team

"A warm response was received from youth belonging to different backgrounds and age groups. Although a few respondents had a very negative approach saying that thousands of such projects have been carried out hardly bearing any results for the youth of valley. Those showing a positive approach hoped and wanted this project to draw some attention of the people across the globe towards the problems of Kashmiri youth. But confidentiality of the personal information was a main concern for everyone due to the prevailing circumstances."

"A wide range of responses were received from youth but all of them were interconnected in one way or the other, all revolving around Kashmir issue. Youth seemed to be very much disappointed with the government in general and police in particular. Quoting one of the respondents, 'Dictionary meaning of the policeman should be exchanged with that of criminal'. Only those who themselves were a part of police system showed some positive attitude, as one respondent said, 'I know that police don't respect and protect people but my brother is a policeman and he does. He tries to help if somebody is beaten for protesting against the killings.'"

*'For decades there has been no substantial change in the quality and deliverance of education at any level (in Kashmir).'*  
(Research Team)

"One of the most important issues for the youth is the Indian occupation. Resolving Kashmir dispute

is necessary to rescue it from the den of misery, destruction and vandalism by over half-million Indian troops. People are not even allowed to protest peacefully against the atrocities by Indian forces. So youth started a new way of resilience: 'stone pelting'."

"The rights and duties section received the most attention from the youth and spontaneous emotional responses were received quite often. Absence of fundamental rights in Kashmir and lack of awareness among masses were main concerns in response to the question about fundamental duties. One of the respondents said, 'why should I do the fundamental duties, when I don't get my basic rights.'"

"The uncertainty and incoherence of views, opinions and decisions among youth was observed owing to the unpredictable situations."

"When it comes to tackling of challenges, everybody was numb for a while, as they do not know what to do. Then I realised that it's not only experience but awareness of rights that we are lacking plus youth has totally underestimated their potential. I mean we have potential; we have energy, as I got some answers like 'I WANT TO DO SOMETHING FOR KASHMIR'. But then the question arises, WHAT?? They fail to answer. HOW?? They fail to answer. So the basic thing that I realised is the lack of awareness of social and political issues, human rights and sometimes few people do not know their natural rights. I am talking about right to life, liberty and property. Maybe they have very much bad experience regarding these rights, that's why they do not know if these rights really exist or not."

*'Youth are very uncertain about their views, decisions and plans about future due to the unpredictable situations. A 17-year-old respondent told me, 'Kashmiris can't plan anything for their future life as I or you could be killed in next few seconds.'* (Research Team)

"Honestly I realised if the Kashmir issue has not been solved in coming years, there will be armed rebellion again in valley because people, mostly young, they are so much fed up of this army regime that it's a bursting situation here. I wonder sometimes if we are living in 18th century or in 21st century..."

"I do not think that we have educational rights in real sense. Government is producing cattle in their so-called educational institutions. When you don't know your potential, when you don't know how to solve the problems, how to critically analyse something or anything, how can you call yourself an educated person?"

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## Brief timeline

**1846-1947:** After being ruled by the Mughals, the Sikhs and eventually the British, Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) State is created under the Treaty of Amritsar between the East India Company and Raja Gulab Singh of Jammu who buys Kashmir Valley from the East India Company for Rs.75,00,000. The people of Kashmir rise against the repressive Maharaja Hari Singh in 1931 and again in 1946 led by Sheikh Abdullah. Following Independence, and the Partition of British India into India and Pakistan, a grave dispute arose over the question of which nation Kashmir should accede to. Based on geographical and religious factors, Kashmir was expected to go to Pakistan.

**1947:** An internal revolt begins in the Poonch region against oppressive taxation by the Maharaja and the rebels form Azad Kashmir Government in October. There is heightened unrest leading to exodus of tens of thousands of Muslims. Tribal fighters from Mirpur invade Kashmir. Fearful for his safety, Maharaja Hari Singh seeks help from India. Maharaja signs a conditional instrument of accession paving the way for the entry of Indian Army into Kashmir. Pakistan disputes the accession as illegal and the first war over Kashmir breaks out.

**1948:** India takes the case of Kashmir to United Nations. The United Nations Security Council passes a resolution providing for (i) Ceasefire (ii) Withdrawal of Pakistani troops and Tribals, followed by Indian troops and (iii) Plebiscite. It also establishes UN Commission for India and Pakistan (UNCIP) to monitor the ceasefire and help administer the plebiscite. Ceasefire divides Jammu and Kashmir in to Indian and Pakistani controlled parts. Due to differences in interpretation of the procedure and extent of demilitarisation, the plebiscite is never held.

**1949-50:** The Indian Constituent Assembly adopts Article 370 of the Constitution, ensuring a special status and internal autonomy for Jammu and Kashmir. However, the autonomy would get eroded over the years.

**1951:** The first elections are held in J&K followed by allegations of rigging. The UN passes a resolution to the effect that such elections do not substitute a plebiscite. The charges of rigging continue to plague most subsequent elections held in J&K.

**1965:** Indo-Pak war breaks out after Pakistan sends infiltrators across the ceasefire line in August. The war ends in a ceasefire on 23 September.

**1971:** Maqbool Bhat and others form the Jammu Kashmir National Liberation Front (which later became the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front or JKLF), which calls for complete independence of J&K from India and Pakistan. The Indo-Pak War of 1971 takes place, resulting in the secession of East Pakistan leading to creation of Bangladesh.

**1984:** The Indian Army takes Siachen Glacier region of Kashmir. Maqbool Bhat is hanged in Tihar Jail at Delhi.

**1987-89:** The rigging of 1987 elections provides boost to the demand for self-determination. The insurgency in the Kashmir valley gains momentum. The end of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in 1988 catalyses militancy in Kashmir. Pakistan provides arms and training to militants

in Kashmir, fuelling the discontent already smouldering in the Valley. Massive protests start in Kashmir in 1989. JKLF declares armed struggle against Indian rule. This is followed by an Indian crackdown leading to widespread human rights violations.

**1990:** By March, amidst the continued unrest, most of the estimated 1,62,500 Kashmiri Hindus in the valley, also called Kashmiri Pandits, flee the Valley. An estimated one million people take to streets in protests demanding freedom and end of Indian-rule in Kashmir. 40 people are killed in police firing. In May, hundreds of thousands of people attend the funeral march of the top cleric, Mirwaiz Maulvi Muhammad Farooq, assassinated by gunmen earlier. Over 40 mourners are shot dead by Indian troops.

**1993:** All Parties Hurriyat (Freedom) Conference (APHC) is formed to promote the cause of Kashmiri nationalism.

**1994-98:** Counter-insurgency reaches a peak. Specialist Indian troops with the aid of 'Ikhwanis', former militants-turned-India-loyalists, deal a severe blow to the armed movement. Human rights violations reach an all time peak.

**1999:** Following the infiltration of Pakistani soldiers and Kashmiri militants into positions on the Indian side of the LoC, the Kargil War breaks out. With detailed media coverage it also becomes a propaganda war. Indian retaliation and international pressure forces Pakistan to withdraw its forces.

**2001:** India and Pakistan fail to arrive at a settlement on Kashmir issue, despite multiple rounds of meetings between Prime Minister Vajpayee and President Musharraf. Plans including free trade, demilitarisation and shared autonomy fail to take off.

**2008:** A controversial land deal (the state government gives nearly hundred acres of land in the Valley to a Hindu shrine board) causes a furore and Muslims in Kashmir take to streets. A brutal reprisal by the state kills nearly 60 people in two months.

**2009:** The alleged rape and murder of two women in the South Kashmir town of Shopian leads to widespread protests across Kashmir. Kashmiris and independent investigations suggest the hand of government forces, but the government claims the two women had drowned and closes the investigation.

**2010:** Kashmir witnesses largest protests against Indian rule since 1990. Widespread anti-India protests led by youth take place, demanding end of Indian rule in Kashmir. Resistance leaders organise weekly protest calendars. Protests often result in clashes between protesters and government forces as government forces try to stop protests. Nearly 120 people, most of them youth, are killed. The Indian government appoints three interlocutors to mediate the Kashmir dispute.

**2011:** Confirming a 2008 report by a local human rights group, the State Human Rights Commission finds evidence of thousands of Unmarked and Mass Graves in parts of Kashmir. It calls for a further investigation and identification of bodies buried in these graves, many among who are believed to be local victims of enforced disappearances.

*At a time when young people worldwide are recognised for taking the lead in changing their societies, this participatory research is aimed at finding the perception and level of awareness of Kashmiri youth about their rights and duties. It also examines the social and political change they want to see, and what they need to effect this change in Kashmir.*

*The research reveals what young Kashmiris want to change, and that they share many ideas on how they can achieve this change. However when it comes to actual engagement to accomplish the transformation they desire, they feel they are forced to either give up, or resort to street protests for which they are persecuted.*

*Young Kashmiris are caught between the desire to resolve the political dispute and a pressing requirement to address everyday issues. Their need for quality education, meaningful employment, proper healthcare and recreational activities is clear, but their attainment has been made complex by the unresolved political context.*

The opinions expressed in this publication are the author's and should not be taken to represent the position either of Conciliation Resources or others who have helped to make the study possible. Any errors in this paper remain those of the author. Comments, corrections and feedback should be addressed to [fayaz@brandeis.edu](mailto:fayaz@brandeis.edu)

## About Conciliation Resources

We're an independent organisation working with people in conflict to prevent violence and build peace. Conciliation Resources is there as long as we're needed to provide advice, support and practical resources. In addition, we take what we learn to government decision-makers and others working to end conflict, to improve policies and practice worldwide.

Our programme work focuses on seven conflict-affected regions around the world, including Kashmir, and we take a further in-depth look at specific conflict contexts and peacebuilding themes through our Accord publication series: [www.c-r.org/accord](http://www.c-r.org/accord)

Conciliation Resources promote participation by Kashmiris in the India–Pakistan peace process. We work in all of the regions of the disputed area including Pakistan-administered Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan, and in Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir. We also work with the diasporas. Together, we can find peaceful alternatives to violence.

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