



CSDS Getting a better understanding of India's youth

Ground breaking research by the *Centre for the Study of Developing Societies* (CSDS) is helping one of the world's oldest civilizations prepare to become its youngest country.

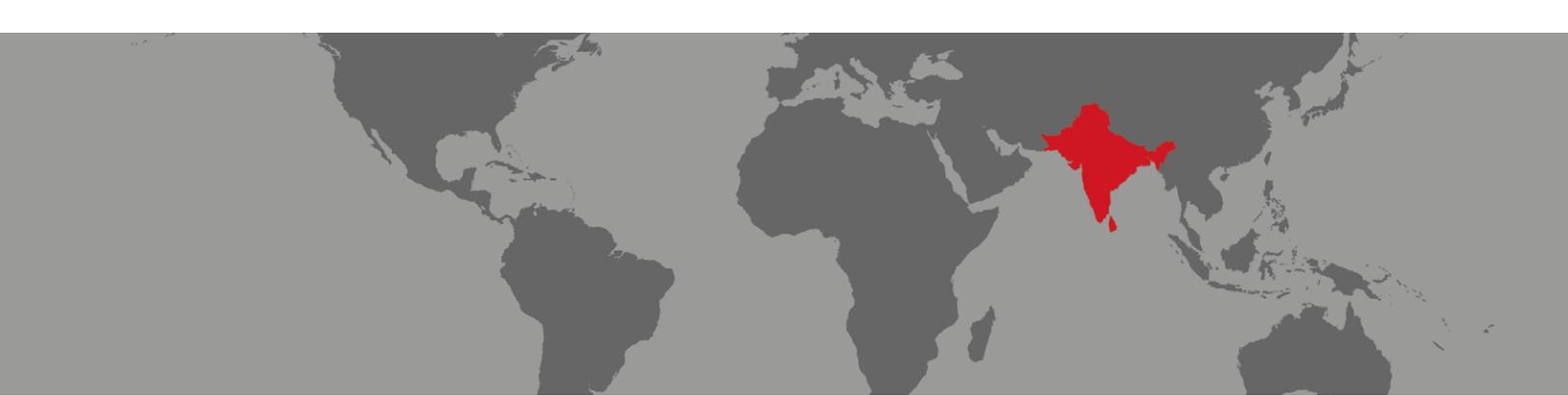
SETTING THE SCENE —More than half of India's population is already under the age of 25. By 2020, the average age in the country is expected to be 29, making India's population the youngest in the world. By strength of numbers, India's youth are poised to become the century's economic game changers, with the potential either to provide a "demographic dividend" – a dynamic workforce and consumer market – or a "demographic disaster" – high numbers of unskilled workers with little purchasing power. The policies the government makes today will go a long way toward determining whether this demographic shift is a blessing or a curse.

The Government of India is well aware of the importance of youth to the country's future. Its Ministry of Youth and Sports plans and implements policies specifically related to youth and is currently in the process of drafting the *National Youth Plan*. However, while some research on Indian youth is available to inform these plans, most of it has been restricted to youth living in large cities, with negligible data or insight about youth living in

villages and small towns. As a result, assumptions about Indian youth have been based on the incorrect view that they form a homogenous group.

WHAT CSDS DID —In order to fill this information gap, CSDS undertook two national studies that aimed to create a truly national profile of Indian youth. It mapped their attitudes, behavior, anxieties, aspirations and political participation across different geographic and social segments. The first study, conducted in 2007-2008, looked primarily at social issues like modernity, traditional family values, anxieties and aspirations. The second study, conducted in 2011, examined political issues – particularly levels of political participation. Using a cross sectional survey as the backbone of its study methodology, CSDS was able to shift away from the homogenous view to reveal youth as a demographic category differentiated on the basis of an individual's socio-economic position.

The report for the first study was publicly released in December 2008 and subsequently published



as the book *Indian Youth in a Transforming World: Attitudes and Perception* (Sage Publications, India, 2009). The report of the second study was released by the Minister of Youth Affairs, Government of India in February 2012 and will soon be published as *Indian Youth and Electoral Politics: An Emerging Engagement*. The findings of both studies were also reported widely in the Indian media. CSDS's principal researcher on Indian youth (Sanjay Kumar) has been participating in meetings and conferences to discuss the findings of the research, and is also developing wider networks. He has also contributed several papers on this issue, including a chapter in the *Report on State of the Urban Youth, India 2012: Employment, Livelihood, Skills*, compiled by IRIS Knowledge Foundation and commissioned by UN-HABITAT Global Urban Youth Research Network.

THE OUTCOME —While it is still early in the policy process, CSDS has had an influence on how the issue is being addressed. The Knowledge Commission of the state of Karnataka commissioned a study similar to the one carried out by CSDS and is using the reports generated by the CSDS studies to frame its own study. The CSDS team has also had a few meetings with officials of the Government of India's Ministry of Youth Affairs to

explore possibilities for being involved in policy formulation, implementation and evaluation of programs aimed at the welfare of youth in India.

As a result of its pioneering work, CSDS is emerging as a critical locus for research on youth, not only in India but also in the larger South Asia region. As a follow-up to the two studies, CSDS will be undertaking a third study, this time looking at youth in other South Asian countries to provide a comparative perspective. CSDS is also a member of a network of South Asian research organisations undertaking research on youth in the region that also includes Colombo University, the Institute of Governance Studies at BRAC University in Dhaka, the Social Science Baha in Kathmandu, and the Delhi Office of the South Asia Institute (SAI) of Heidelberg University. Together with these organizations CSDS organized the first annual *Giving Youth a Voice* conference, held at Colombo University in March 2012. The 40 participants included representatives from Sri Lanka, India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, and Bhutan, and included, policy makers, youth organisations, members of the Sri Lankan Youth Parliament, and scholars from South Asia and Germany. A second conference will be held in Kathmandu in September 2013.

For more information on the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, visit <http://www.cds.in/index.php>

TTI's Stories of Influence Series

This series, produced by TTI, shares stories about the impact Southern think tanks have on policy initiatives. All the think tanks featured in this series are supported by the [Think Tank Initiative](http://www.thinktankinitiative.org), a multi-donor program dedicated to strengthening the capacity of independent policy research organizations in the developing world. At www.thinktankinitiative.org, you can find profiles on the organizations in Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia supported by the program, as well as publications, working papers, and general information about TTI.