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The YouthBol Report: In Brief

YouthBol – literally, the ‘Voice of the Youth’ – is a poll campaign launched in September 2018 by Centre for Catalyzing Change (C3) in association with its partner, the USAID’s Maternal Child Survival Plan Project. YouthBol is an effort to put adolescents and young people at the heart of the youth health and well-being agenda. The purpose of the poll has been to find out and understand what the youth in India want when it comes to policies, programmes, measures and facilities with respect to their health and well-being.

YouthBol is rooted in the belief that there is a need to articulate specific health and well-being demands of young people, and that intentional participation of the youth can lead to authentic empowerment of young people in India. For too long, in public and private spaces, decisions have been made on behalf of and in the name of adolescents and young people. Youth voices have been largely missing from the hallways of power where agendas and policies for the youth are envisaged. It’s time this changed.

The poll has reached out to 1,10,092 young people from three different age groups – 10 to 14 years, 15 to 19 years and 20 to 24 years – across 27 States and four Union Territories of India. C3 conducted and coordinated the poll both in the field, as well as online, reaching out in the process to more than one lakh respondents.

What do India’s young want: The YouthBol findings

In percentage terms, 10-24 year olds in India – indicate the YouthBol results – have two key concerns that preoccupy them: **health and in-school services. Thirty six percent of the over one lakh respondents said health was their top priority, while 26% laid emphasis on in-school facilities.**

Under the broad category of health-related responses, the most strident demand that YouthBol has thrown up has been for information (and action) on **prevention of substance abuse**. India’s youth wants more awareness about the harmful effects of banned substances. In addition to wanting information about traditional substances like alcohol, tobacco and drugs, young people also want greater awareness on the misuse of unconventional items like paint thinners, correction fluids (whiteners) and Vicks (mentholated topical ointment).

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that most premature deaths among adults can be associated with behaviours like substance misuse that begin or occur during adolescence¹. C3 researchers point out that it is imperative, therefore, to provide young people with greater information on the impact of these substances.

The youth have also demanded that vending of alcohol and tobacco near schools and colleges must be strictly banned, an adolescent helpline set up for dealing with substance abuse issues, and greater access provided to good quality and free rehabilitation services.

Many young women polled by YouthBol ranked access to information and care on **menstruation, menstrual pain management, and menstrual hygiene and products** at the top of their wish-list. They called for a better understanding of and responsiveness to this issue from adults. Said an 18-year-old girl from Odisha: “We want relief from period pain. I keep missing my classes due to it.”

For the oldest age group (20-24 years), **information on and access to contraceptive methods and family planning services** emerged as a key priority. This demand was also the highest among YouthBol respondents who were married.

Mental health-related information and services is also a priority theme. YouthBol indicates that young people want information on how to cope with academic pressure and stress, peer-pressure and bullying. They also want better access to non-judgemental, confidential, and affordable mental health services.

For young people who stated they were in relationships, obtaining more **information on sexual attraction, love and relationships** emerged as a strong priority. Clearly, young people’s health and well-being priorities shift as they become older and complete important life milestones, emphasizing the need to address their diverse needs across their lifecycle. Additionally, reaching young people and particularly young married couples, with appropriate information and services on contraception and family planning services is crucial, as India seeks to fulfil its FP2020 goals.

A crucial finding from YouthBol is the insight that adolescents and young people have a **broader understanding of health**, which goes beyond illness, disease and treatment. Health and well-being are associated by the youth within the larger context of enabling factors like education, job opportunities, environment, and socio-economic conditions of individuals, YouthBol respondents believe that imposing heavier fines on those who pollute will be able to tackle the menace of pollution in their communities.

The second most-voiced demands -- those for **better facilities** at the school and community levels – have ranged from access to computers, libraries, canteens, playgrounds, roads, electricity, transport facilities, functioning health centres, clean toilets, and clean and safe air and water. Of these, the issues of clean toilets, better

¹ <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescents-health-risks-and-solutions> Accessed on 15.10.2019

facilities in schools, and lesser junk foods in canteens stand out, with a 39% share of the total responses under the head of ‘in-school services’.

With respect to **access to good and nutritious food and to information on nutrition and healthy eating habits**, the youth want better institutional delivery of these services through the mid-day meal scheme, anganwadi centres, and in canteens in educational institutions. The National Nutrition Strategy acknowledges that proper nutrition is the most effective entry point for human development, poverty reduction and economic development, with high economic returns.² Prioritizing the needs of adolescents and young people under the National Nutrition Mission will be a crucial step towards achieving the Mission’s goals by 2022.

Eight percent of the respondents put gender equality on the top of their priority. For young people who have never been to school, information on and prevention of **violence and harassment (physical, verbal, emotional)** was a major concern. Said a Uttar Pradesh-based 14-year-old girl: “A boy shows me obscene photographs. Where and to whom can I report this to?”

This segment was also keen to know more about **government programmes and schemes** – highlighting the need for establishing community programmes and redressal mechanisms for out-of-school adolescents and young people. Assistance on violence and harassment, along with information on **gender identity and sexual orientation**, was raised by transgenders as well.

The poll and its findings are unique because they have the potential to guide our political classes and our policymakers on where the nation’s priorities must lie and focus on. C3’s YouthBol campaign has given a voice to this segment of India’s population, which has now made its wishes and needs known – this now gives governments an opportunity to act on these wishes. It gives political parties an opportunity to add them to their manifestoes.

About Centre for Catalyzing Change (C3)

C3 (www.c3india.org), formerly known as Centre for Development and Population Activities (CEDPA), has been working in India since 1987. Over the years, it has emerged as one of the country’s key change-making organizations focused on improving the condition of girls, women and youth in the country. At the core of C3’s work and philosophy is the belief that gender equality is essential for development and democracy.

- **To download the complete YouthBol Report, and to know more on YouthBol and C3, please visit the website: www.c3india.org OR <http://www.c3india.org/youthbolfindings>**
- **For any additional information, assistance with interviews etc, please contact: Rakhi Miglani, rmiglani@c3india.org, 8130041469.**

² NITI Aayog (2017) Nourishing India, National Nutrition Strategy. Government of India.
https://niti.gov.in/writereaddata/files/document_publication/Nutrition_Strategy_Booklet.pdf Accessed on 16.10.2019