[**Asset or time bomb?**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1730698/asset-or-time-bomb)

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THAT the youths of any nation are a great asset to its future is no news. They represent new blood pumping into the body of a community, keeping it alive and moving forward with hope. On the contrary, battalions of youth least prepared to shoulder the burden of the future are regarded as ticking ‘time bombs’.

Youths are of enormously different orientations, habits, and behaviours in both rural and urban areas with different socio-economic and educational backgrounds. There is no monolithic profile of youths in any society; what we are talking about are notable trends, not individuals.

Around 63 per cent of Pakistan’s population (aged 15-35) is reported to comprise of youth (UN Population Fund Report, 2017). The question is, is this a good omen, or a challenging situation? An article published earlier on these pages highlights how this cohort is likely to face myriad issues due largely to the lack of capacity of our country to tap the treasure.

The overall despondency that characterises our country afflicts the younger generation perhaps more deeply because it is not able to see a secure future, leading to brain drain and flight of skilled labour. The process may not necessarily be good for the country as its best assets are lost; yet, the flip side is that they tend to support their larger ‘back home’ families with their remittances and in many other ways.

Despondency afflicts the youth, who cannot see a secure future.

While there are countless blessings that our new generations have brought to our homes, towns, and cities, the phenomenon also gives rise to a number of issues, such as generational gap, cultural alienation, divided families, separation from siblings, parents, and the larger society. Moreover, the current nuclear family trends are unleashing untold misery for parents and grandparents.

Another article published in this paper considers the ‘communication gap’ between the youth and elders as a major factor causing rupturing of generational dialogue. Unlike the past, generations today tend to part ways to build their families in different directions with varied value systems due largely to the paradigm shift in lifestyles.

Another threat to the well-being of the youth is the risk of being (mis)led by elders claiming to be ‘leaders’. It is happening right in front of us; we can see the direction in which many young people are led, and in fact trapped. If youths succumb to hero worship without critical thinking, swept away by peer pressure, indulge in abuse of gadgets, become slaves of technologies, and victims of (damaging) social habits, they can become parasites, rather than responsible citizens and a blessing for their families and society at large.

On the other hand, if our youths adopt a wiser path and, as many do, equip themselves with new knowledge, skills and attitudes to adapt to the new age, accentuated by innovations, ever-new technologies, digital revolution, knowledge explosion, and global connectivity, they can, and have, achieved envious standards of life.

This perhaps may be the reason Allama Iqbal had made the wise suggestion: to “free the intellect from slavery; make the young teachers of the old”. Why? Because the bazmi jahan is too different today. He says: “Rise! The company of [today’s] world is different [from the past]; in both East and the West, is now your [those who adapt to the times?] turn.”

So, what can possibly be the way forward in making the young leaders of the old, and tapping the youths’ energies to the fullest?

First, listen to them; and stop blaming, advising or giving too many sermons for too long. The youth may need advice, but that must be given cautiously and sensibly.

Second, guide them to respect evidence, rationality, human dignity, and plurality of faiths and cultures. Avoid infecting them with prejudicial thoughts, hatred and recycling of generational rivalries.

Third, respect their knowledge and understanding of issues. Often the learners are more competent than their teachers; the young are smarter than their elders. So, we need to capitalise on their information and knowledge, if not their wisdom. The best way to teach is to allow them space to contribute in class, at home, in the village. Do not take them as empty vessels to fill, but as contributors to knowledge. Engage them in family decisions, no matter how young they are, be they boys or girls.

Fifth, dowhat you want them to do, reminding ourselves that actions speak louder than words! Sixth, the society’s responsibility is to provide a decent, enabling environment, where they are able to nurture their bodies, grow their brains, and energise their spirits with ethical and spiritual values. This may look like a tall order, but it is a must for developing a healthy, energetic, upright and creative youth that will contribute to the future of a nation.

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