



**For Immediate Release**

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**Diverse stakeholders gather to discuss youth active citizenship in India**

New Delhi – Over 100 participants representing different stakeholder groups and organizations from across India and from Nepal, South Africa and the United States convened in New Delhi during 3-4 March 2009 for a consultation on youth development and nurturing active citizenship. The consultation was hosted by Delhi-based NGO **Pravah** and **Innovations in Civic Participation (ICP)** with support from the American Center in New Delhi and the Youth and Civil Society Initiative of the Sir Ratan Tata Trust.

Designed as a listening space to understand different perspectives on youth civic engagement, the consultation brought together key stakeholders for a dialogue to explore the needs of the field and make recommendations for creating a more supportive environment for youth active citizenship. The consultation highlighted the need for investing in young people as active citizens while also encouraging dialogue about existing challenges and opportunities and related recommendations.

“Young people in South Asia represent one of the largest cohorts that can actively contribute to meeting critical social needs. Internationally, momentum is growing to engage this cohort and expand opportunities for young people to become civically engaged,” said Susan Stroud, Executive Director of ICP. “The positive and exciting involvement of various stakeholders in this consultation further solidifies that the time is now for investing and engaging with young people as change agents.”

This is the first time such a large and diverse group of stakeholders have come together to discuss youth active citizenship in India. Participants included government officials committed to strong youth policy, leaders of youth-led organizations and high-performing youth development programs, heads of educational institutions, representatives from the private sector as well as young people working to improve their communities. The overwhelming response reiterates the need for such collaborative spaces and exemplifies the growing momentum for focusing on youth and active citizenship.

“I think this (tremendous) response reiterates the need for such spaces where we can come together, share and learn from each other and collaborate,” said Kamini Prakash, Director of Streaming for Pravah, during her opening statement at the Consultation. “And it all indicates that perhaps the time has now finally come for youth active citizenship to be put on everyone’s agenda.”

Experiences around the world, including India, have shown that youth active citizenship is an effective strategy for promoting youth development and leadership for social change. South Asia is home to one of the largest and fastest-growing youth populations on the planet, with 33% of India’s population between 15 and 35 years old. In India, promising youth development and active citizenship models are in place but there are few instances of collaborative efforts between the different stakeholders.

The two-day consultation combined panel presentations and small group discussions to allow participants to engage on several important youth civic engagement issues. Mrs. Sindhushree Khullar, Secretary of the Ministry of Youth Affairs opened the consultation on March 3 by emphasizing the importance of the youth vote in the upcoming Indian elections and the need to view young people as the drivers of social change. Outlining the government's investment in youth, she argued that it is not a shortage of resources but the lack of innovative programs that is the obstacle to greater youth active citizenship in India.

The Secretary's national perspective was followed by the personal experiences of young participants, who spoke eloquently about their journey as active citizens, the influences that motivated them and the impact of their work on themselves as well as their communities. This was followed by a panel discussion highlighting the need and ways to invest in young people as active citizens throughout differing sectors. Panelists included representatives from the US Embassy, the Times of India Foundation, the Sir Ratan Tata Trust, Pravah and Oxfam India.

In addition, a variety of innovative approaches for building youth active citizenship in India were presented by representatives from different organizations, including as Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan (NYKS; the national youth service program), PUKAR (Mumbai), Drishti (Ahmedabad), the Bosco Institute (Assam), CYDA (Pune), Pravah, Project Citizen and the green schools program of Centre for Science and Environment in New Delhi. These approaches all see the potential for youth to be social change agents and give young people the tools to initiate change and influence others.

In addition to Indian approaches, international experiences of youth active citizenship were presented through case studies of AmeriCorps (US), groundBREAKERS (South Africa) and Youth Initiative (Nepal). The closing session featured Mr. Eboo Patel, Executive Director and Founder of the Interfaith Youth Core (US). Mr. Patel engaged young consultation participants in a discussion on the role of young people as active citizens.

The second day of the consultation engaged participants in animated small group discussions addressing the challenges, opportunities and needs of the field. Participants addressed the barriers to youth active citizenship, building capacity of young people to be leaders, good indicators for assessing programs and ensuring the sustainability of youth initiatives. This led to a discussion of recommendations and next steps for nurturing the field of youth active citizenship in India and South Asia.

Several recommendations came out of the consultation that will be disseminated to the various stakeholder groups and taken up by a working group moving forward. Some of the recommendations include:

- Setting a standard age criteria of youth as 13 to 30 years old. Ensuring that the youth minister can fully represent youth interests by being less than 45 years old.
- Creating of a comprehensive data bank on youth demography, resources, organizations and opportunities, including effective dissemination strategies.
- Greater collaboration among youth organizations, donors, government and other stakeholders.
- Building the capacity for youth active citizenship through greater training and learning opportunities and the creation of greater opportunities for young people and civil society to be involved in social and political/policymaking processes. It is important for young people and civil society to be more significantly involved in policy making and implementation.
- Development of appropriate evaluation tools to assess and highlight the impact of youth active citizenship programs.

- Greater visibility for and investment in youth active citizenship. This includes encouraging greater media coverage of youth active citizenship and establishing resources and funds for supporting innovative active citizenship programs.
- Ensure that young women are supported to participate in programs and that program design takes into account power dynamics between young men and women.

A working group of varying stakeholders will be convened by Pravah and ICP to take forward these recommendations. The consultation was successful in bringing together a diverse group of people representing different stakeholder groups and building ownership for an agenda for action. It is the first critical step for deeper engagement and collaboration contributing to a more supportive environment for young people who are active citizens.

Patricia Wasley, Chair of ICP's Board of Directors, in closing the consultation commented on the positive and forward looking outcomes of the consultation saying: "We also understand that for a quick moment we can see a better world by virtue of the fact that we know you are connecting and strengthening the effort to both protect and preserve and strengthen youth across your great country."

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**Pravah**, registered in 1993, is based in New Delhi. It works to build leadership for social change through active citizenship and youth development interventions. Pravah builds with and in youth respect and understanding of citizenship, attitude of ownership for common spaces, skill of leadership for social change and behaviors to develop strong relationships as the foundation. After a decade of intensive work with individuals, it expanded its portfolio to include teachers training, incubating new initiatives and facilitative work with other organizations working on youth development and together with these partners advocate for youth development and citizenship action.

**Innovations in Civic Participation (ICP)**, based in Washington, DC, is a global leader in the field of youth civic engagement. ICP's mission is to facilitate the generation of opportunities for young people to improve their communities and build essential skills for future success through civic engagement. ICP works with individuals and organizations around the world to support the development of innovative approaches to two civic participation strategies: national youth service and service learning. Founded in 2001 by Susan Stroud through a multi-year grant from the Ford Foundation, ICP grew out of Ms. Stroud's 30 years of experience in designing programs and policies and building networks that result in many more young people being given the opportunity to engage in civic activities. Since 2001, the team at ICP has worked to expand opportunities for tens of thousands of young people throughout the world to engage in service.