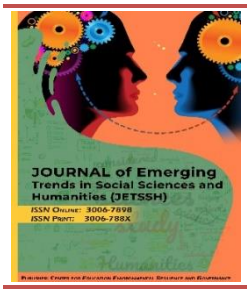
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Technical Skills as Mitigator of Youth Bulge Risk: A Human Security Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Nobody can negate importance of Pakistan because of its location at a demographic crossroads and fascinating youth bulge. At the moment it possesses one of the largest youth bulges in the country's history because over 60 % of the population is under 30. Large numbers of unemployed young people are viewed as a threat by the traditional security model. They are considered as a setup for crime, radicalization and societal unrest. Using the alternate lens of human security, this paper flips that logic upside down. Instead of just traditional security perspective, it focuses on personal, economic and community security. Albeit, Lack of practical and technical skills convert that massive demographic resource into a total national liability. Qualitative analysis and structured labour data from Pakistan's Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sector shows that market-integrated technical skills serve as a buffer against established threats. Alignment of outdated technical institutions curricula with modern market requirements will minimize economic vulnerabilities, build long lasting resilience and mitigate young people feelings of being sidelined, especially in highly threatened regions.

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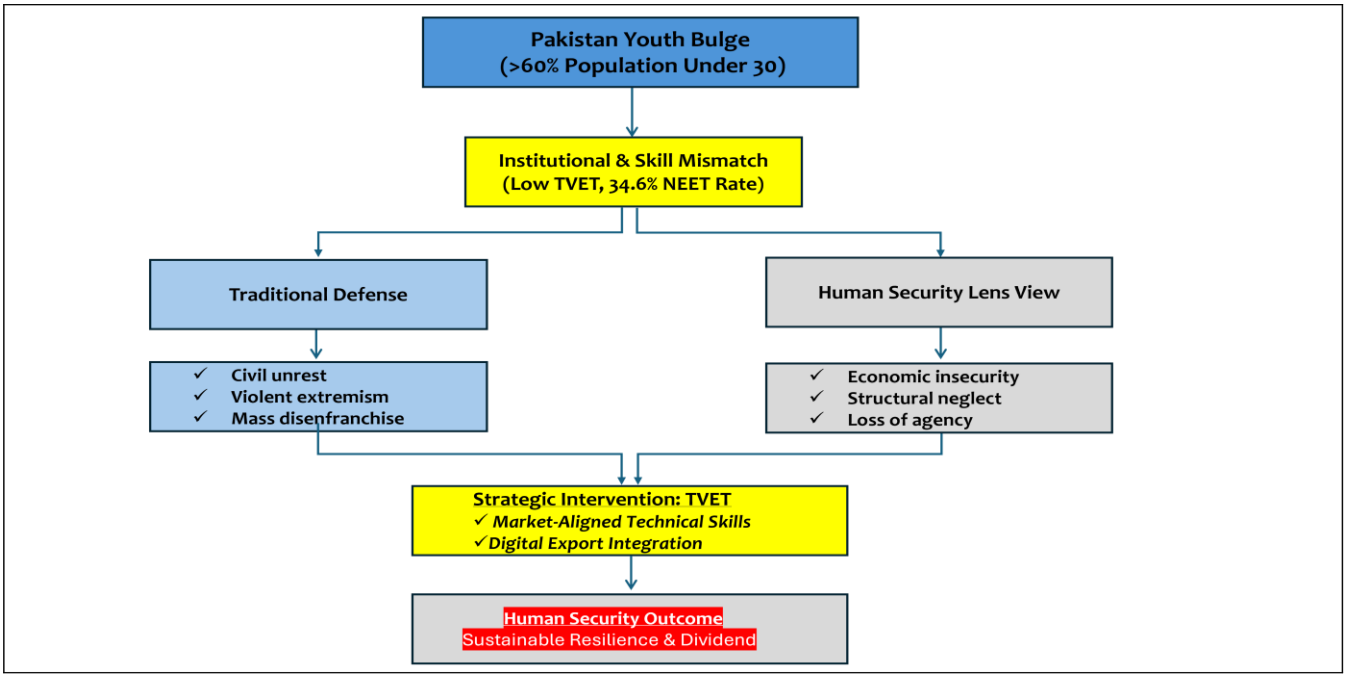
1. Introduction

Political, social and security paths of developing countries are quickly steered by demographic shifts. Countries face remarkable spike in young citizens When death rates drop but birth rates stay relatively high. This is more prominent if the phenomena persist for a generation and is termed as "youth bulge" by the Demographers (Fuller, 1995; Urdal, 2006). For a country like Pakistan, this can open up two very different paths. It can act as an engine for rapid growth to serve as "demographic dividend" or it can overwhelm economy and create severe social dilemma (Bloom, 2011; Hafeez & Fasih, 2018).

This reality can't be ignored in context with statistical data of Pakistan. As per UNDP reports, above 60 percent of the country population is under 30 years of age and roughly 29 percent falls between 15 and 29 years. Conversion of this raw population into real economic power requires efficient institutions, realistic education and jobs opportunities for absorption of new individuals every year (Nayab, 2008).

When a state fails to meet these requirements, quick outbreak of trouble in inevitable. Security analysts that belong to old school of thoughts, look at the unemployed or idle young men through a narrow threat-focused lenses. They visualize a potential recruiting pool for criminal activities, street riots or extremist groups (Huntington, 1996; Goldstone, 2002). Although those threats are real, but viewing youth bulge unilaterally as a police or military problem misses upon actual drivers of the crisis.

Figure 1: *Evaluation of traditional defence vs human security lenses. Strategic intervention and human security outcome. Source: Author's research conception*



This article builds its argument within the human security framework made popular by the United Nations Development Programme in 1994. That framework shifts the main focus of security from borders and military hardware. Rather it focuses more on individual well-being, freedom from fear and freedom of want (UNDP, 1994; Alkire, 2003). Within the overall context, it dilates directly at economic stability, local community strength and individual's safety. The article shows how smart, targeted technical training mitigates the core risks of an unabsorbed youth population in Pakistan.

2. Human Security Vs State-Centric Security - Theoretical Framework

Security is treated by classic international relations theories as a state's ability to hold a monopoly on physical/ geographical area and defend its border against internal as well as external threats (Mearsheimer, 2001& Waltz, 1979). These classical theories, especially structural realism evaluate a massive spike in

young citizens as hinderance in governance. A youth bulge coupled with low economic yields gets stamped as a risk that requires more policing and tighter monitoring (Kaplan, 1994).

Human security considers individual people as the primary concern and turns that idea upside down (Sen, 1999; Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007). It argues that broader instability of a state is actually outcome of threats to individual's daily income, physical safety and basic dignity. The framework of UNDP breaks human security into seven interconnected domains i.e economic security, food security, environmental security, health security, community security, personal and political security (UNDP, 1994).

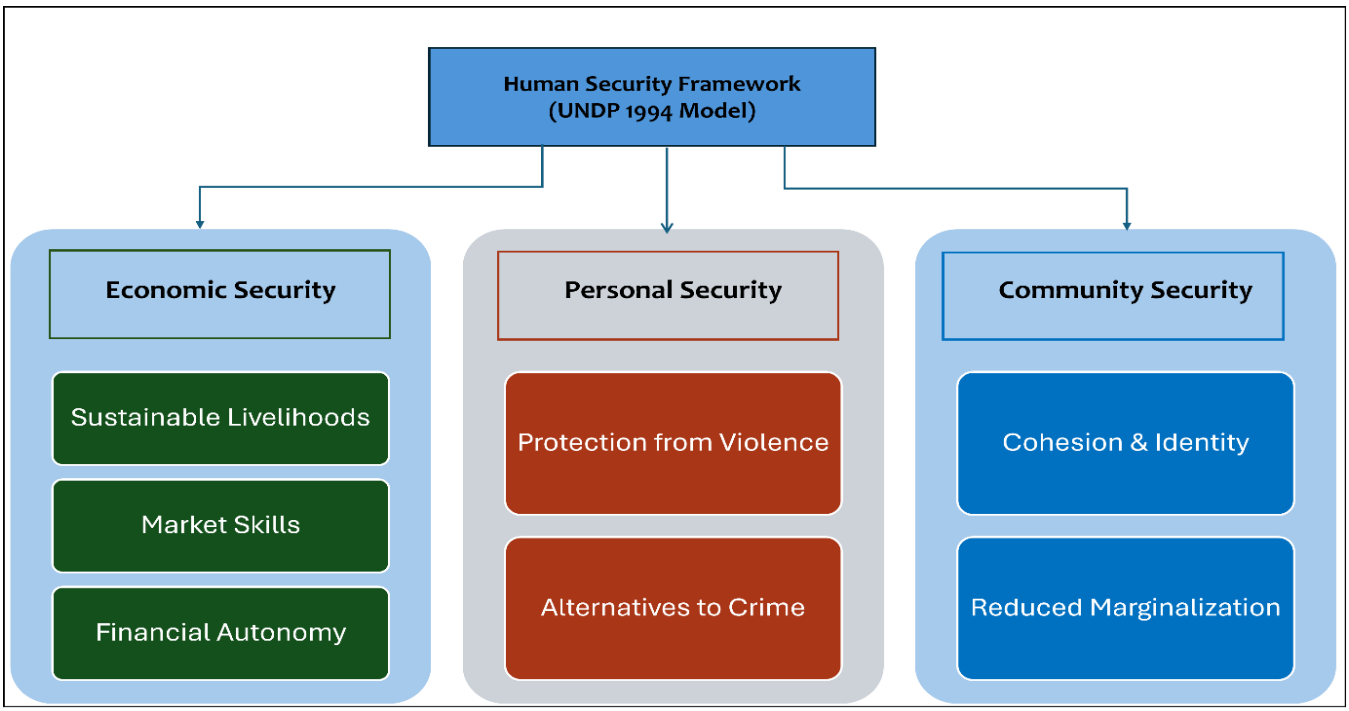
However, three domains carry more weightage when we look at youth demographics:

(1) Economic Security: It leads to individuals Esurance for earning a reasonable living through productive and decent work (ILO, 2020).

(2) Personal Security: Personal security results in protection of people from physical violence, coercion and exploitation by armed gangs or criminal groups (Human Security Centre, 2005).

(3) Community Security: It demonstrates into strong social bonds and local connectivity so that young people do not feel completely isolated or alienated (Paris, 2001).

Figure 2: *Human Security Framework (UNDP 1994 Model), Three important domains illustrated with the help of visual cards and interconnected structural elements. Source: Author's research work*



Application of this framework leads to an important truth i.e sheer numbers rarely cause political violence on their own. The actual breaking or crises point pops up when weak institutional structures hinder young people from earning a reasonable living. Studies on increase in population confirms that youth bulges increase conflict risks when paired with economic strangulation and nonproductive educational systems (Urdal, 2006; Barakat & Urdal, 2009). Young citizens are exposed to recruitment by anti-state elements and criminal gangs when they face dead-end economic situation and run into wall after wall. Technical skill development fill into this gap as an effective policy tool and directly help in elimination of economic problem. These skills help in conversion of a potential security threat into strong socio-economic growth.

3. Pakistan's Youth Bulge - Structural Mechanics

Age structure of Pakistan offers a rare and time-sensitive window of opportunity. However, our labour and education statistics shows unsatisfactory results. Conversion of this opportunity into economic advantage has been so far difficult.

Figure 3: *Pakistan Youth Demographic Profile; matric/ indictors and structural values. Source: Author's research work*

Pakistan Youth Demographic Profile	
Metric / Indicator	**Structural Value**
Share of Population Under Age 30	> 60.0%
Youth Cohort Aged 15–29	~29.0%
Youth Development Index (YDI) Rank globally	161 out of 181
Youth NEET Rate (Not in Education, Employment, or Training)	34.6%

Pakistan positioning at 161 out of 181 countries on the Global Youth Development Index, indicates major gaps in healthcare, education and quality of employment. National NEET rate (youth Not in Education, Employment or Training) at 34.6 percent, is rather more alarming (UNDP, 2017 & World Bank, 2021). More than a third of young Pakistanis are deprived of formal education and the decent job opportunities. The situation hurts young women relatively harder due to deep-seated social, regional and structural barriers (Javed, 2019).

Three important issues see through this void:

(1) Early Dropout/ Low Completion of Technical Skills and Education

Enrolment in primary schools is projected in media. Albeit, completion proportion of high schools as well as technical skills is below the desired standards (UNESCO, 2020). A huge number of youths get dropped out from formal education and technical centre before acquiring any market worthy skills.

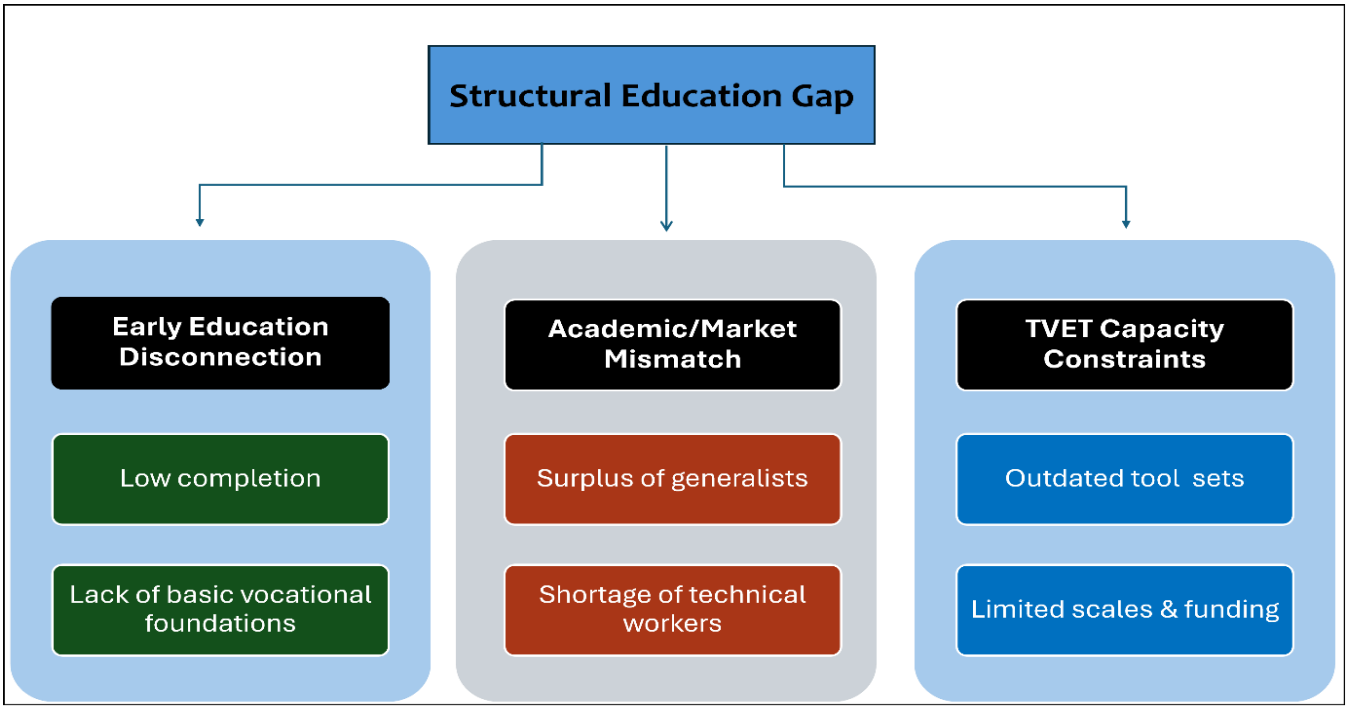
(2) Generalist Degrees vis-à-vis Industry Needs

Education system of Pakistan churns out huge numbers of humanities and general social science graduates (Higher Education Commission, 2021) but local industries need technical and skilled individuals. This untie leads to a twofold challenge of widespread unemployment in pedagogy and unoccupied technical seats (Amjad et al, 2015).

(3) Outdated Vocational Infrastructure

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) mesh of Pakistan is supervised at national level by NAVTTC and at provincial level by TEVTAs. The network of TVET is struggling against old equipment, outdated training plans and budget constraints. Unluckily the struggle has prolonged over the decades. The infrastructure of TVET is far from meeting the requirements of modern market (NAVTTC, 2021 and Asian Development Bank, 2019).

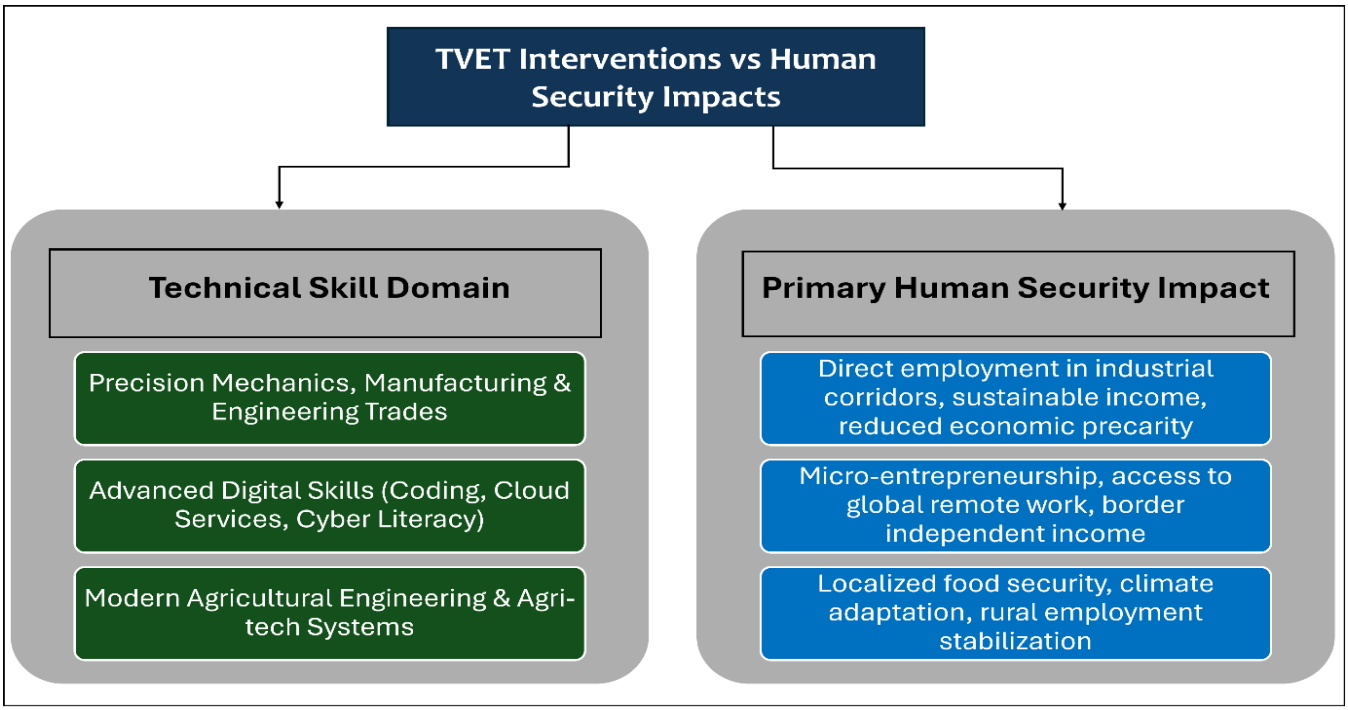
Figure 4: *Overview of Early Education Disconnection, Academic mismatch vis-à-vis Market and Capacity Constraints of TVET. Source: Author's research work*



4. Vulnerability Mitigation Strategy - Technical Skills

Addressal of structural human insecurity necessitates moving beyond generic speeches and formulation of training programs that produce concrete/ tangible results. Technical and vocational education equip youth with the skills for jobs, steady income and financial independence. Acquisition of technical skills has direct impact over the human security and mitigation of vulnerabilities.

Figure 5: *Impact of Technical Skills on Human Security. Source: Author's research work*



4.1 Immediate Economic Relief

Technical skills are a source of our youth's immediate leverage in the job market. Factories and agricultural sectors constantly search for

technical individuals such as electricians, mechanics, CNC operators and other machinery handlers (ILO, 2019). Reliable technical trade/ job protects young workers and their families from economic shocks even if broader financial situation gets tough.

4.2 Export of Digital Skills and Remote Income

Digital infrastructure helps young people to bypass local hiring freezes entirely. Training in software development, data management, graphic design and modern digital marketing allow workers to offer their services on international freelance platforms (Zaheer, 2020). This brings foreign currency directly into the local economy, lessen population pressure and keeps inflow of money even during domestic recessions. Moreover, connecting local trade certificates with international standards means that Pakistani workers moving abroad can have safer and higher paid technical jobs/ roles instead of being restricted to dangerous, low-skilled labour (Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment, 2022).

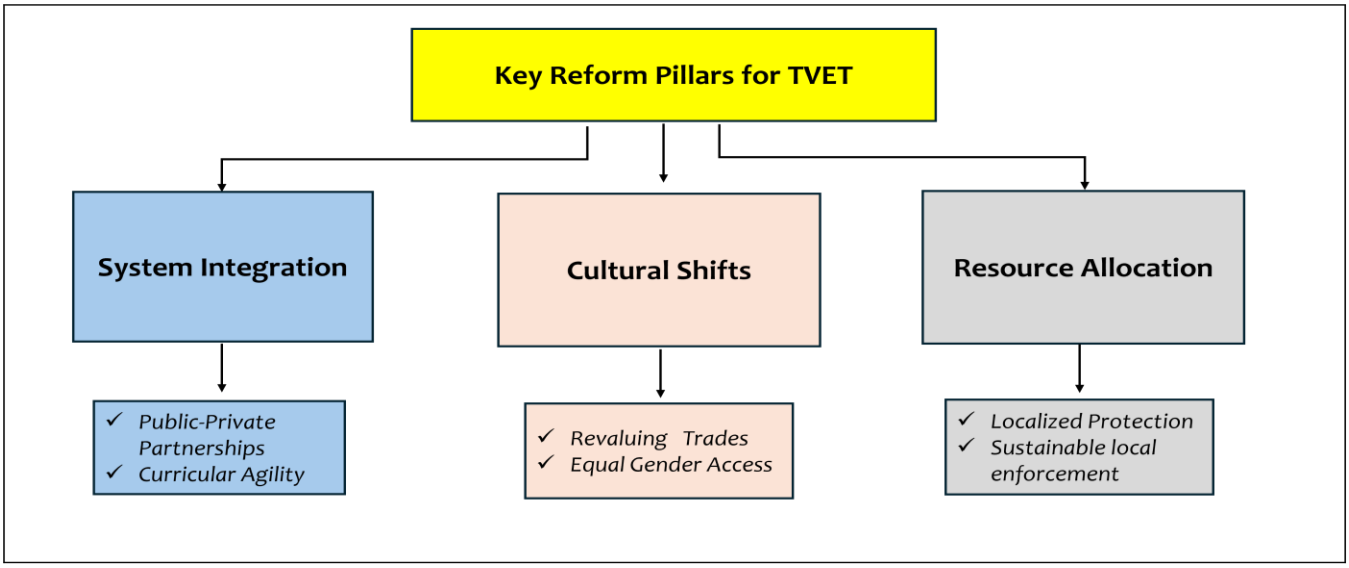
4.3 Stopping Disillusionment and Building Agency

Prolonged unemployment leads to severe psychological damage, isolation and loss of confidence (World Health Organization, 2017). When young citizens face long-time unemployment, they become far easier targets for terrorist's organizations, criminal networks and political agitators. Technical training programs provides youth with visible goals, progress and daily work. Technical skills help in restoring personal dignity and shields youth from manipulation. Through the skills, they can establish clear paths toward earning in respectable way (Mercy Corps, 2015).

5. Policy Challenges and Way Forward

The logic for expanding vocational training is obvious. However, execution of these programs across Pakistan will require negotiation of several uphill political, financial and cultural hurdles.

Figure 6: *System Integration, Cultural Shifts and Resources allocation are the Major Pillars of TVET Reforms. Source: Author's research work*



5.1 Quality Control and Institutional Coordination

Ecosystem of Pakistan's vocational and technical skills comprises federal teams, provincial boards and private setups. This decentralization creates wild gap in training quality and certification standards (GIZ, 2020). The state needs practical manifestation of single national qualification framework while cutting undue red tape between NAVTTC and provincial TEVTAs. Only then we will be able to win over private enterprises.

5.2 Involvement of Private Industry in Courses Design

Vocational courses fail quickly when government officials design them in isolation. Therefore, industry managers, local tech setups and industry associations need to be involved in training plans (World Bank, 2018). Apprenticeship schemes and industry boards are important for keeping quality

course materials and keeping pace with the new technology.

5.3 Dismantling Social Stigma and Bridging Gender Gaps

In some Pakistani communities some manual trades are considered inferior when compared to general university degrees (Jan, 2019). Change of that mindset requires public awareness. The awareness campaign shall project earning power and career opportunity available through technical skills. Simultaneously, technical programs must address obstacles that hinder women by building conducive training centres. The programs that offer flexible digital skills courses and set up micro-grants for female entrepreneurship (UN Women, 2021).

5.4 Targeted Funding for Infrastructure

Facilities upgradation requires real financial commitment. Keeping in view state budget pressures, government agencies should leverage public-private partnerships, work with international development funds and encourage corporate social responsibility initiatives (Asian Development Bank, 2021). To ensures that rural youth get the same opportunities as those in major cities, building modern technical centres in smaller towns and peripheral districts is the need of time.

6. Conclusion

Surge in Pakistan's youth population will be decisive in its political and economic ecosystem for the coming decades. Interpretation of these young citizens unilaterally through a military/ police lens ignore what actually drives unrest in the society. Long lasting national security rests on individual financial stability, safety, security and social connection.

Modern, market-focused technical skills/ education provide a direct, practical mean to reduction of youth vulnerabilities. Pakistan can pull millions of young citizens out of economic uncertainty by investing in modern technical training centres, directly working with private industries/ businesses and opening gateways to digital jobs. Transformation of this demographic wave into an economic engine of Pakistan, isn't just an educational goal but also a vital human security strategy for the future.

Conflict of Interest

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