

EASTERN HIMALAYAN
FOUNDATION

State of The Youth Report 2022

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Contents

Credits	2
About Us	2
Eastern Himalayan Foundation	2
Azim Premji Foundation	2
Part I	2
Why the State of the Youth Report?	2
What is the State of the Youth Report?	4
How was it conducted?	4
Who were the participants and where was it conducted?	5
Part II	5
State of the Youth: key perspectives	5
Education	5
Marital Status	6
Roles of the Household Members	6
Responsibilities and Activities of the Youth	6
Future Aspirations	7
Role Models	8
Issues from the Perspectives of the Youth	8
Education	9
Roads	10
Sanitation	11
Drugs and alcohol	11
Unemployment	11
Water	11
Health and Mental Health	11
Causes for the Issues	11
Suggested Solutions	12
Part III	12
Conclusion & Recommendations	12

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About Us

Eastern Himalayan Foundation

The Eastern Himalayan Foundation (EHF) aims to bridge the opportunity gap for young people to access higher and diverse learning opportunities in the two hill districts of Darjeeling and Kalimpong.

The 'State of the Youth' report is EHF's effort to keep its ear close to the ground and keep itself informed about the situation of our young people as it designs present and future programs.

Part I

Why the State of the Youth Report?

India has the largest youth population in the world. “Nearly 40 per cent of the Indian population is aged 13 to 35 years”¹.

The 2021 National Draft Youth Policy provides a 10-year plan aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals. There are 5 priority areas - education, employment & entrepreneurship, youth leadership & development, health, fitness & sports, and social justice. “Each priority area is underpinned by the principle of social inclusion keeping in view the interests of the marginalized sections”².

At the Centre, the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports houses the Department of Youth Affairs along with the Department of Sports. At the provincial level in the State of West Bengal, the Department of Youth Services and Sports (Youth Services Wing) heads the youth initiatives. Multiple schemes³ such as Kanyashree, Rupashree, Yuvasree, Sikshashree, Lokprasar, Gatidhara, Sabooj Sathi and others have been launched; some of these are exclusively for youth.

In the state of West Bengal, Darjeeling and Kalimpong are two hill districts (Figure 1). This region has been embroiled in political turmoil creating further vulnerability in an already biophysically, socio-economically and politically marginalised landscape. Tea, timber and tourism which drive the economy of the region are dwindling.

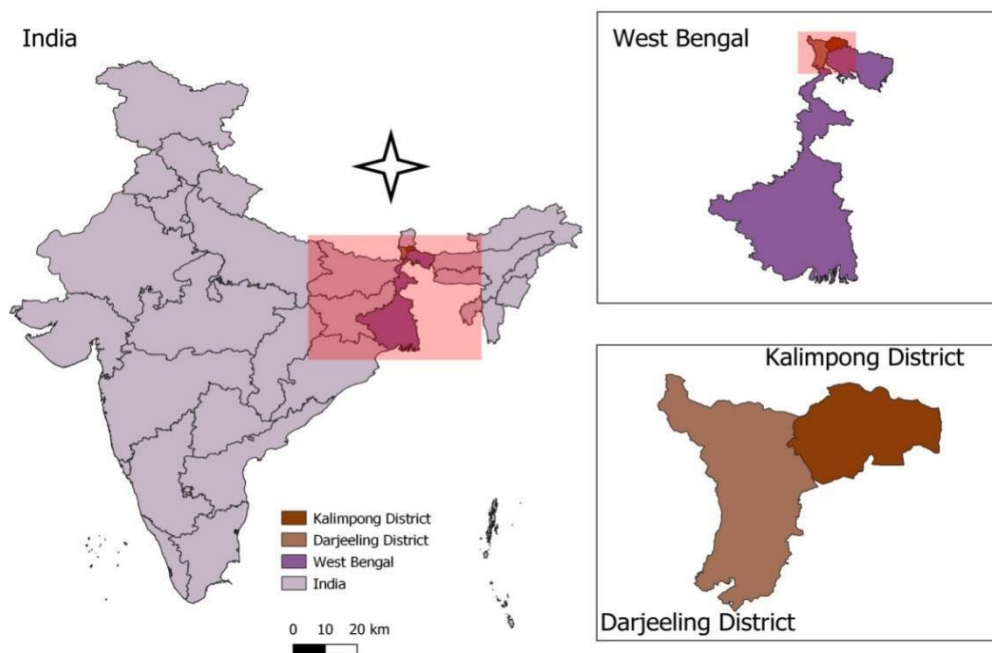


Figure 1 Location Map of Darjeeling and Kalimpong Districts

¹

https://www.ilo.org/newdelhi/info/WCMS_175936/lang--en/index.htm#:~:text=India%20has%20the%20largest%20youth.in%20the%20National%20Youth%20Policy%20.

² <https://static.pib.gov.in/WriteReadData/specificdocs/documents/2022/may/doc20225553401.pdf>

³ <https://wbxpress.com/schemes/>

The study was undertaken between November 2021 and May 2022. The study focused on Darjeeling as in the first year, the organization was to focus its operations in one district.

This study, State of the Youth, was designed acknowledging the lack of contemporary work on Darjeeling and more specifically the youth. It provides **an insight into the situation of the youth in Darjeeling**. Kalimpong district is not covered in this report. This report delves into aspects of education, career aspirations, their notions of marriage and extracurricular activities. This report is an attempt to capture the understanding of the region, its issues and possible way forward from the youth's perspective.

Objectives

The State of the Youth report was conducted to understand:

1. The state of the youth in the Darjeeling district with respect to their education, social and economic status
2. Problems and issues from the perspectives of the youth
3. Understanding possible solutions from the perspective of the youth

Methodology & Coverage

Overall around **600 youth participated** in the study:

1. **Age group** – 16-25 years
2. **Gender ratio** – 60% female and 40% male
3. **Area covered** – 39 villages, tea plantations and towns

A **survey** was conducted with youth (age 16-25) in select rural geographies⁴. **FGDs** were conducted in **6 educational institutions** of Darjeeling Sadar region and Darjeeling-Pulbazar, Jorebunglow-Sukhiapokhari blocks:

- a) Bijanbari Degree College
- b) Darjeeling Government College
- c) St. Joseph's College, North Point
- d) Sonada Degree College
- e) Little Angels School, Relling
- f) Relling High School

FGDs were also conducted with 2 proactive youth groups namely, Scavengers Darjeeling (Darjeeling Sadar) and Step Forward Welfare Society (Upper Takbia, Goke I) to get a more holistic understanding of the youth.

⁴ Goke 1, Goke 2, Bijanbari-Pulbazar, Relling and Mazuwa

Part II

This section presents the state of the youth in terms of their educational and marital status, the economic setup of their households and their aspirations drawn from the surveys.

Education & Employment

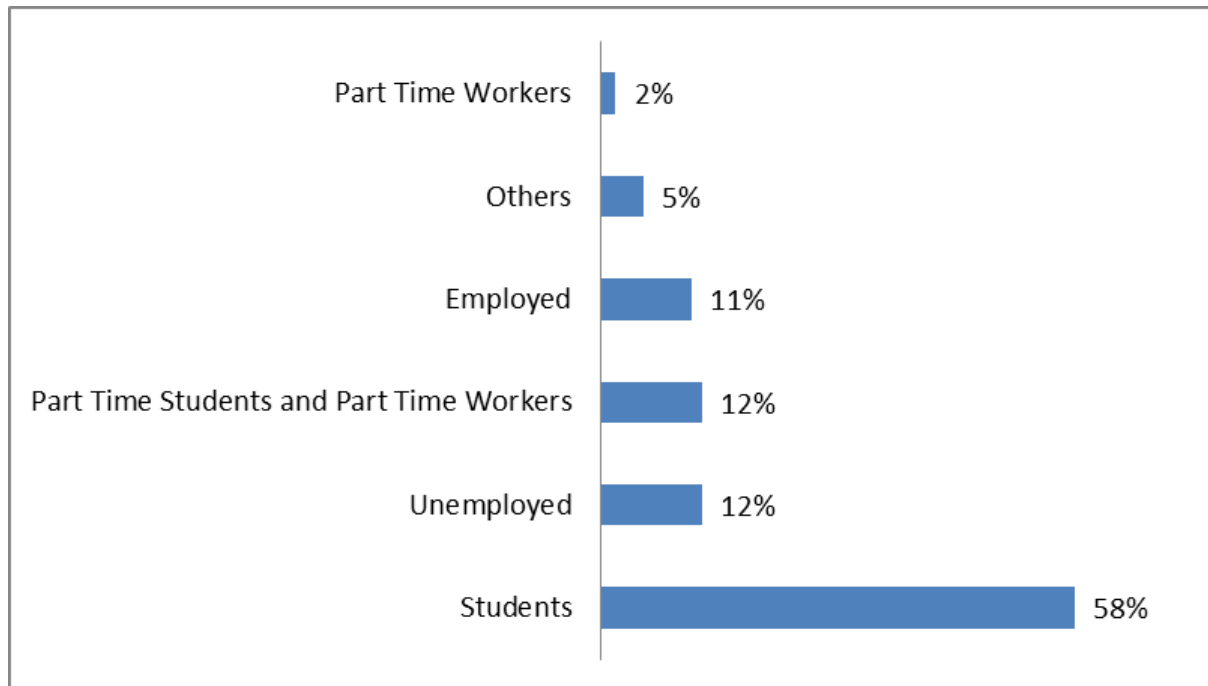


Figure 2 Education and employment status of the respondents

The respondents included the regular college going students and part-time students along with those who are not into any employment at present. Among the other respondents, there were dropouts including women who were married, youth who were uninterested in studying further and others who did not respond or are waiting to get enrolled. **Students are mostly enrolled in arts and humanities**, with few in science and fewer in commerce. No students are enrolled in engineering, nursing and other professional courses.

Out of the total respondents, 23% had dropped out of school and college. Half of them **left studies after passing high school (class 12)**, 22% had dropped out before class 10 and 19% after class 10. The rest dropped out during college or class 11.

Many (26%) had dropped out because they were uninterested in studying and did not want to continue. Some had to drop out due to getting married/being pregnant (22%), domestic problems (15%), work (13%), lack of financial and family support (9%), lockdown (4%) and other personal issues (4%). Around 7% did not provide any reasons.

Marital Status

From the respondents, 12% were married and 1 person was divorced. Women made 69% of the married youth. **Of the married youth, 43% married by the age of 18 years**, 37% between 21 and 26 and 20% between 19-20 years of age.

Sources of Income of Household Members

To understand the economic status and sources of income for their households, we asked the youth about their household composition, the jobs their family members are engaged in and their source of income. The most important occupation/engagement was farming. There were also a significant number of unemployed members and infants, children and elderly members who cannot contribute to the income of the household. The other professions included teacher, business and drivers. Permanent government jobs are the primary stable salaried sources of income here.

Responsibilities and Extra curricular activities of the Youth

Apart from school and college, youths spend their time on household, economic and recreational activities.

- **48% of the total respondents financially support their families** through full time or part time jobs. They engage in labour work/MGNREGS, taking tuition, driving, running shops and salons.
- **68% of the respondents have no extracurricular activities** (including volunteering activities, clubs, societies and/or internships). Most of them reported that they spend time either on household chores (including farming, taking care of livestock and siblings/children) and on their mobile phones.

Around 30% of those engaged in extracurricular activities engage in music, gardening, meeting friends and roaming, playing sports and exercising and other hobbies. They are involved in initiatives such as

1. National Service Scheme (NSS)
2. National Cadet Corps (NCC)
3. Local Community Based Organization or NGO
4. Self-Help Groups (SHG)
5. *Sai Samiti*
6. Religious community groups
7. College and school clubs
8. Sports and mountaineering clubs
9. Youth clubs
10. NGOs
11. *Samaj* (Community-Based Organizations)

The initiatives were focused on - **Cleanliness activities, Social activities, and Cultural activities.**

Future Aspirations

In the **next 5 years**, the youth wanted to engage in the following occupations –

- **Government job** – 26%
- **Business** – 14%
- **School teachers** – 12%
- **Army** – 11%
- **No aspiration** – 11%
- Remaining 26% aspired to do a plethora of jobs with the following as the top ones:
 - Go outside Darjeeling for further studies or work
 - Teach in college

- o Farm and garden
- o Study further (Masters)
- o Arts and culture

30% of respondents have no concrete plan of action to achieve their above goals.

The self reported challenges they are facing in realising their goals are:

- **Financial** issues (23%),
- Lack of **guidance** (19%),
- Lack of **time management** (12%)
- **Family and domestic issues** (10%)
- Other challenges –
 - o Lack of opportunities
 - o Mental preparedness, stress, lack of focus, nervousness, lack of confidence, motivation and understanding, laziness
 - o Physical strength and health
 - o Politics
 - o Insufficient marks.

Role Models

The role models of the youth mainly belonged to their households; in some cases they were from their community or were popular figures.

- **33% of the role models were their mother, father or their other members of their family** because they “work hard”, “support each other”, “face problems with a smile”, are “strong and selfless”, “unite the community and cooperate”, “provide financial support and encouragement”, “do good deeds”, and are “dedicated towards both family and career”.
- **28% of the role models were from outside the community.** They included political figures, scientists, actors, singers, sportspersons, businessmen, religious figures, civil officers and music bands. Characteristics such as involvement in women’s rights, action-oriented policies, artistry, confidence, leadership skills, helpfulness, simplicity, political ideologies, and hard work make them ideal role models for the youths.
- **27% of youth did not have any role models** which could affect their exposure and their leadership aspirations.
- **7% had role models within the community** such as their teachers, local political leaders, social workers, friends, classmates and businessmen. The characteristics they looked up to were determination, being helpful, supportive, providing equal treatment, visionary and their accomplishments.
- 5% considered themselves as their role models because of their belief in themselves and their strengths.

Issues from the Perspectives of the Youth

This section focuses on the issues that the youths are facing, their understanding of the causes and the probable solutions for them. We collated all the inputs from the surveys and the FGDs into categories of major concerns:

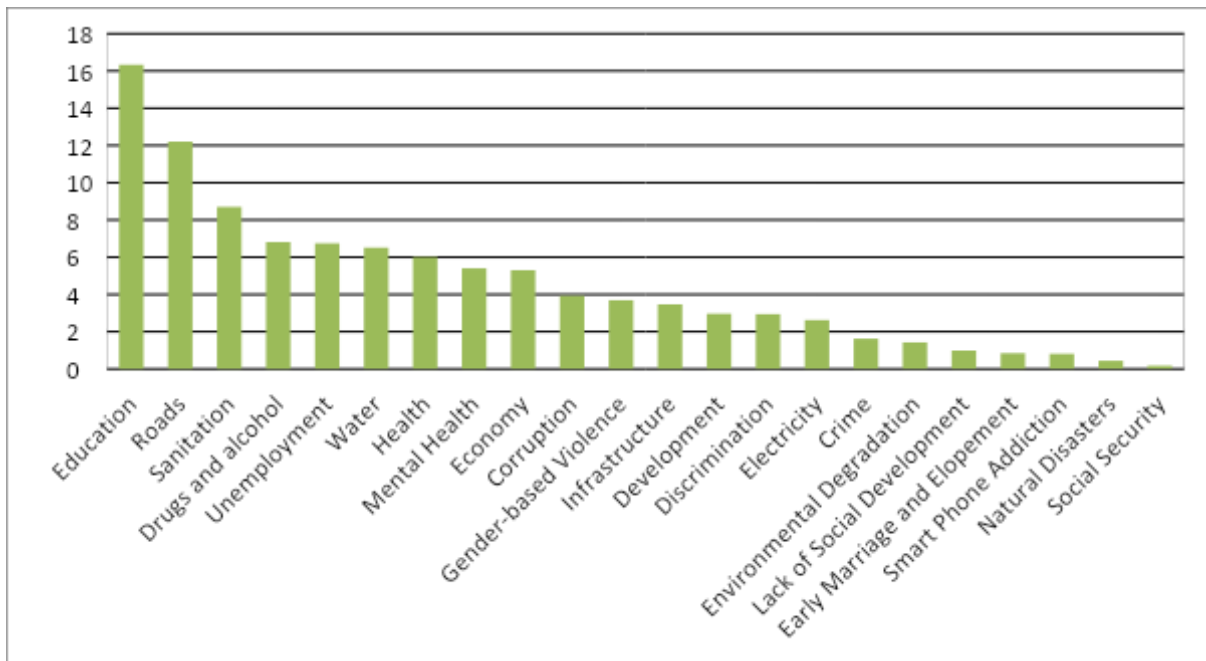


Figure 4 Issues being faced by the youth

Most of the themes that we encountered overlap with the 5 priority areas for policy interventions under the Draft National Youth Policy 2021:

- (1) Education
- (2) Employment & entrepreneurship
- (3) Youth leadership & development
- (4) Health, fitness & sports and
- (5) Social justice

For this report, we shall be focusing on the **7 priority areas collated from our field work** and discuss them in some detail. They are:

- a) Education**
- b) Roads**
- c) Sanitation**
- d) Drugs and alcohol**
- e) Unemployment**
- f) Water**
- g) Health (including mental health)**

These priority areas stand on their own as specific categories but improvements in one can have positive impacts on the others. The issues are prescribed by the youth; we also see that many of them need to be addressed with the participation of various stakeholders such as the state, educational institutions, and the local communities.

Education

Education is also the first area of concern under the NYP of India. According to our survey, it **was the most felt problem affecting their rights and progress**. The issues with

education ranged from absence of quality educational institutions (primary to graduation) to lack of teachers, low attendance of students and school teachers.

There is a lack of education on critical topics like menstrual hygiene, sex education, gender-based discrimination and others. Women dropped out of school when they got married or pregnant which can be attributed to lack of awareness on sex education and gender studies.

The lack of awareness platforms and extracurricular activities is high. Moreover, the political turmoil the region faces affects educational pursuits. **The youth see educational issues not only in terms of the academic curriculum but also platforms for exposure and a nurturing environment to develop life skills.** They want career counselling and guidance for higher education. They aspire to improve their communication skills and be more confident. And they want to be more educated about social issues so that they can help themselves and their own communities move towards a better quality of life.

Roads

Roads were highlighted as the second most important issue. **Roads are an indicator of development. Where they do not exist or are not properly maintained, access to basic facilities like education and health get restricted.**

Most of the students in local colleges cannot afford to venture out due to **absence of public transport.** Students walk to their educational institutions. For example, Bijanbari Degree College students come from as far as 26 km away which takes around 1-2 hours by road (Figures 5). These areas include Mim Tea Estate, Orange Valley Chongtong and Upper Nezi, Kolbong. Due to lack of regular vehicles, the students have to either walk or rent a place to stay close thereby adding extra costs. Some students even walk for about 3-4 hours on a daily basis to and from College.

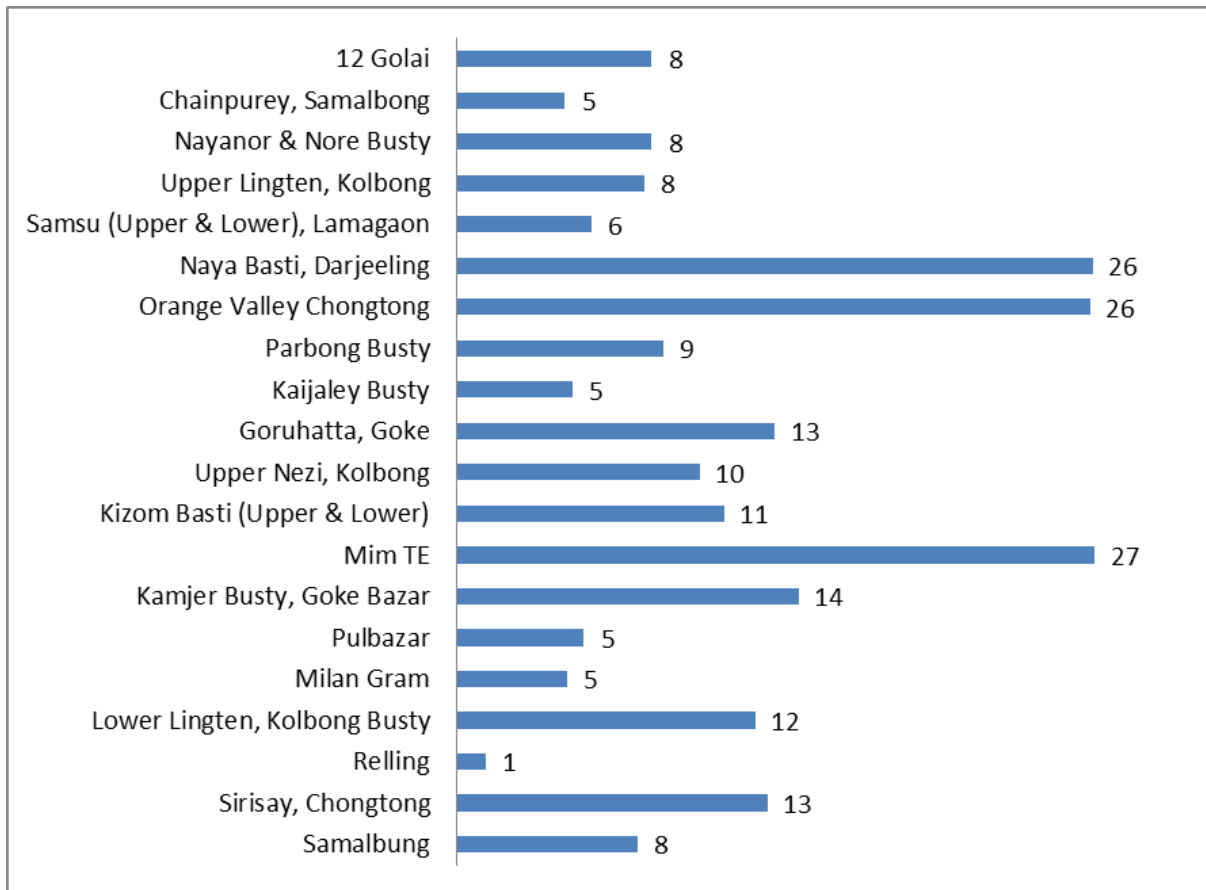


Figure 5 Distance (in km) from Bijanbari Degree College to the students' houses

Similarly, Darjeeling Government College students come from the adjoining villages, tea plantations and towns. The farthest ones are Sittong, Kalimpong and Rimbick which are approximately 50km away and take 2-3 hours by vehicle.

Sanitation

The youths perceived **poor sanitation with no waste disposal mechanism, no sewerage and drainage systems, and plastic pollution** as a major issue in their region. They feel that their environment is unclean and unhygienic. Cleanliness is the primary focus of many of the initiatives that the youths have taken up. There is a need to move away from the process of clean-up initiatives only and look at the sanitation system as a whole especially in the face of emerging environmental concerns.

Drugs and alcohol

Consumption of drugs and tobacco leading to **addiction** is another concern. Alcoholism extends across senior citizens and youth. There is no awareness on these aspects and no rehabilitation centres as well.

Unemployment

Due to the dearth of job opportunities, even the **educated youths are unemployed**. Moreover, some families have no regular source of income. Political favoritism plays a role in providing jobs to those without relevant qualifications. Such an experience highlights the need of employment and entrepreneurship building, which are also priority areas in the NYP.

Water

There has been a reduction in the number of resources affecting the availability of water. This is an increasing scarcity especially during tourist seasons. Most students living in Darjeeling town either in their own homes or in rented accommodation spend considerable time and effort fetching water for drinking and other purposes. Most rented accommodation do not have a municipal water supply and students either have to buy or fetch water from nearby springs.

Health and Mental Health

The youth **value physical and mental health equally** as included under the Health and Fitness priority area of the NYP 2021. The youth highlighted the absence of health care centres, medical facilities and hospitals, lack of staff and ambulances, and emergency services.

This is **directly related to the bad state of roads** in the region where emergency services cannot be made available. Negligence in government hospitals, minimal preparation for pandemic & lockdown were also mentioned.

Issues seen on the education front such as lack of awareness and confidence affect the mental health of the students. The respondents have mentioned the following as issues: overthinking, confusion and disturbance, negativity, concentration problems, introversion, and sensitivity. Issues of depression, anxiety, anger and suicides also emerged. Youth spend unregulated time on their phones/devices which can lead to adverse mental and physical issues as well.

Causes for the Issues

Youths perceived the root causes for the issues they are facing as:

- a. Corruption
- b. Lack of education
- c. Lack of governance
- d. Absent or inefficient government schemes
- e. Dwindling water sources
- f. Lack of awareness
- g. Improper roads
- h. Lack of good leaders
- i. Lack of unity among people

Most of the issues **are related to the government and the politics of the region.**

Suggested Solutions

The solutions suggested by the youth are:

- a) Better and effective **education systems**
- b) **Awareness programmes** on employment opportunities, government schemes, environment, social and health aspects for youths and the general public
- c) **Choose the government carefully** for better work and collaborative work on the ground
- d) **Abolish corruption**, restriction against bribery and taking action against those who indulge in it

- e) **Preservation of water sources** by maintaining the vegetation, building ponds and tanks and rain water harvesting structures
- f) Implementation of **government schemes** for education, employment, healthcare, skill development, transportation, sanitation and water
- g) **Concern about the local issues** including but not limited to waste, pollution, better infrastructure, and **to raise demands** on the same
- h) **Long lasting roads** should be created and maintained regularly in this area which receives one of the highest rainfalls in the country within a span of 3-4 months. This also will help prevent disasters.
- i) Responsible and good **leadership**

Part III

Conclusion

It is important to recognize any investment on our youth in the present is in effect, an investment on our own futures. In the course of the survey and the focused group discussions, we met very articulate bright minds, with a strong will to do and be more. Unfortunately, there are limited avenues for them to explore and build on their potential. This lacunae is felt more in the rural areas or for students who hail from our tea gardens and villages.

At Eastern Himalayan Foundation, we have used the findings of the report to inform our program design.

However, the report is aimed to support all state and non-state actors who want to invest in working with the youth, especially in Darjeeling and Kalimpong. We hope it will be a useful resource to improve the design and efficacy of interventions involving and targeting the youth.