

Policy Talk on Youth Participation in National Planning

The youth population has been an integral part of the history of Bangladesh and the future is deeply intertwined with them as well. With approximately 48 million youth in the nation, it is crucial to not only groom them into competent human resources but also, provide them a seat at the decision making table. The government has prioritized youth as mentioned in the Awami League Election Manifesto 2018 and numerous civil society organizations have been working to tackle the challenges they face. However, it is only through proper planning and well-structured social and economic policy formulation and implementation, Bangladesh's youth can build better communities – and a better world.



BRAC organized the Policy Talk on Youth Participation in National Planning on April 3 at BRAC Centre Inn with representatives from civil society organizations such as Oxfam, JAAGO, Save the Children, ActionAid, ICCCAD, InclusionX and Youth Power Connectivity (YPC).

The objective of the policy talk was to gather representatives of youth organizations and discuss with them how we can work collaboratively to create a formal structure that can capture the individualistic youth voices from dissimilar backgrounds and convey them to policy makers engaged in National Planning. While numerous NGOs in Bangladesh

are persistently working towards the development of youth, there is little coherence and coordination amongst us thus far. Working in silos with no implication at the policy level only hinders the long-term goals, yielding insignificant progress for the youth in the country.

Indeed, Bangladesh has made notable progress with drafting the National Youth Policy in 2017 and discussions to prepare the Youth Budget have already started. However, as Afrin Sultana Chowdhury from JAAGO foundation stated, *'Policies are being formulated, but they are extremely long and not youth friendly at all.'*

Khairul Bashar Naeem, a university student and a representative from YPC said, *'If one does not know me, how can they identify the challenges I face and what I need to address them?'* This led to our conversation about the fact that youth are commonly viewed as a homogenous group, which dilutes the dissimilar problems they face from different backgrounds. Consequently, the solutions they receive in the form of policies are in fact ineffective.

On a similar note, the Regional Campaign Manager, Asia at Save the Children International, Taskin Rahman said, *'Youth are typically associated only with sports or education, but their potential to be true leaders are often unacknowledged.'* To defy that, it is essential to take steps actively to unlearn the mental barriers that prevents development actors and decision makers from ensuring youth are achieving their full potential.

Program Head for Advocacy for Social Change, Azad Rahman asked, *'Yes, Youth is being given the priority, but are their voices being heard?'* This was a major topic of discussion because considering a large portion of the country is youth, not acknowledging their insights will lead to inadequate policy formulation.

We discussed about how we could ensure youth participation in the 8th Five Year Plan (FYP) and the challenges around it. The participants suggested greater use of the internet and social media for easy exchange of ideas. Such initiatives may also increase the space for youth participation. At the same time, it was noted that, while many youth actively follow political events and engage in discussions in social media but it does not always translate into formal political engagement and commitment from young people. Therefore, formation of the youth platform will help creating effective channels of cooperation and information exchange among young people, the national Government and decision makers engaged in national policy formulation.

To ensure the establishment of the Youth Platform, we will communicate with the Ministry of Youth and Sports. Since we plan to begin our work with the 8th FYP particularly, we will engage with General Economic Division. Furthermore, when aiming to work with other upcoming national plans or policies, we will communicate with specific ministries to ensure they consider the recommendations being provided by the youth representatives in the Youth Platform.



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