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2nd issue, January 2019

dBRIEF

Cover story *p.23*
Youth

Interview *p.61*
with Dr Muhammad Musa

In focus *p.65*
Skills development

Stories of dedication *p.73*

Inside story *p.77*
Youth in BRAC



Published by

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Foreword

The world is now home to the largest generation of youth in history, 90% of whom live in developing countries like Bangladesh. There is no doubt that this large number of young people among us represent the best opportunity for us, but there are also challenges. Almost one-fifth of the youth worldwide are not in employment, education or training, and one in four is affected by violence or armed conflict in some way. Millions of girls become mothers while they are still children.

Dealing with this immensely diverse group requires special attention from governments, global and local development organisations, and the private sector. This global challenge is reflected in the global consensus dubbed as Youth 2030: The United Nations Youth Strategy, launched on 24 September 2018. The strategy reflects the global commitment to working with and for young people with the ultimate goal of building a world in which the rights of every young person are realised; that ensures every young person is empowered to achieve their full potential; and that recognises young people's agency, resilience and their positive contributions as agents of change.

Young people are the champions of Bangladesh's glorious history. From the language movement of 1952 to anti-autocratic movement of the 70s, and finally the war of liberation under the leadership of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, youth in Bangladesh have played a catalytic role. The present government under the charismatic leadership of the Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina hence sees the youth as an opportunity. Hence, all the relevant government policies such as the National Youth Policy 2017, National Skills Development Policy 2011 and the 7th Five Year Plan 2016-2020 aim to enable the youth to attain their highest potential. Moreover, the newly formed government led by the Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has specified the immense importance for the development of youth in their election manifesto. The youth constitutes about a third of the population of the country. National development and advancement largely depend on the proper utilisation of the youth. It is therefore important to involve them in the national development process. The government has prioritised the development of skills of young people so that they are prepared to take positions of leadership. The government is not only improving the

capacity of youth, but also addressing the growing unemployment problem through extensive development programmes. For the participants of the technology industry, there are projects that have already been completed or nearing completion. This includes software technology parks such as the Bangabandhu Hi-Tech City, Bangabandhu Silicon City in Rajshahi, Sheikh Hasina Software Technology Park in Jessore, Sheikh Kamal IT Training and Incubation Center in Natore, CUET IT Business Incubator in Chittagong, and Sylhet Electronic City. We are working on 12 more IT parks in full speed. My ministry has also initiated programmes for ICT courses for the youth. However, our priority is not only about education and skills, we are also working to create an environment where the youth can exercise their potential fully.

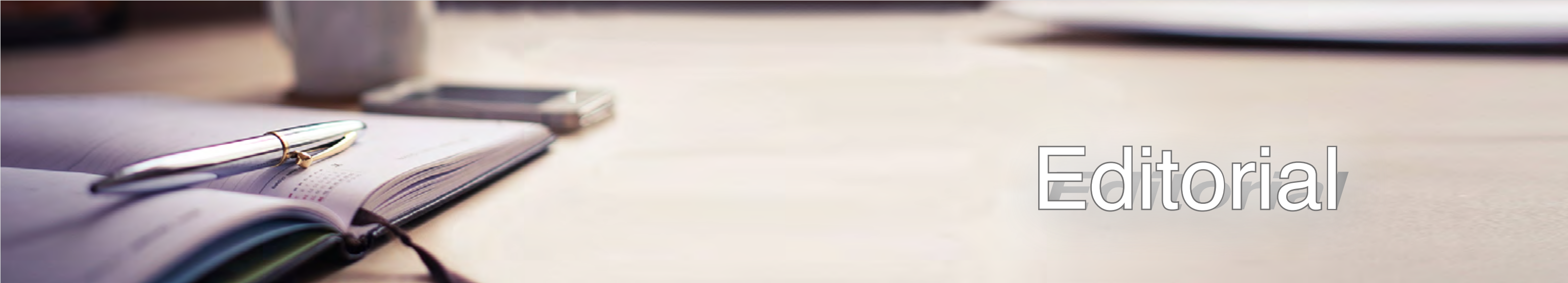
In addition to our emphasis on the employment of the generation through skills development, equal importance has also been given on their overall mental and physical development through sports and other physical exercises. One of the policy priorities for Bangladesh has been the participation of women in sports. Accordingly, sports centres are being constructed in divisional cities to promote women's participation in sports. Moreover, constructions of one mini-stadium in every sub-district (upazila) has already been started under the instruction of the Honourable Prime Minister. Finally, I sincerely thank BRAC for dedicating this issue of dBRIEF to this very important subject.

The government has prioritised the development of skills of young people so that they are prepared to take positions of leadership

Complex development challenges like empowering the young population of Bangladesh need concerted efforts of both government and non-governmental agencies alike. Hence, we have been working with several non-governmental agencies including BRAC for years on issues such as youth policy implementation. I believe that the present issue will be a useful contribution to the ongoing discussion of youth empowerment and engagement, and will receive appreciation from the

stakeholders. I wish BRAC every success in the future and hope it continues its noteworthy work in making a difference in our country and abroad.

Muhammad Abdullah
Secretary
Ministry of Youth and Sports
People's Republic of Bangladesh



Editorial

We are deeply grateful for the generous encouragement we received on the first issue of dBRIEF. We are humbled by the positive response from our readers from both government and non-government agencies in the country and outside. I would like to take this privilege to thank the honourable Secretary for Youth and Sports, Muhammad Abdullah, for kindly writing the foreword for this issue. His wisdom and support have been priceless.

We have been careful in following up on the feedback we received from you: you asked us to highlight stories of our dedicated staff, so we did. We are hoping to include a guest column from the next issue. Most of our readers wanted to see dBRIEF every quarter and suggested a Bangla version. Rest assured, we are seriously looking to upscale our resources to meet these expectations. I hope that in the meantime, your love and support will continue for dBRIEF as it carries forth on its exciting journey!

This issue focuses on youth. Young people's ability and aspirations have always shaped the development prospect and trajectory of countries around the world. Indeed, transformational change happens when the youth get engaged. Bangladesh is eyeing one such ambitious transformation - to become a developed country by 2041. There is hardly any doubt that the old-school thinking that drove us where we are now cannot get the country to reach this ambitious goal.

Bangladesh, a young country, is also the country of youth! One in every three Bangladeshis is a young citizen. Bangladesh simply has no shortage of young people to lead the country's transformational journey to reach the 2041 goal. However, are we doing enough to ensure that our young people have the right skill set and are sufficiently engaged with high level decisions? Many of the recent global reports raise concerns. These reports suggest the need to do more to create space and scope for the young to contribute to social transformation. As the honourable secretary told us in his foreword, Bangladesh is not sitting idle. The national policies, plans, and strategies prioritise the issue of youth and there are many projects in various phases of implementation and design to support those plans.

However, there are certain nuances and assumptions related to the discussion of youth that need greater deliberation and consensus. First, it is important that we change our approach. Young people are not just beneficiaries of development programmes. They are an important source of the solution. Bertrand Russell, the Nobel Laureate and British philosopher once said, "The young, no doubt, make mistakes; but the old, when they try to think for them, make even greater mistakes." Indeed, it is important that the youth get the opportunity and space to address the challenges that they face.

However, we cannot only focus on the challenges. Consider the young enterprising women and men who have comprehensively shaped the modern world. Mark Zuckerberg's Facebook, Slava Rubin's Indiegogo, Nathan Blecharczyk and his friends' Airbnb, Zhou Qunfei's Lens Technology or Garrett Camp and his friends' Uber are now an essential part of millions of people's lives and livelihoods. Not just in business, young people are leading the social entrepreneurial movement across the world. The cover story of this issue of dBRIEF presents an inspirational personal account of such a social entrepreneur.

Second, it is critical to realise that the youth is not just a topic of a 'side-event' of a development discussion. The youth is more of a cross-cutting topic relevant to everyone and every discussion. Involvement of young people in critical national debates is not a 'gift' that we can offer. When we bring in their innovative and fresh perspectives, all of us stand to gain.

Sir Fazle Hasan Abed was still in his 30s when he founded BRAC in 1972. He then motivated a group of young men and women to dedicate their lives in rebuilding the nation after the war of independence. Since that very first day, BRAC consciously kept that space for the young to lead from the front. Today, a respectable number of BRAC leadership including eight of the senior leaders are in their 30s.

Third, the youth is not just a homogeneous group - each has their individual but important perspectives. The 'youth' discourse is not about a single youth narrative. What the young person living in a village of northern Bangladesh wants might be completely different from someone living in the capital. What a young Bangladeshi values might not be valued by a young Australian. It is important to meet all these groups' asks and support each other to reach their potential.

Unsparingly, hence, BRAC designs its programmes specifically for various youth groups like students, adolescents and young adult girls and boys living in both urban and rural areas, based on each of the group's unique perspective. The centrepiece of this issue of dBRIEF is a report based on the preliminary findings from a nationwide survey titled 'Self-identity, aspirations, and expectations of the youth in Bangladesh.' The survey reached out to various groups and tried to present their distinctive perspectives.

Before I invite you to the second edition of dBRIEF, I must also put forward a note of apology. Though promised, we could not publish the 'Dear Editor' section this time. However, please do not stop sending your comments, suggestions and questions to dbrief@brac.net. We will certainly publish the section in the next issue.



Development update

KAM Morshed

Looking Back

The FY18 report card

Bangladesh has achieved the highest-ever 7.86 per cent gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate during the 2017-18 fiscal year (FY18). This has surpassed the interim estimate of 7.65 per cent. During this period, the size of GDP grew to USD 274.11 billion from USD 240.72 billion and the per capita income increased to USD 1,751 from USD 1,610 in the previous fiscal year, posting a 6.61 per cent growth¹. The BBS also estimated that the contributions of agriculture, industry, and service sector were 13.82 per cent, 30.17 and 56 per cent respectively. Based on trend data from the House Hold Income and Expenditure Survey

(HIES) of 2015, it is estimated that as of 2018, the poverty rate stands at 21.8 per cent and the extreme poverty rate at 11.3 per cent, down from 23.1 per cent and 12.1 per cent respectively in 2017.

During the FY18, despite various ups and downs in the world market, Bangladesh's export has inched up 5.81 per cent to USD 36.67 billion.

Inward remittances in FY18 bounced back after a falling trend in the previous fiscal. Bangladesh Bank reported that expatriates remitted USD 15.54 billion in 2018, a jump of 14.79 per cent over 2017 and slightly higher than the total figure of FY16. Notably, money

(Tab 1) Growth score card FY18

GDP Headlines		2018
Nominal GDP (USD bn)		274
Real GDP growth (%)		7.9
GDP per head (USD at PPP)		4,180
Headcount poverty (2018 est. %)		22
Expenditure on GDP (% real change)		
Private consumption		11
Government consumption		15.4
Gross fixed investment		10.5
Exports of goods & services		8.1
Imports of goods & services		27
Remittance		
Remittance (in USD bn)		14.98
Remittance growth (%)		17.31%
Sectoral Distribution		
Agriculture		13.82
Industry		30.17
Services		56
Agricultural growth (%)		11.02
Industrial growth (%)		17.13
Service sector growth (%)		12.18
Prices and financial indicators		
Exchange rate BDT: USD (end-period)		84.24
Consumer prices (% change)		5.4

Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics

sent by non-resident Bangladeshis makes up about 12 per cent of Bangladesh's GDP and unlike other countries, has a strong poverty reduction impact in Bangladesh.

The overall reduction of income poverty has been very good. The acceleration of economic growth, growing remittance, expansion of social safety net and activities of a large number of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) is said to have contributed to this progress².

One clear evidence from the data for FY18 and a few preceding years is that Bangladesh's growth is propelled by growing investment (see Fig 1). In FY18, Bangladesh invested 31.23 per cent of her GDP—which is higher from the FY17 figure of 30.51 per cent and the highest in Bangladesh's history. The rate is, however, lower than the magic rate of 35 per cent, which the experts believe is required for double-digit growth.

To promote investment, Bangladesh follows a simple strategy - first invest in public sector, create the infrastructure and other factors needed to ultimately promote private sector investment.

In his 2018-19 budget speech, the honourable finance minister AMA Muhi clearly articulated this expectation and said that "the purpose of this investment is to create investment supporting environment for the private sector³." However, despite growth in the public sector, the private investment seems to have stagnated (see Fig 2).

The answers to this mystery lie in both the realities of public investment and private investment contexts.

Public investment

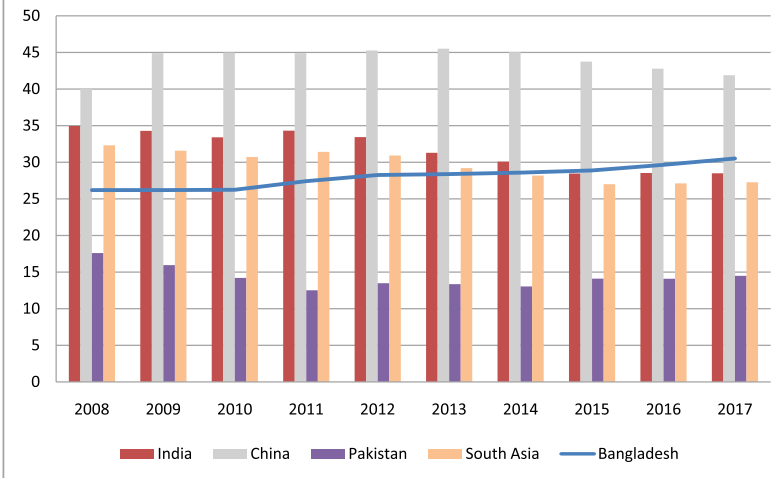
The large and complicated 'megaprojects', which constitute the majority of our public investment portfolio (see Box 1), needs a number of years to complete and start producing the impacts. Hence, it would be unwise to expect the 'private investment' boosting impact of public investment too soon.

Having said that, experts point out three key issues that need our attention.

² See "Why Is Bangladesh Booming?", by Prof. Kaushik Basu, Project Syndicate, 23 April, 2018

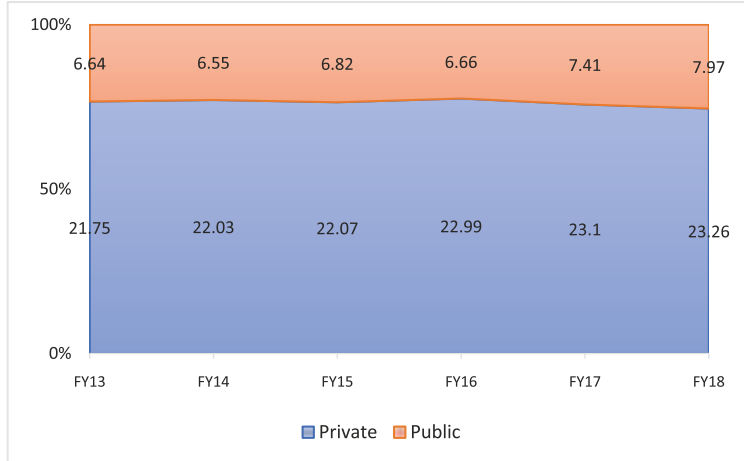
³ Budget speech delivered by the Finance Minister in the JatiyaSangsad accessed from https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/page/b29661b6_927f_4012_9f83_5ac47dbd6ebd/Speech_EN_18_19.pdf

(Fig 1) Investment GDP ratio



Source: The World Bank

(Fig 2) Investment composition in Bangladesh



Source: The World Bank

(Box 1) Mega Projects of Bangladesh

10 large scale projects (dubbed as mega projects) is monitored by a high-power 'Fast Track Monitoring Committee' headed by the honourable prime minister. A 'Fast Track Taskforce' has been formed and is headed by the principal secretary to the prime minister for coordination. FY19 budget has an allocation of USD 4 billion for these mega projects, up from USD 3.8 billion for nine of those projects in the last fiscal year.

These projects are (1) Padma multi-purpose bridge project (2) Padma rail bridge project (3) Ruppur nuclear power project (4) Rampal coal based power project (5) Chattogram-Dohajari to Ramu-Cox's Bazar and Ramu-Gundum railway construction project (6) Dhaka mass rapid transit development project (7) Construction of payra sea port (first phase) project (8) Sonadia deep sea port (9) Matarbari ultra super critical coal fired power project and (10) construction of Maheshkhali floating LNG terminal project.

¹ Estimates by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS)



First, the contribution of international implementing agencies in the development of local value chain is insignificant. Most white collar jobs and a good portion of blue collar jobs go to foreign workforce, as lack of skills and international certification stops local industries from working as sub-contractors. A wisely drawn plan to make Bangladeshi labour force and companies compatible with the standard is needed. Additionally, public support to the local sub-contractors is needed to ensure that these investments crowd-in more local investment and that technology is transferred. This can also ensure sustainable operation of these often turn-key projects by developing local capacity.

Second, issues of managing implementation by local public agencies often cause implementation delays. Save and except the ‘Dhaka Metro Rail’ project, all the other mega projects are behind schedule, sometimes by a few years.

Of the 10 mega projects currently under high-level supervision, five are currently in progress while four are yet to cross the starting line. The resulting delays are not only pushing the final price tag of the project up by a significant amount but also delaying their impact on boosting private investment.

Finally, the third issue is related to the ‘quality’ and discipline of disbursement. Only able to spend 60-65 per cent of the ‘Annual Development Plan’ is a problem of the past; last year the implementation rate was a record 93.7 per cent. Various financial reforms such as the procedures of the fund release as well as effective coordination by ‘Economic Relations Division’ have significantly improved disbursement rate. However, data from the Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division (IMED) of the Ministry of Planning suggested that around 41 per cent of the budget spending took place during the last two months of the

financial year 2018. While accounting procedure and reporting lag must have made the situation look worse than it actually was, the data clearly points out the procedural indiscipline. Such unplanned activities make it difficult for local firms to adequately compete with large international counterparts who might have sufficient access capacity to respond in short notice.

Private investment

Delayed impact of public investment alone cannot explain the stagnant growth of private investment - other bottlenecks are in play as well. Several global research publications such as the “Doing Business 2019”⁴, “The Global Competitiveness Index 2018 (GCI 2018)”⁵, “LDC report 2018”⁶, etc have shed light on some of these challenges.

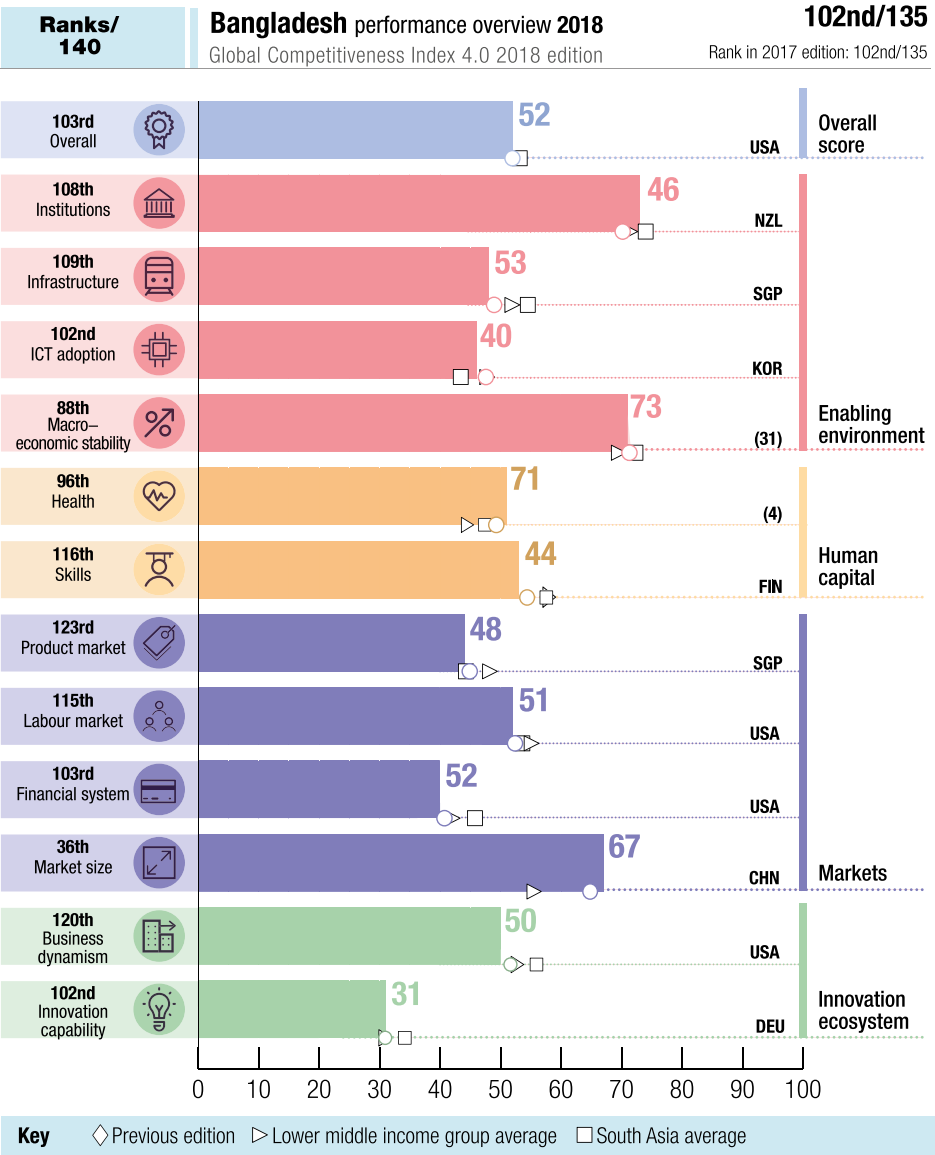
Administrative and legal procedures

Archaic, complicated, expensive, and time consuming administrative and legal procedures might be the most major impediments for private investment in Bangladesh. The ‘Doing Business 2019’ report points out that even the simple procedure of registering a business takes 19 days in Dhaka compared to a day in New Zealand. Similarly, it takes 148 days to get an electricity connection in Dhaka, which takes a fraction of time in most other countries. Unsurprisingly, hence, 2019 Doing Business Index (DBI) ranked Bangladesh lowest among all countries of the South Asia region at 176th place among 190 countries. Notably, this position is significantly lower from Bangladesh’s 130th position in the first DBI of 2014.

Bangladesh’s legal system, which is already clogged with a massive 3.3 million pending cases⁷, is an impediment too. It is complicated and time-consuming to enforce the contract, or ensuring property rights, or even dealing with insolvency in Bangladesh. Although the CGI 2018 showed that Bangladesh is ahead in terms of ICT Adoption and health indicators of the South Asian average, in most cases we are behind. Especially, the GCI 2018 ranked the country’s land administration system as one of the worst in the world (135th among 140 countries). These bottlenecks discourage investments into Bangladesh market and indirectly reduce the country’s competitiveness (see Fig 3).

The Governance Innovation Unit (GIU) at the Prime Minister’s Office which has a mission to “...ensure that the public sector is putting citizens

(Fig 3) Competitiveness of Bangladesh



Selected contextual indicators			
Population millions	163.2	GDP(PPP) % world GDP	0.54
GDP per capita USD	1,601.7	Unemployment rate%	4.4
10-year average annual GDP growth%	6.1	5-year average FDI inward flow % GDP	0.9
Social and environmental performance			
Environmental footprint Gha/capita	0.8	Global Gender Gap Index 0-1 (gender parity)	0.7
Inclusive Development Index 1-7 (best)	4.0	Income Gini 0 (perfect equality) -100(perfect inequality)	32.4

first by implementing good governance reforms and innovations that meets or exceeds citizen expectations” is perfectly positioned to take the lead to improve both business environment as well as competitiveness. Specific initiative in partnership with the Bangladesh Investment Development Authority (BIDA) and in association with business chambers can bring early results.



WISDOM BITS

“A successful economic development strategy must focus on improving the skills of the area’s workforce, reducing the cost of doing business and making available the resources business needs to compete and thrive in today’s global economy”
- Rod Blagojevich

⁴The World Bank Group, Doing Business 2019: Training for Reform, Washington, DC, USA, Oct. 2018,
⁵ World Economic Forum, The Global Competitiveness Report, Cologny, Switzerland, Oct. 2018,
⁶United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, LDC Report 2018: Entrepreneurship for structural transformation: Beyond business as usual, Geneva, Switzerland, Nov. 2018

⁷Honourable Law Minister Mr. Anisul Huq disclosed this figure in the parliament on January 16, 2018.

Structural weaknesses

A United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) study shows that the current economic structure of Bangladesh's private sector is not ready for take-off. While the nation is still dependent on agriculture, the industry and services sectors seem to be trapped in the cycle of low-cost, low-value, small size enterprises.

The non-agricultural sector is characterised by self-employment, who are self-employed by necessity. Enterprises in the non-agricultural sector are small and have very low capacity to absorb risk. As such, most remain in the informal sector or being in the ‘shadow’, as the LDC report has termed them (see Fig 4). UNCTAD has estimated that the size of the ‘shadow’ economy of Bangladesh is about one-third of the official GDP. The challenge is that these participants of the shadow economy do not have access to business services such as access to formal credit and ensure formal employment and hence do not contribute in capital formation and thus promote new entrepreneurs.

In this context, properly monitored entrepreneurship development programme for the educated youth might be a policy direction to adopt. Improving the efficacy of G2B services especially by promoting venture capital and adopting supportive policy framework for angel investors can be helpful.

Financial market

Accessing finance is an overwhelming challenge in Bangladesh. Besides internal ‘crises’ that has effectively limited bank and non-bank financial institutions’ capacities to contribute, low level of ‘financial inclusion’ has also left a large proportion of people outside the reach of financial services.

The growing number of non-performing loans (NPLs), which reached nearly BDT 1.0 trillion in September 2018, is probably the best indicator of the ‘crises’ in the banking sector⁸. During the first nine months of the calendar year, the growth of NPL was 34 per cent. Of the 57 scheduled

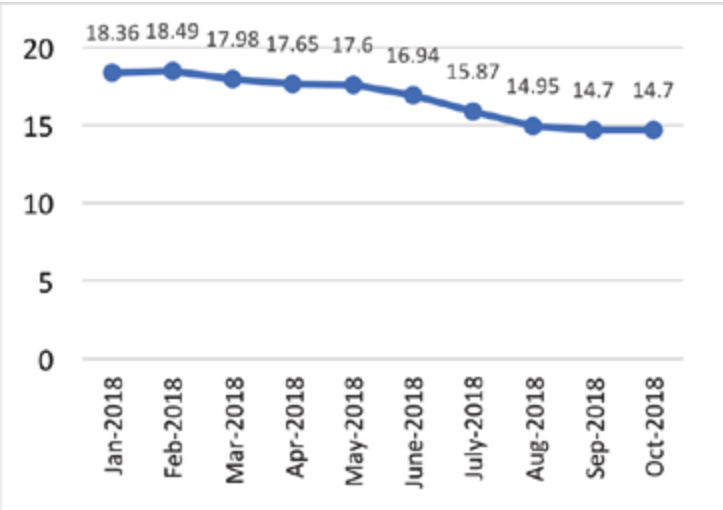
⁸This large NPL figure does not include rescheduled loans amounting to Taka 191.20 billion as well as Taka 372.60 billion written off. The NPL picture is, hence, more dire than what is presented in the Bangladesh Bank report.

(Fig 4) Shadow economy (% GDP) 1991-2015



Source: UNCTAD LDC Report, 2018

(Fig 5) Private sector credit growth (%)



Source: Bangladesh Bank, Author's calculation

banks, the eight state-owned banks represented nearly 50 per cent of the NPLs as of June 2018. The situation not only depleted the capital of the banks but also forced them to set aside otherwise loanable resources as reserves. Consequently, private credit growth has reached the lowest in 22 months and is expected to remain low

in the coming days (see Fig 5).

The ‘financial inclusion’ problem has several faces but the result is the same: a large segment of private enterprises is deprived of formal financial services. Having less than nine branches per 100,000 people of Bangladesh, most of which are concentrated in the major

towns, a large segment of rural Bangladesh simply do not have banks. Of course, there are a large number of microfinance providers active in these areas. But, except for a notable few, the MFIs remained fixated with personal credit and seldom have products suitable for micro-enterprises.

However, not having appropriate products is not only a rural problem. The second largest sector after RMG in terms of transaction is the micro-enterprise sector. Bangladesh has over 1.3 million micro-entrepreneurs who are transacting USD 18.4 billion annually. Every year, about 50,000 new micro-enterprises are opening their doors. UNCDF estimates that these entrepreneurs need between USD 3.66 to USD 5.29 billion annually. But they only have access to around USD 778 million from both banks and microfinance institutions⁹. It seems that our banking sector is not interested to tap the large potential market (see Box 2) for an interesting perspective.

Preparing for the big leap

Bangladesh is poised to make a big leap in terms of economic growth. Be it the Forbes 2014 article that described Bangladesh as a capitalist haven¹⁰ or the recent report by HSBC that says Bangladesh is becoming the 26th largest economy in the world from the current 42nd¹¹ position, there is a growing consensus about Bangladesh's future. Similarly, the December update from the

⁹ United Nations Capital Development Fund. (2018, 11 20). Landscape assessment of retail micro-merchants in Bangladesh. Retrieved from <http://shift.uncdf.org/article/3986/micro-merchant-research-into-action-series-landscape-assessment-of-retail-micro-merchants-in-bangladesh>

¹⁰ Forbes, Alyssa Ayres, Bangladesh: Capitalist Haven, Oct 28, 2014

¹¹ Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC), The World in 2030: Our long term projections for 75 countries, 2018

¹²United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN/DESA), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the five United Nations regional commissions (Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)), World Economic Situation and Prospects 2018, December 2018, NY, USA

(Box 2) Are the banks lazy?

There seems to be a lot of unserved customers and potential business opportunities for commercial banks of Bangladesh. The large number of underserved micro-enterprises is a good example. However, it seems that the banks are not in a hurry to cash in those potential businesses. What can explain such laziness?

The relatively recent “lazy bank hypothesis” forwarded by Manove, Padilla and Pagano (2001) can offer interesting explanation to our situation. As the hypothesis argued, when banks become accustomed with high-quality collateral such as the one offered by the government, they become less interested to innovate and find the right product for inherently more risky private sector financing. In the Bangladeshi context, can it be said that since the government regularly borrow from private commercial banks, and despite all governance weaknesses, the regulatory lacunas allowing them to make hefty profits, these banks are becoming less interested to serve their most interested customers? While not much research evidence is available for Bangladeshi banks, a 2014 research by Professor Samah Shetta and Professor Ahmed Kamaly of Department of Economics, American University in Cairo found strong correlations between government borrowing from commercial banks and banks’ dwindling interest of private lending.

If this is the case for Bangladesh, then we need to remember that this is a double-edged sword. On one side, such practice will erode the availability of funds and will promote inflation, on the other.

Joining the bandwagon, the December report by several UN agencies concludes that “the Bangladesh economy is set to continue expanding at a rapid pace, underpinned by strong domestic demand, especially large infrastructure projects and new initiatives in the energy sector¹². ”

Economist Intelligence Unit predicted that the “real GDP growth will average 7.7 per cent per year in 2018/19-2022/23,

bolstered by sustained gains in private consumption and investment. Private consumption will be supported by rising personal incomes.”

There appears to be a consensus among the commentators of the necessary conditions to attain such an impressive feat as well. First of all, according to them, it is all dependent on ongoing political stability. In addition, most agreed that Bangladesh will have to put special emphasis on four key areas like economic diversification, reducing inequality, supporting long-term investment and tackling institutional deficiencies.





Transforming growth into progress

As the Constitution of Bangladesh professes, growth is only as useful as its impact on the lives of men and women¹³. In that context, when measured in terms of the Human Development Index¹⁴, Bangladesh's progress has been enviable (**see Fig 6**). The 2018 HDI placed Bangladesh at 136th among 189 countries and territories¹⁵. With an HDI score of 0.608, Bangladesh has moved up three places, compared to its 2015 standing by improving all three components of the index. However, a detailed read of this report along with several other recent studies do raise some concerns about Bangladesh's quality of development.

Quality concerns

Some quality aspects of Bangladesh's development journey need closer review. While a baby born in Bangladesh is expected to live for 72.8 years (a South Asia champion), s/he is expected to only have around 60 years of healthy life. With only 4.7 physicians and six hospital beds

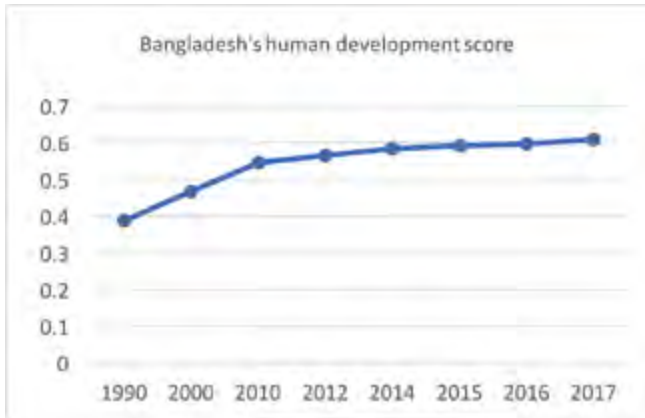
for 10,000 people, Bangladesh simply cannot do any more for this newborn.

Similarly, the standard of living of the average citizen of Bangladesh could have been better in comparison to the per capita income. Around 58 per cent Bangladeshis are involved in vulnerable jobs. Only about 69 per cent of the rural population have access to electricity, and around 47 per cent Bangladeshis

use improved sanitation. All of these indicators, according to the HDR, puts Bangladesh among the bottom third of the countries. The only saving grace in this regard is that 97.3 per cent Bangladeshis have access to safe drinking water.

The biggest quality-related concern is quality of education. This issue will be discussed in further detail in a section below.

(Fig 6) BGD Human development trend



Source: Human Development Report 2018, UNDP

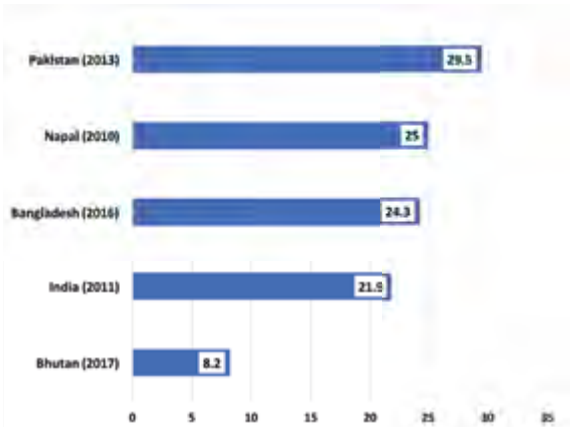
Inequality

Despite accelerated GDP growth rate, the rate of poverty reduction is slowing down. It averaged 1.8 per cent per year between 2000 and 2005, 1.7 per cent per year between 2005 and 2010; but declined to 1.4 per cent per year between 2010 and 2017 (**see Fig 7**) for regional comparison). The residual poverty that the country is dealing with is complex and entrenched in nature, which explains this slowdown, but inequality, both income and non-income, is responsible too.

On the income side of inequality measured with the Gini coefficient, Bangladesh seems to have been regressing. The 2015 Household Income and Expenditure Survey by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) estimated the income Gini coefficient of Bangladesh at 0.483 nationally, which was 0.498 in rural areas and 0.454 in urban areas. According to the report, the poorest 5 per cent Bangladeshi only receive 0.23 per cent of overall income, which was 0.78 per cent in 2010. At the same time, the income of the richest 5 per cent has grown from 24.61 per cent to 27.89 per cent. But the worst assessment in this regard was recently made by Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya (**see Tab 2**). He has shown that when calculated on wealth, the Gini coefficient was as high as 0.74 in 2010.

The income inequality is often associated with non-income inequality, but more often the non-income inequality is created by non-financial factors such as social structure, cultural norms, etc. The exact

(Fig 7) People below national poverty line (%)



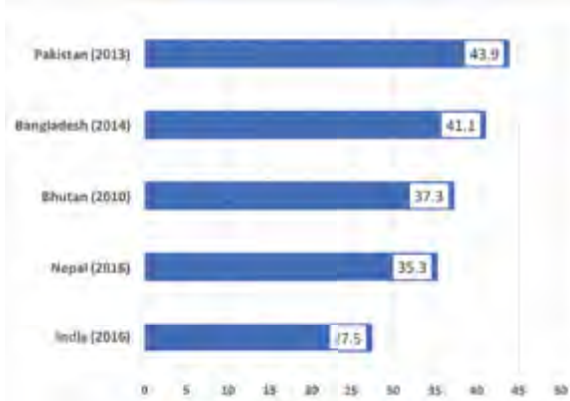
Source: Human Development Report 2018, UNDP

(Tab 2) Wealth Gini

Household distribution	National		Rural		Urban	
	2005	2010	2005	2010	2005	2010
Bottom 5%	0.06	0.04	0.01	0.08	0.02	0.02
Bottom 10%	0.28	0.55	0.08	0.21	0.42	0.08
Top 10%	61.47	49.33	66.32	63.63	49.26	67.39
Top 5%	47.99	51.32	35.24	35.75	51.67	53.64
GiniCoeff.	0.72	0.74	0.63	0.62	0.78	0.79

Source: Abdul Ghafur Memorial Lecture 2018, "The Uncomfortable Truth Recent Economic Growth Performance of Bangladesh", Debapriya Bhattacharya. Accessed on 12 December, 2018 at https://cpd.org.bd/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Abdul-Ghafur-Memorial-Lecture-2018_The-Uncomfortable-Truth-Recent-Economic-Growth-Performance.pdf

(Fig 8) Multidimensional poverty (%)



Source: Human Development Report 2018, UNDP

measure of inequality caused by such diverse reason is difficult. The Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) and UNDP are popularising the concept of multidimensional poverty to measure deprivation in all the dimensions of human development (health, education and living standards). In terms of MPI, the UNDP reported in 2018 that more than 41 per cent people live in multidimensional poverty in Bangladesh (**see Fig 8**).

In addition to MPI, the Human Development Report also measures what is known as inequality-adjusted HDI to measure welfare loss due to inequality. Going beyond the average achievements, the IHDI reveal large inequalities across human development dimensions which can make sustainable progress difficult. According to this year's HDI update, Bangladesh stands to lose 24 per cent of human development due to inequality.

What is Bangladesh doing to address the growing inequality? Oxfam and Development Finance International (DFI) attempted to measure each of the countries commitment to end inequality through what they call 'Commitment to Reducing Inequality' (CRI) Index¹⁶. This year's CRI placed Bangladesh at 148th rank out of the studied 157 countries - clearly indicating lacunas in our policies and actions. The report highlighted various legal issues and practices such as less regressive tax system, more reliance on indirect taxation such as VAT, lax labour laws, etc as potential loopholes for Bangladesh that may encourage inequality.

¹³Article 10 of the Constitution of People Republic of Bangladesh on the fundamental principles of the state reads "10. A socialist economic system shall be established with a view to ensuring the attainment of a just and egalitarian society, free from the exploitation of man by man.

¹⁴The 'Human Development Index' (HDI) measures long-term development progress in terms of long healthy life, access to knowledge and a decent standard of living. The index is the most recognized measure of people's wellbeing.

¹⁵United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Report 2018, NY, USA. September 2018

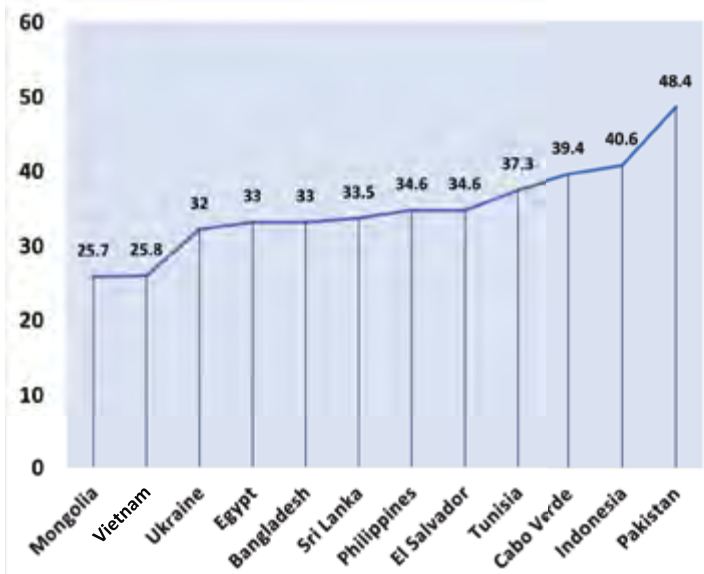
¹⁶The Commitment to Reduce Inequality Index 2018, OXFAM, October 2018.Oxford, UK

Gender divide

Gender-based inequality is not just another form of inequality but probably the most pervading and damning one. Bangladesh is generally regarded as a good performer in her class globally. In this year's Human Development Report two separate set of indicators were used to measure the divide. The life-course gender gap attempted to measure the disparity in "choices and opportunities over the life course - childhood and youth, adulthood and older age. The indicators refer to health, education, labour market and work, seats in parliament, time use and social protection¹⁷". Of the nine indicators for which Bangladesh data was available, other than 'sex ratio at birth' indicator, Bangladesh has done poorly (in five indicators) or average (in three indicators). The other set, dubbed as "Women Empowerment" panel, contains a selection of women-specific indicators to measure three dimensions of empowerment in reproductive health and family planning, violence against girls and women and socioeconomic empowerment. Once again, out of the 13 empowerment indicators, Bangladesh has shown quality performance in three categories



(Fig 9) Gini estimates of wage inequality



Source: The Global Wage Report, 2018/19, ILO

(contraceptive prevalence, unmet need for family planning, mandatory paid maternity leave) and performed poorly in eight other categories. However, information on two indicators remain missing.

Amidst these concerns all the above worries, there is at least one good news for Bangladesh's performance in reducing the wage gap between men and women. The Global Wage Report¹⁸ (GWR) of ILO analyses gender pay gap worldwide using the Gini coefficient. According to the report, Bangladesh's wage gap Gini coefficient is 33 (see Fig 9). Bangladesh's score suggests that wage inequality in the country is one of the lowest in South Asia. The data for gender pay gaps using hourly wages in Bangladesh shows that the mean gap is -5.5 per cent and the median +0.3. This means that on average, women earn 5.5 per cent more than men. However, when gender pay gap is evaluated based on monthly earnings, both the mean (+7.2%) and median (+4.7%) notes that women on average, earn less than men in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh, a lower-middle income country, is the only country whose factor-weighted mean hourly wage gender pay gap is positive. It can be inferred from the data, thus, in part-time jobs or hourly based payment, employers prefer to recruit women due to the nature of the job and offer better wages. On the other hand, in monthly wage or permanent jobs, men are given priority over women and therefore, the gender wage gap is higher compared to monthly wage payment.

Similar findings were reflected in another global report this year published in December¹⁹. According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2018, Bangladesh has held its top-most position among the countries of South Asia in ensuring gender equality for the fourth time in a row. According to the Global Gender Gap Index, Bangladesh has slipped one rung to the 48th position among 149 countries in the world, but still ahead of all other countries in the continent except the Philippines, according to the report.

Sustainability

One of the major lacunae of Bangladesh's MDG performance was environmental sustainability. The biggest concern was forest cover, in which Bangladesh struggled. The HDR this year also attempted to identify strengths and weaknesses with respect to environmental sustainability. Bangladesh fared well with regard to carbon emission and consumption of fresh water with respect to the reserve. Bangladesh's valiant attempt to introduce solar home system brought Bangladesh's performance with regard to energy mix to the average level. However, the country is still struggling to maintain forest cover. In fact, the actual cover has declined 4.4 per cent from 1990 to 2015. Additionally, mortality due to environmental degradation caused by air pollution, water quality, etc is identified as a challenge for Bangladesh.

On the socioeconomic sustainability indicator sets, Bangladesh's performance is as good as saving practices, growing capital formation rates and low debt services positively influenced Bangladesh's economic sustainability. However, the low skillset of labour, the concentration of export in only RMG and low of budget allocation in health and education challenges Bangladesh's social sustainability.



Harnessing the demographic dividend

Bangladesh will continue to have an overwhelmingly young population for at least two more decades, if not more. During this time a smaller proportion of the population will be dependent (age 14 and younger, and 65 and older) on the larger number of working population (age 15-64). Hence, there will be higher national saving, greater private investment, higher number of innovation, and the list goes on. This demographic

condition is known as the demographic dividend. Two additional details are important to note. First, demographic dividend is also associated with heightened socioeconomic pressures, particularly the need to generate jobs for those entering the labour market.

A recent unpublished study by BRAC has found that as many as 30 per cent of the respondents prioritise 'employment opportunity' over everything else as their expectation from the government.

Second, the demographic dividend is time bound. With time, the dividend goes

away. It is estimated that as of 2017, more than 65 per cent of Bangladeshis are of working age (15 to 64 years). However, we have already seen a sharp fall in fertility rates, from 6.6 children per woman in 1980 to 2.5 in 2010. The rate is expected to go down further in the next decade. It is expected that the working-age population in Bangladesh will expand by an annual average of just 1.5 per cent in 2019-30.

What demographic dividend guarantees are that there will be ample supply of human resources? However, whether the available resources are capable to contribute and whether there is enough scope for these young people to contribute determines how well a nation can translate the demographic dividend into the economic dividend.

¹⁷United Nations Development Programme, 2018 Human Development Report, Statistical Update, September, 2018 (page 20)

¹⁸International Labour Organization (ILO), Global Wage Report 2018/19: What lies behind gender pay gaps, November 2018

¹⁹World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Report 2018, December, 2018

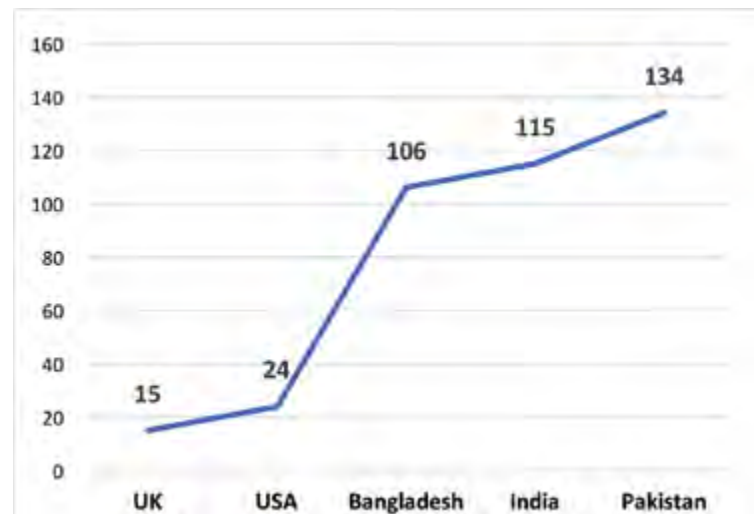
Do our youth have the right skill set?

Several recent reports, studies and discussions have highlighted poor teaching standards, low teacher attendance and relatively high student-teacher ratios as reasons behind the low skill set of Bangladeshi workforce. The high number of school going population and low tax base make it difficult for administrators to allocate sufficiently for schools. Quality of infrastructure in rural areas, where most students reside, also make it difficult to address specific needs of rural communities within a centralised system like the one that we have.

This year's Human Development Report identified the high teacher-student ratio at the primary level, quality and proportion of primary teachers who are trained, students' access to the internet as problematic for Bangladesh. When read alongside the Global Competitiveness Index 2018 and the Doing Business 2019 report, a much grimmer picture of education quality, especially at the tertiary and vocational level, emerges.

The World Development Report (WDR) 2019²⁰ concluded that Bangladesh's

(Fig 10) Human capital index 2018 rank



Source: World Development Report, 2019, The World Bank

Human Capital position is 106 among 157 countries (see Fig10). In comparison to the neighbouring countries of South Asia, Bangladesh's position is better. However, for a country that does not have a huge amount of mineral resources or other physical resources to lean back on, and the demographic dividend is what the nation is aiming to harness, the ranking of 106 is not much to celebrate. WDR concludes that Bangladesh's pre-primary, primary, and secondary education system

perform poorly in inculcating the basic skills and learning ability. According to the World Bank, children in Bangladesh can expect to complete 11 years of pre-primary, primary and secondary school by age 18 but once adjusted for quality, that 11 years of learning only reaches equivalence of 6.5 years²¹.

In this context, Bangladesh may look towards innovative teaching-learning models to address the acute infrastructure inadequacy and lack of trained teachers using technology and leveraging such ideas as self-organised learning. Investing in technical and vocational training for those who have already completed secondary schools might be a prudent strategy too.

?

DID YOU KNOW

Almost two-thirds (65%) of children entering primary

schools today will end up in a job that doesn't yet exist. Technology will be at the heart of most of tomorrow's jobs, and computing and advanced technological skills, such as knowledge of artificial intelligence, will be highly sought after.

Are we creating the right scope?

The aspect of transforming demographic dividend into economic dividend has to do with the right opportunities for this large number of young people who are entering the job market. However, Bangladesh's ability to absorb these new entrants are waning fast. The Labour Force Survey by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics reveals that on an average, between 2003 and 2016, the Bangladesh economy generated more than 1.15 million jobs per year; but this pace is falling. Between 2003 and 2010, the total employment grew by 3.1 per cent a year. This rate dropped to 1.8 per cent per year from 2011 till 2016. Another big problem is the unequal distribution of jobs among different parts of the country. Dhaka division alone accounts for 45 per cent of all industry jobs and 37 per cent of all services jobs of the country. Also, the Labour Force Survey of different years shows that the unemployment problem is more acute among highly educated youth!

So what options are open for Bangladesh to ensure that the 2.1 million new entrants will get the scope to work (see Box 4). Throughout the economic history, the most common option is the industrial sector as the chosen sector for employing the youth. Bangladesh has a relatively underdeveloped manufacturing sector with little deposits of mineral resources and abandoned supply of low-cost hydroelectricity.

Of course, we have a world-class, large-scale export-oriented garment manufacturing sector, which has been the largest manufacturing sector. But the absorption capacity of the sector is waning. Automation and competition pressure is pushing the RMG units to become more capital intensive. The country is exploring a newer competitive niche in other manufacturing industries such as pharmaceutical and light engineering but none of these industries promise large scale employment.

Other countries, especially neighbouring India, have created employment for its growing youth segment in the services sector, more specifically in the technology-based outsourcing industry (see Fig 11). Not only is it a massive provider of employment, but the contribution of the sector in maintaining

(Box 4) The availability riddle

Growth in the working-age population does not automatically imply an automatic increase in the number of available labour. Conservative social attitudes towards female workforce participation prevail across much of the region, albeit with variation in degree. Afghanistan and Pakistan, for example, are much more socially conservative than Bangladesh.

As their populations grow rich, their family members may decide to take turns or even decide not to take part in the formal employment market. In India, for example, the labour-force participation rate for women aged 15-64 years dropped to 24.4 per cent in 2012, from 34.2 per cent in 2005, according to data from the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

Relative affluence also increases the likelihood of people not putting full time into a regular employment, and reduces the number of work-hour available for the market.

a healthy foreign currency reserve is also significant. Bangladesh has made some useful headways in this right direction.

Currently, Bangladesh contributes 15 per cent to the global labour pool online by means of its 650,000 freelance workers. However, the experience of most other Asian countries shows that since the service sector depends on both the local industrial and agricultural sector unless a country could connect itself to the global value chain, services sector on its own seldom creates employment. In other words, Bangladesh now needs to concentrate more on getting connected to the international value chain. Hence, proper international certification of our youth will be critical. This can ensure

their participation in the online job market more effectively and contribute at a higher level.

The other traditional sector which is still the major employment provider in Bangladesh is the agricultural sector, though its importance is decreasing every year. Jobs left in the sector are mostly low-income and low-value-added, and hence are unattractive to the youth. Though commercial agriculture has shown some hope in south-east Bangladesh, the use of tools and the gradual decline of the cultivable land area is a limiting factor for the sector as a source of employment. Interestingly, the participation of women in agriculture is experiencing a marked rise in recent times.

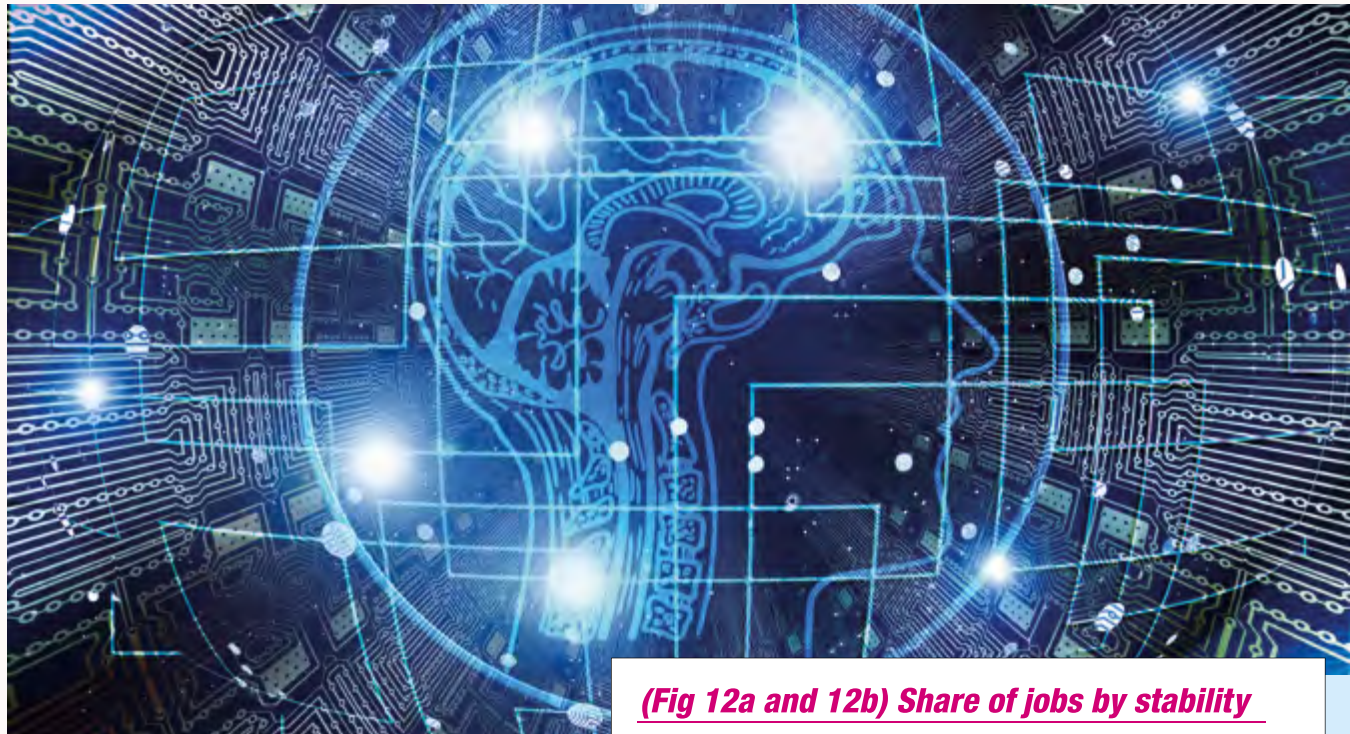
(Fig 11) Employment in service sector (%)



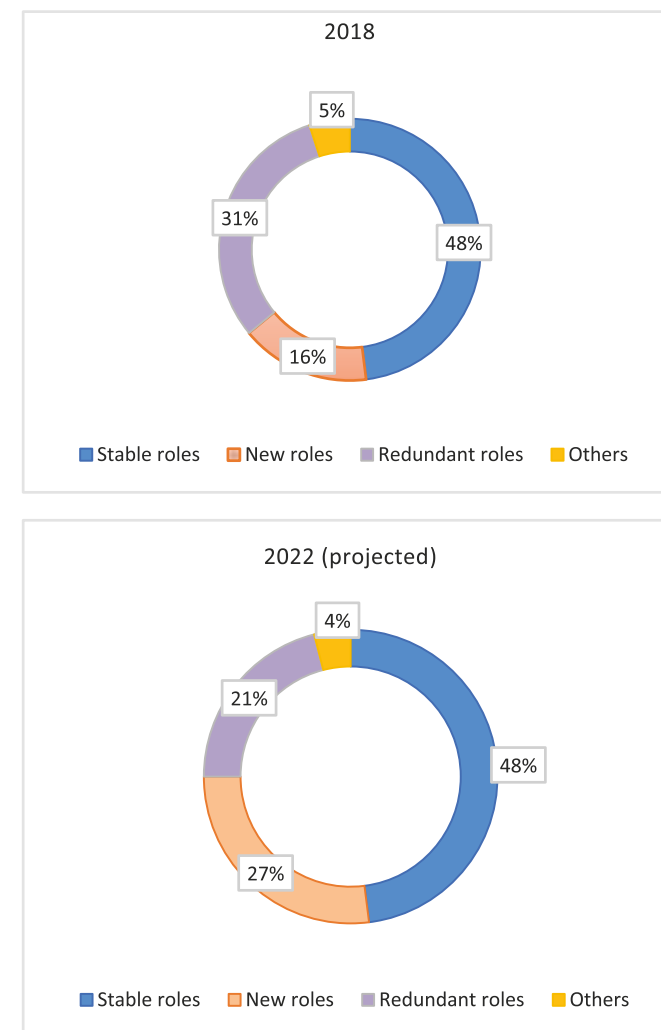
Source: The World Bank

²⁰The World Bank, World Development Report 2019, The Changing Nature of Work, October, 2018

²¹The World Bank "Human Capital Index" dated October 2018 accessed online at http://databank.worldbank.org/data/download/hci/HCI_2pager_BGD.pdf



(Fig 12a and 12b) Share of jobs by stability



Source: The Future of Jobs Report 2018, World Economic Forum

Are we ready for 4IR?

We are standing at the doorstep of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) as the traditional manufacturing processes are harnessing new technology, such as the Internet of Things (IoT), and Artificial Intelligence (AI) and leveraging real-time data. The initial discussion of how the 4IR is going to affect the labour force was akin to Karl Marx's worries that "machinery does not just act as a superior competitor to the worker, always on the point of making him superfluous. It is the most powerful weapon for suppressing strikes." In this context, the 2018 WDR basically debunked the fear **(see Fig 12a and Fig 12b).**

The report concluded that with the help of

technology, work is constantly reshaped while the firms adopt newer ways of production, marketing, and sourcing their inputs. Overall, technology is creating newer jobs and newer sectors. Technology is also changing in a way that the workforce are acquiring skills that they need to make the best use of the employment opportunities offered by firms. Digital technology is also changing how people work and the terms on which they work. Hence, 4IR should have an overall positive impact on human beings and their living standards. The report projected that about half of today's core jobs - making up the bulk of employment across industries - will remain somewhat stable in the period leading up to 2022.

But it is women who are likely to be most affected by automation because

they tend to be employed in more routine tasks than men across all sectors and occupations. Routine tasks are more prone to automation. New IMF research²² estimated that 26 million women's jobs in 30 countries, which is around 180 million jobs globally, are at risk of being displaced by technology in the next couple of decades.

However, there is no reason to assume that the transformation to industry 4.0 is automatic and without pain. Depending on how well each individual, community, country and region prepare and learn new ways of operation, there will be winners and losers. This year's Global Competitiveness Index, which focused on different countries ability to be competitive in the 4IR era, poorly rates Bangladesh's preparation. This new methodology, made up of 98 variables organised into twelve pillars, emphasised the role of human capital, innovation, resilience and agility as drivers of economic success in the 4IR era. Sadly but unsurprisingly, the GCI 2018 ranked Bangladesh at 103 -- down from last year's 102 -- out of 140 countries. Compared to last year, Bangladesh's ranking fell nine out of 12 pillars with lowest in business dynamism and product market. It may be interesting to note that, this year, neighbouring India climbed five rungs to 62. The Global Innovation Index, published in July this year, ranked Bangladesh 124 among 126 countries in terms of Human Capital and Research while the overall ranking was a low 116²³.

Hence, it is critical for Bangladesh to assess the factors which need to change in order to improve the quality and quantity of Bangladeshi innovation as well as the quality of tertiary education including in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). The copyright and patent related awareness need to be created and related public services need to be streamlined.



Focusing on job seekers

One particular development in Bangladesh has the potential to change the current situation dramatically. Bangladesh is aiming to establish as many as 100 special economic zones to attract both local but mostly foreign capital. Once operational, these zones will create a massive number of employment. Here again, it is important to forecast the skills needed in these new industries and to ensure that the Bangladeshi job seekers are equipped with the required skills and certifications to take advantage of those vacancies. Similarly, a quick stock of the mega projects and their employment needs

can be used for targeted development of human resources to ensure that such opportunities are available for local unemployed youth.

The Bangladesh Awami League, the party that secured a landslide victory in the 11th Parliamentary Poll held on 30 December, has also promised to create 15 million more jobs during the next five years for 11.09 million more people who are likely to join the workforce during that period. The manifesto also promised a significant increase in investment in vocational and technical education and progress in the information and communication technology sector to build a workforce that can face the challenges of the modern world.

?
DID YOU KNOW

Globally, one in five young people are NEET: Not in Employment, Education or Training. Three out of four of young NEETs are women. World Economic Forum estimates that in Bangladesh, females in the 'Youth category not in employment or education' is 30.7 while male is 8.8.

- World Economic Forum

²²International Monetary Fund (IMF), Gender, Technology, and the Future of Work, October 2018, Washington DC, USA

²³Cornell University, INSEAD, and the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), Global Innovation Index, 2018, USA

Looking forward

Most economic estimates suggest that the strong economic growth of Bangladesh in FY18 is going to sustain over the near future. Such prediction is remarkable because the formal economy slowed down in December and will take probably a couple of months in 2019 to get back to normal. However, the informal economy, especially in rural Bangladesh, is expected to experience the opposite at the same time. Last year, as many as 1,841 candidates ran their campaigns. Even if the political parties had spent 2.5 million for each campaign then the parties and the candidates have spent anywhere around BDT 5 billion. Additionally, the EC budgeted around BDT 7 billion to conduct the election - much of which reached the grassroots.

This sudden burst of income at the lowest tier of the economy generally shows a positive impact on the economy. Hence, Bangladesh should be able to sustain the overall growth trend in the mid-term, if not in the short-run.

Public investment and sustained gains in private consumption should remain as the key driver for the economy. However, to manage the budget deficit, the new government can consider tax reform to increase tax revenue post-election. A new value-added tax (VAT) law is due to come into effect in fiscal year 2019/20 (July-June).

Trade war and

The world is most likely going to face a full-on trade war between China and the US although there is an official pause following the G20 summit in Argentina. Already, the two countries have so far imposed tariffs covering roughly USD 360 billion of merchandise trade between them. Some observers note that the US and Chinese economies are too interlinked for a trade war to truly escalate in the short term. Hence, this present confrontation should turn into a slow and secretive cold trade war.

The US-China trade war will have a significant adverse impact on the world economy by distorting global

(Fig 13) Top clothing exporting countries, 2016



Source: World Trade Statistical Review; World Trade Organisation

trade flows to push production to more expensive locations, forcing up prices and reducing efficiency. This will create cost-driven inflation to force many countries to tighten their monetary policy. Global trade flows are also set to slow down, particularly in the short term, as mounting US-China tensions will disrupt existing supply chains and dampen investor confidence. While the greatest impact will, of course, be felt in the US and China, many other

While in the long term everybody stands to lose from a trade war, in the short to medium term, there will be winners and losers.

economies are likely to experience collateral damage.

Tariffs generally do not reduce trade but shift it to new destinations. After the new tariff, importers in China and the US will look for alternative suppliers. This can open new opportunities for exporters in third-party markets like Bangladesh.

Probably the most conceivable channel of harnessing the benefit for Bangladesh is the RMG sector. Bangladesh is the second-largest exporter of RMGs in the world after China. Even before the trade war, Bangladesh's share in global

RMG exports had been growing, owing to its low-cost production credentials. Major international fashion brands such as H&M, GAP, Levi's and Zara already have manufacturing facilities in Bangladesh. That is, if tariffs on imports from China go up then these brands can easily divert orders to Bangladesh. The good thing is that Bangladesh seems to have the access capacity to absorb the immediate increase in orders. In fact, already Bangladesh seems to have started benefitting from this. There is a report of several export orders switching from China to Bangladesh and also several buyers have initiated purchases from Bangladesh for the first time.

There are, however, two risks for this advantage to continue. Countries like Vietnam and India can actually bag a higher portion of market share that is left out by China. More specifically, only India has the ability to match the scale of China (see Fig 13) and the country also produces cotton. India also has the necessary access to capital to invest on a large scale. Hence, they have a competitive edge over Bangladesh. Secondly, it is expected that Chinese manufacturers will refocus their attention on the European market. This will make the market more competitive for all current exports including Bangladesh's, eventually reducing Bangladesh's share in that market.

Inflation to be moderate

According to data released by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), point to point consumer prices rose by 5.35 per cent in December compared with an average increase of 5.58 per cent in the first 10 months of the year (see Fig 14). Food price inflation has continued to ease as agriculture production in the country recovers following devastating floods in 2017. Food prices rose at an average rate of 5.1 per cent year on year in October, the lowest rate since August 2016.

The BBS data showed that the point to point non-food inflation rate, however, declined slightly to 5.49 per cent in November down from 5.90 per cent in October.

(Fig 14) Bangladesh inflation rates



Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics

Remittance showing an uncertain trend

Remittances in 2018 were the highest that the country has ever recorded - albeit slightly weaker than our expectations, owing to cooling in oil prices in the latter months of the year. The main reason for the strength in inflows was a recovery in global oil prices last year.

According to data published by Bangladesh Bank, the inflow of workers' remittances decreased at the start of FY19 and subsequently settled during the last four months of the year (see Fig 15). The latest report²⁴ by the World Bank suggests that officially-recorded remittances to developing countries will increase by 10.8 per cent and South Asian Countries by 13.5 per cent in 2018. This new record level follows a robust growth of 7.8 per cent in 2017. The report identifies Bangladesh as a gainer and is in the third position in South Asia with USD 15.9 billion inward remittances with India (USD 79.5 billion) and Pakistan (USD 20.9 billion) is considerably ahead of Bangladesh.

It is expected that in the next six months, remittance flow will slightly increase supported by a weaker taka against the US dollar. Furthermore, the government's clampdown on illegal remittance channels will also continue to support remittance

(Fig 15) Inward remittance in billion (USD)



Source: Bangladesh Bank

earnings from official channels in 2019.

However, the pace of migrant worker deployments from Bangladesh for the first three quarters of 2018 has slowed by 25 per cent (0.55 million, compared with 0.73 million in the same period of 2017). The adoption of fiscal consolidation measures and stricter immigration rules in the Gulf region may also impede growth in remittance inflows to Bangladesh.

Some of the political developments in the Middle East can drive down oil prices further in 2019. Such a change is a double-edged sword for Bangladesh. Lower oil prices mean savings in foreign currency for Bangladesh - a country that is almost totally dependent on imported primary energy. At the same time, remittances to Bangladesh are highly correlated with oil prices, as the wages of migrant Bangladeshi workers in Middle East vary with movements in oil prices.

²⁴The World Bank, Migration and Development Brief 30, December 2018, Washington DC, USA

Brexit and Bangladesh

The UK is an important trading and development partner for Bangladesh. According to Bangladesh Bank data, it is the third largest export destination for Bangladeshi apparels encompassing more than USD 4 billion worth of shipments a year. The UK is also a tested partner of Bangladesh's development. Bangladesh enjoys the second position in terms of development assistance from UK's side. Additionally, more than 2,000 UK firms are currently operating in Bangladesh.

Brexit may have a negative impact on the UK's economy. Uncertainties associated with the process, as experts are predicting, can cause immediate-term negative economic impacts.

One of the more likely immediate term impacts is weakening pound sterling—which is going to affect Bangladeshi exports to the UK market and remittances from the UK. Development assistance from the UK will also be unfavourably affected. Finally, given the close ties that Bangladesh enjoys with the UK, any negative impact on UK's economy is sure to have a corresponding impact felt by Bangladeshis living in the country and at the UK.

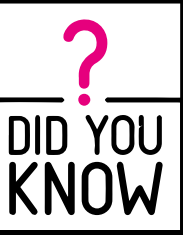
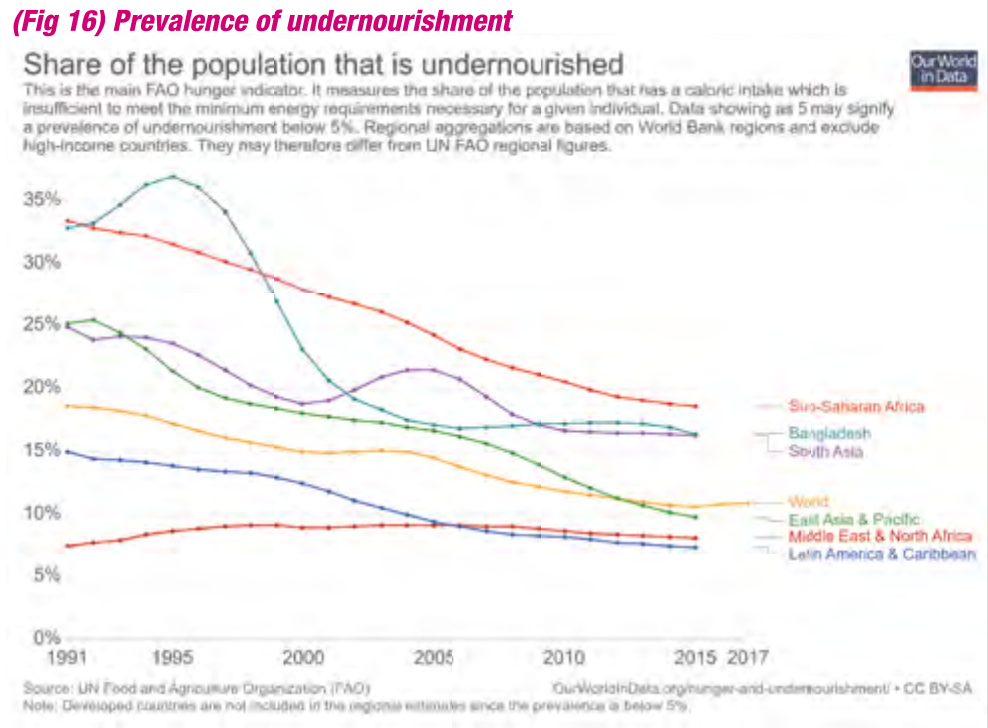
However, on a positive note, Brexit may open half of the import market of UK for renegotiation which countries like Bangladesh can grab with the right offering. Similarly, a good chunk of EU market will be open for discussion as well.

Sustainable Development Goal: Zero hunger

Global outlook

Ending hunger, food insecurity, and malnutrition of all forms is at the core of Goal 2 of the Sustainable Development Goals agenda (see Fig 16). However, with new pieces of evidence indicating a rise in the global hunger situation, the question remains whether all countries will be able to make adequate progress towards achieving this ambitious goal by 2030. The Global Hunger Index 2018²⁵ report estimates that at the current rate of progress, an estimated 50 countries will fall short of the target of achieving zero hunger within 2030.

The latest State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World²⁶ report reveals that the number of undernourished people reached a staggering 821 million in 2017, implying that one out of every nine people in the world remains affected by undernourishment. In addition to conflict and violence in many regions, adverse impacts of climate change have been identified as a key driver to worsen food security. The situation is most persistent in South Asia and sub-Saharan African nations where people are already living in vulnerability and disadvantage. Globally, the South Asian region has the highest rates of stunting and wasting.



- Today there are 821 million people who are chronically undernourished. This is more than the 795 million in 2014, although still down from about 900 million in 2000.
- 75 per cent of the world's poorest people live in rural areas and depend on agriculture and related activities for their livelihood. 50 per cent of hungry people are farming families.

(Tab 3) Selected key indicators of SDG 2 in Bangladesh

Indicators	Base year	2020 (Target)	2025 (Target)	2030 (Target)
Prevalence of undernourishment (% of population)	16.4 (2016)	14	12	10
Prevalence of stunting among children under 5 years of age (%)	36.1 (2014)	25	16	12
Proportion of wasted children under the age of 5 years (%)	14.3 (2014)	12	10	5
Proportion of overweight children under the age of 5 years (%)	1.6 (2014)	1.5	1	1

Source: FAO and MoHFW

State of Bangladesh

One of the success stories of MDGs, Bangladesh made remarkable progress in several social indicators including reducing poverty, ensuring food security, lowering maternal mortality ratio and infant and under-five mortality rates, primary school enrolment and gender parity in primary and secondary education. Despite the progress made during the MDG period, the prevailing high levels of malnutrition and undernutrition pose significant challenges for the country. Although the prevalence of undernourishment decreased slightly from 17.2 per cent in 2010 to 16.4 per cent in 2016, greater effort is needed to reduce the rate to 10 per cent within 2030.

The rise in the prevalence of stunting (height for age) among children under 5 years of age from 15.3 per cent in 2011 to 36.1 per cent in 2014 is most concerning. Malnutrition in early stages of life has a long-lasting impact on economic growth, human capital development, and labour productivity. The proportion of wasted children (weight for height) declined from 15.6 per cent in 2011 to 14.3 per cent in 2014, while that of overweight children (weight for height) also declined from 1.9 per cent to 1.6 per cent during the same period.

For a country that is hoping to make the best use of the demographic dividend to break free from the cycle of underdevelopment, this is indeed bad news.

It is clear that to transform the youth population into a healthy workforce, addressing the challenges of hunger, undernourishment and malnutrition is a pre-condition. The National Micronutrients Status Survey 2011-12 report estimates that micronutrients deficiency is accounted for the loss of USD 7.9 billion in the national GDP. Naturally, the loss is simply cumulative - the malnourished children of today will fail to deliver the growth as a young citizen too.



²⁵ Concern Worldwide and Welthungerhilfe.V., Global Hunger Index 2018, October, 2018

²⁶ FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2018. The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2018. Building climate resilience for food security and nutrition. Rome, FAO.



Key challenges

Sustainable food production and climate change

Bangladesh is among the most precarious and unpredictable countries due to climate risks²⁷. Agricultural production is anticipated to be extensively harmed by the rapid expanse of soil salinity that arose from sea levels rising, tidal flooding, and intensifying storm gushes. It is estimated that 30 per cent of Bangladesh’s cultivable land is located in coastal areas. The increase in soil salinity will lead to a 15.6 per cent wane in the harvest of high-yield rice. Other agriculture-related challenges are a loss of arable land due to rapid urbanisation. On the whole, though, Bangladesh has done well to increase agricultural productivity to keep the net

average production growth at around 3.8 per cent over the last decade. Additionally, salinity, as well as excessive use of groundwater, are already impacting irrigation during the dry season. Given the declining groundwater tables and water quality issues in Bangladesh, it will be extremely difficult to exploit groundwater resources sustainably. Without an increase in water productivity, it will be difficult to meet even reduced demand.

Not only the quantity of food produced will be affected, a major study²⁸ published recently predicted that the rice grown in higher levels of carbon dioxide will have reduced amounts of key nutrients.

The gradual increase of CO2 level in rural Bangladesh where most of the rice is produced can have a significant impact on the nutrition of a community who are almost exclusively dependent on rice.

The productivity of agricultural labour and other challenges

Generally speaking, the labour productivity of Bangladesh is not among the highest. Low level of skill, a low adaptation of technology and lower productivity of the land are all contributing factors. A 2014 BRAC study²⁹ found that roughly 40 per cent of the cultivated land continues to be single cropped. Quite expectedly, it is the large and medium farms who have more single cropped land than small farms. To make the situation worse, our agricultural productivity is low. For example, the current yield gap (the gap between potential production and actual production) actually means as much as 36.7 million tonnes of potential loss in rice by 2021.

²⁷A 2017 report by Germanwatch, a think tank ranked Bangladesh as the 6th most vulnerable country in the world. See: <https://germanwatch.org/en/12978>. The sixth version of Maplecroft’s Climate Change and Environmental Risk Atlas identified Bangladesh as the most climate vulnerable country in the world. See <http://maplecroft.com/portfolio/new-analysis/2013/10/30/31-global-economic-output-forecast-face-high-or-extreme-climate-change-risks-2025-maplecroft-risk-atlas/>

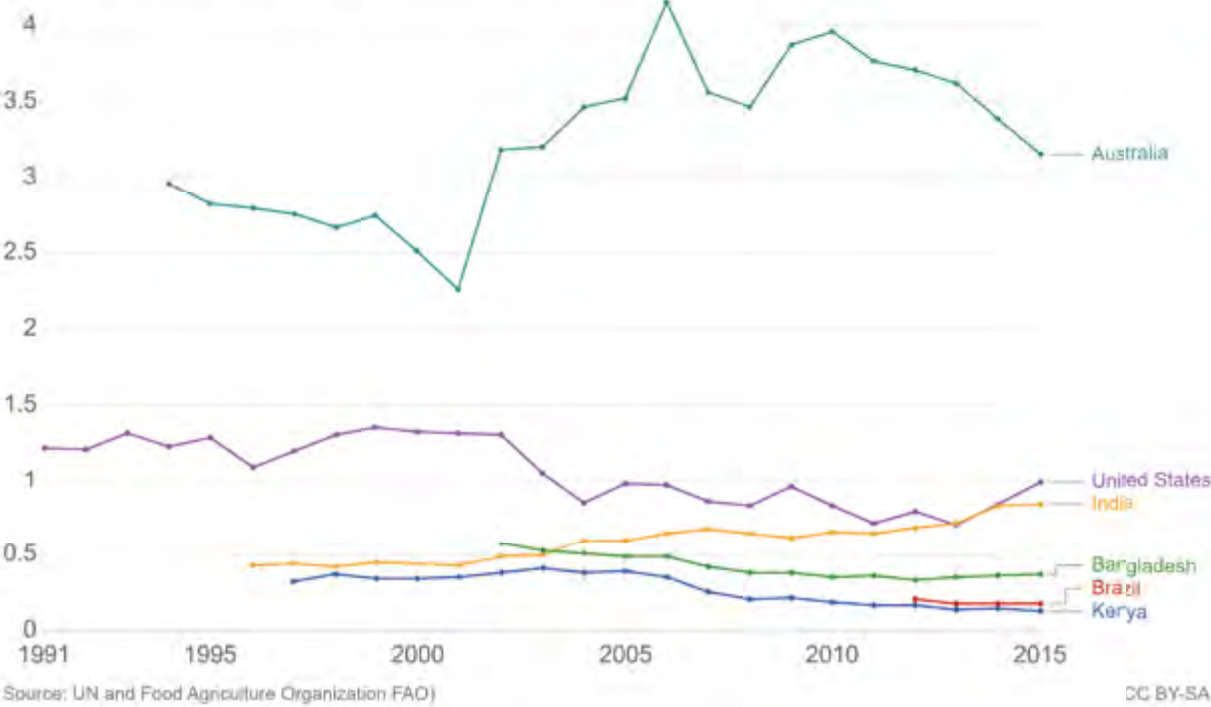
²⁸Zhu, C., Kobayashi, K., Loladze, I., Zhu, J., Jiang, Q., Xu, X., ...&Fukagawa, N. K. (2018). Carbon dioxide (CO2) levels this century will alter the protein, micronutrients, and vitamin content of rice grains with potential health consequences for the poorest rice-dependent countries. *Science advances*, 4(5), eaaq1012.

²⁹Hossain, M., Bayes, A., Islam, SM (2014), A Diagnostic Study on BangladeshAgriculture, accessed online at <http://blog.brac.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Agriculture-Report.pdf>

(Fig 17) Agriculture orientation index

Agriculture orientation index for government expenditures

Agriculture Orientation Index (AOI) is defined as the agriculture share of government expenditures, divided by the agriculture share of GDP. An AOI >1 means the agriculture sector receives a higher share of government spending relative to its economic value. An AOI <1 reflects a lower orientation to agriculture.



Fisheries and livestock challenges

In terms of food utilisation, the benefits of fish in the human diet are well established. Especially in Bangladesh, fish represents a major source of dietary protein for much of rural communities. The recent FAO report³⁰ ranked Bangladesh as the fifth largest producer of inland fish after China, India, Indonesia and Vietnam. The global report also mentioned how the sector is fast becoming a key driver for alleviating poverty by creating huge employment and developing the supply chain.

However, habitat destruction due to water pollution, urbanisation, and salinity intrusion are all critical risk factors for sustainable growth of the sector and hence, for public health and nutrition. Overfishing, illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing and destructive fishing practices of both inland and coastal also pose a sustainability issue.

³⁰Food and Agricultural Organization, *The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2018 - Meeting the sustainable development goals*. Rome, 2018

Investment in health and nutrition

Another major challenge for Bangladesh in achieving SDG 2 is the low government expenditure on health. Public health expenditure in Bangladesh is only 0.8 per cent of GDP. This is one of the lowest in South Asia. Improvement in nutrition and health will require a significant increase in public health expenditure.

One of the limiting factors in this regard is what the SDG terms as Agricultural Orientation of public expenditure (indicator 2.A.1). Apparently, the share of budget allocation to the agricultural sector compared to the sector’s contribution to the GDP is only 37 per cent, whereas developed countries such as the USA and Australia spend much more in comparison (**see Fig 17**). Notably, the Bangladesh Second Country Investment Plan (CIP2) prepared by Food Planning and Monitoring Unit (FPMU) under Ministry of Food proposed

13 investment programmes to improve food and nutrition security in the country, at an estimated total cost of USD 9.2 billion—which is way more than what the current expenditure package offers.

?

DID YOU KNOW

According to World Poverty Clock, every hour 5,760 people need to escape poverty to reach SDG 1 target, but only half or about 2,880 people do escape. In Asia, against the target of 1,302 people per hour, 2,748 people escape poverty. However, in Africa, Australia, and South America the net incidence of poverty is actually increasing by 9.8, 3.2, and 42 people per hour respectively.

Poverty and behavioural issues

A third of Bangladeshi pre-school children and half of the pregnant women are anaemic. Vitamin A deficiency affects every child in five, and vitamin B12 deficiency one child in three. Lack of awareness and inappropriate food choices are two of the key challenges in this regard. Additionally, early marriage and teenage pregnancies leading to a high prevalence of low birth weight (22 per cent) are among the key determinants of malnutrition. Similarly, only half of the children are exclusively breastfed and complementary feeding practices are inadequate to meet the nutritional requirements of infants and young children.

A multi-sectoral approach is key

To overcome these challenges, a coordinated multi-sectoral approach is needed at national to local levels. The National Nutrition Policy 2015 focused on ensuring the availability of adequate and safe food as well as diversification of diets through both nutrition-sensitive and nutrition-specific interventions. The Global Hunger Index 2018 reiterated this policy priority by underscoring the importance of promoting nutrition-sensitive interventions in agriculture, including the production of nutrient-rich crops and fish for improved nutrition. Strong political consensus and local government actions are required to attain such coordination.

Greater policy support is needed for small-scale farmers and low-paid food producers to build their resilience against the adverse impacts of climate change. Public investment in developing appropriate crop variety and intensive extension work will be critical.

BRAC's focus

Non-governmental organisations like BRAC have an important role to play for successful implementation of SDG 2. BRAC, with its extensive operation throughout the country, has unparalleled access at the grassroots to provide service in remote areas as well as to help people combat climate change. Through the Health, Nutrition and Population Programme (HNPP) and Agriculture and Food Security Programme (AFSP), BRAC is contributing to improve dietary practices of the target population, as well as to achieve food security and improved nutritional status of two million marginalised people. In addition, Ultra-Poor Graduation (UPG) programme provides support to households to enhance food and nutrition security with resilient livelihoods and enterprises, the targeting to impact 400,000 households by 2020. Furthermore, BRAC Seed and Agro Enterprise, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), BRAC Dairy and Food Project, and the Integrated Development Programme (IDP) contribute to SDG 2 both directly and indirectly. Effective collaboration of government with NGOs in the areas of health, nutrition, and food security can produce a synergic effect to achieve SDG 2.



KAM Morshed is the director of Advocacy for Social Change, Technology and Partnership Strengthening, BRAC.

Cover story



Bhumijo and the journey of a young entrepreneur

Farhana Rashid

All through my life, whenever I went out, I would always drink less or would opt for not drinking water at all. The equation, for me, was quite simple - if I did not drink, I would not have to use the toilet.

I was not alone. I saw all the women around me practicing the same thing. It seemed like a pretty smart solution until I learned about urinary tract infection (UTI), which is said to lead to much worse health problems such as kidney diseases and recurring UTIs.

Sixty-one per cent of patients with UTIs give a history of regular, voluntary deferral for periods of one to six hours.

There is a serious lack of hygienic and safe public toilets in the cities of Bangladesh, especially for women. Most of our public spaces like schools, colleges, offices, hospitals, bus stops, railway stations do not have proper

toilet facilities. Due to this crisis, women usually drink less water or opt for voluntary urinary retention.

Government agencies like city corporations are not able to meet the demand with their conventional model for public toilets because of land scarcity, high budget and long bureaucratic processes. The currently available models of public toilets also fail to maintain hygienic and secure environment in most cases. Moreover, the city authority alone is unable to provide enough public toilets, especially for women.

After completing my Bachelor's in architecture from Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), I decided that I did not want to be an architect to only serve the elite. I went to study at KTH Royal Institute of Technology in Sweden on sustainable urban planning

*The currently available models of public toilets fail to maintain hygienic and secure environment in most cases. Moreover, the city authority alone is unable to provide enough public toilets, especially for women**

*The World Bank 'Global Economic Prospects (GEP)' published in June 2018 projected 6.7 percentage point GDP growth for Bangladesh, which is significantly lower than the official projection.

and design with a scholarship. On my return to Bangladesh in 2016, I focused on ways to contribute to the betterment of the society and environment, but did not know where to start.

I began to work as a coordinator at the Bengal Institute of Architecture for a project on regional planning and development of Dhaka and the small surrounding settlements. Then came the Urban Innovation Challenge (UIC) in 2016. BRAC called out for ideas to improve our cities by solving critical problems. Being an architect and a planner, I have always believed that every solution lies within the problem itself. So when the time came, we submitted our ideas on ending the crisis of public toilets using limited resources and time.

Bhumijo - a team of five people including myself - was announced as the winner of UIC 2016 in the health category, after competing with nearly 600 ideas. I got the news when I was visiting Rajshahi with my one-month-old daughter. With the immense support from my family and BRAC, I dared to start working on developing the first pilot in June 2016.

We had to tackle numerous challenges before we could design the toilet. We needed to find the right location where there was a huge demand for public toilet with respect to population density and land ownership. We also had to consult and negotiate with the community that having a hygienic public toilet was a basic necessity.

In October 2017, with seed funding from BRAC, we renovated an existing toilet facility in the bustling Noor Mansion Market in Gausia, Dhaka, transforming it into an exclusive facility for women ensuring safety, accessibility and hygiene. Over the last year, the facility gained huge traction on various media platforms. The facility has been used 45,000 times by women and children. More importantly, users have repeatedly left positive responses on their experience. It took us only two weeks to complete the transformation with the cost of only BDT 500,000, which is a lot cheaper and quicker than available solutions of providing public toilets.

Our initiative also gained attention from government and non-governmental agencies through various seminars, news publications and events. A few days ago, a woman who works at Noor Mansion market came up to me and praised the way Bhumijo's toilet was made - this is, personally, one of the greatest rewards. Additionally, Bhumijo received an award



from UNDP Bangladesh at Smart City Week 2017 for successful idea implementation. Bhumijo was also invited to showcase its idea at Women in Leadership Fest, Dhaka 2018 and at a seminar by CERM, BUET. The project was appreciated by leading organisations including WaterAid, UNICEF, ActionAid, WASH Alliance etc. It was a great honour for me to be featured in the national newspaper Prothom Alo as 'a top young leader for contributing to society'.

After a journey of two years, Bhumijo today is a social enterprise with a vision of a healthy city for all. To ensure supply of public toilets in locations where they are most needed, Bhumijo conducts research and develops design using human-centered design methods. Using the existing resources and sustainable building techniques, Bhumijo can deliver better designed public toilets quickly and at a lower cost. Bhumijo's business solutions include i) research ii) planning and design iii) construction and construction management iv) maintenance and operation, and v) product placement services.

In December 2018, Bhumijo opened its second toilet in Rangpur and will soon open up a few more facilities in Dhaka and Narayanganj. With the corporate social responsibility funding from various private sectors, Bhumijo is now working with Bangladesh Railway to renovate existing toilets at the railway station near Dhaka airport. With funding from Unilever Bangladesh, Bhumijo is also working on a community toilet in Dhaka's Kalyanpur slum.

Several other organisations including Dhaka's city corporations, INGOs and corporates are in conversation to scale up the model. We are also providing advisory support to WaterAid to design a public toilet in Uttara's Azampur. A joint research by Bhumijo and BUET is looking into formulating strategies for better public sanitation in Bangladesh.

Bhumijo recently organised a workshop on 'Inclusive Urban Sanitation' with participation from the Swedish Ambassador to Bangladesh, Dhaka North City Corporation, BRAC, icddr,b and other stakeholders. We are also in conversation with the Nottingham University for a joint research on public sanitation.

Bhumijo has been shortlisted for various grants and fundings such as the Transform Grant, Women Innovation Challenge, and Scaleup Bangladesh. Because of its social impact, the Thomson Reuters Foundation has offered pro bono legal support.

Besides hard work, time and effort of every team member, Bhumijo has been successful with the right support and funding, which made it possible for us to test and execute our idea thus far. I believe it is only with collaboration with government agencies, private sector, and academia that young entrepreneurs can work towards a better future for Bangladesh - one where no woman has to suffer while accessing public spaces.

Farhana Rashid is the co-founder and CEO of 'Bhumijo'.



Our cities, our solutions

Nishat Tasnim

Thousands of innovations are blossoming every day in Bangladesh where people solve problems with the resources available to them. Solutions of day-to-day problems come from people who are practically living in it and yet managing to develop innovative approaches of tackling issues at hand.

BRAC has created the 'Urban Innovation Challenge' (UIC), platform for young innovators who are ready to bring radical approaches to age-old problems, and in the process, playing a role in making Bangladesh the next big thing in innovation. The platform has made it viable for innovators to test their solutions across the cities of Bangladesh.

The organisation has more than four decades of scaling what works and its workforce realises how

contextualisation of problems plays the most important role in coming up with solutions.

After the successful completion of the first ever Urban Innovation Challenge in 2016, BRAC launched the Urban Innovation Challenge 2.0 in August 2018. BRAC called out for ideas with the tagline "Our cities, our solutions" for young innovators who are pumped to solve pressing issues of urban Bangladesh in five different sectors: climate change, healthcare, low cost urban housing, renewable energy and water, sanitation and hygiene. The objective was to challenge innovators to come up with scalable solutions rather than fancy ideas that look good only on presentation slides. With thousands of people pouring into cities for better opportunities each day, urban spaces are increasingly facing new problems

*"Before UIC, we had not given much priority to the networking. We did not see much merit in talking to people or following up. UIC changed my outlook on this. We learned that networking is extremely important in building a business. I am still in contact with many of the participants and people we met at UIC. We are in regular touch with the BRAC team"**

– Abu Sayed Al Sagor, Founder and CEO, BD Assistant

and challenges to deal with. The idea is to encourage young minds to get close to the problem and people, and then incubate and test out their ideas in the field, and iterate along the way.

So how is Urban Innovation Challenge different from other events or challenges? To begin with, it does not end at the final pitch where winners are given out prize money. Rather, after the final pitch, a six-month-long incubation period starts with seed funding from BRAC. Access to BRAC's network of operations and partners is a unique opportunity for innovators to test their solutions. They also get connected to mentors. BRAC makes them prepared for investment pitch before its own investment committee and other investors. Throughout, the platform is focused on real-life experiences rather than technicalities.

The reach across Bangladesh was ensured through campus activation by different university clubs and faculties. Applications both in English and Bangla were encouraged. For Urban Innovation Challenge 2.0, BRAC received around 300 applications and among them 25 were direct submissions by the start-up community in Bangladesh.

The platform also creates a space to gather knowledge about BRAC's required experience of over four decades. BRAC provides participants with mentorship support, investors and partnership ecosystem required to flourish their business ideas.

The teams went through initial screening, boot camp, human-centred design, final pitch and incubation. After conceptualisation of their ideas, 13 teams were selected to pitch their projects in the final round this year. From there, seed funding was declared for six winners. The winners were City Bird, Nirvana, Jotno Healthcare, Onushongo, Responsive Urbanist and DrinkWell. These teams focused on different sectors and urban issues that need innovative solutions.



Photo courtesy: Farhad Hamid

1. City Bird - Leveraging the idle rooftop solar panels to power residential water pumps in lifting water from ground level to overhead reservoir.

2. Nirvana - Creating an affordable cooking solution for households through its designed digester, Lasiter. This digester is installed on rooftops and uses collected kitchen waste to produce gas for household supply.

3. Jotno Healthcare - Ensuring delivery of authentic diagnostic and digital primary healthcare services to the doorsteps of patients through the use of Jotno Healthcare Box. The unit is equipped with the Jotno mobile app and point-of-care testing devices with the capability to diagnose through 70+ vital pathological tests.

4. Onushongo - Designing and constructing multi-purpose service points in urban slums that offer common facilities for cooking and washing. Onushongo develops master construction plans for slum development with the aim to avoid displacement that can accompany gentrification.

5. Responsive Urbanist - Designing and installing a rainwater harvesting system in public spaces to address the demand for clean drinking water for migrants in financial crisis.

6. Drinkwell - Offering turnkey water solutions via metered water ATM dispensing systems. The system uses RFID-enabled pay-as-you-go cards, leveraging mobile money platforms to enable utility companies to provide safe drinking water in hard-to-reach areas.

Six months of incubation includes building proof of concept (materialising idea into reality), prototyping (low-cost early model or experiment to rapidly create solutions to challenges), external network and

resources, and getting ready with their investment pitch.

Two winners of the last edition of Urban Innovation Challenge received further investment from BRAC's investment committee and the other got additional grant. The three winners were - BD assistant, Bhumijo and Bloodman.

BD Assistant: Creating employment opportunities for dropouts through locally generated apprenticeship.

Bhumijo: Transforming poorly maintained public toilets into hygienic and accessible toilets for women.

Bloodman: Matching blood donors with blood seekers in emergency situations.

BRAC makes sure that the entrepreneurs find relevant information and feedback from its field staff. The objective is to urge them think about sustaining their ideas and how scaling and networking are going to be vital for their initiatives to flourish.

BRAC has already welcomed the second version of solution-focused thinkers. It is time to see how the incubation phase goes for them and who convinces BRAC to get the opportunity for further investment.

Nishat Tasnim is a research and insight specialist, BRAC Social Innovation Lab.

*The World Bank 'Global Economic Prospects (GEP)' published in June 2018 projected 6.7 percentage point GDP growth for Bangladesh, which is significantly lower than the official projection.



Self-identity, aspirations and expectations of Bangladeshi youth

Md Shakil Ahmed and Anindita Bhattacharjee

Bangladesh has been experiencing a demographic dividend for the last 10 years. We have gotten used to more people being of working age than non-working age. This is not expected to end any time soon. The current economic growth predictions forecast that this dividend will continue until 2040.

Currently, more than 65 per cent of the country's population are of working age. Everyone in the development sector is talking about the youth. However, much of this discussion is often limited to specific segments of the youth.

To provide a comprehensive picture, BRAC conducted a nationwide survey on a total of 4,200 young people (between the ages of 15-35). An equal ratio of men and women were interviewed - across 150 sub-districts and 51 districts of Bangladesh. The survey covered a range of topics relevant to the youth.

In this piece, we only focus on the expectations and aspirations of the youth – with respect to their personal lives and how they feel as citizens of this

country. This theme is relevant to politics, research, policy and intervention design. A full report of the survey will be published later in 2019.

Self-identity: How do the youth prefer to identify themselves?

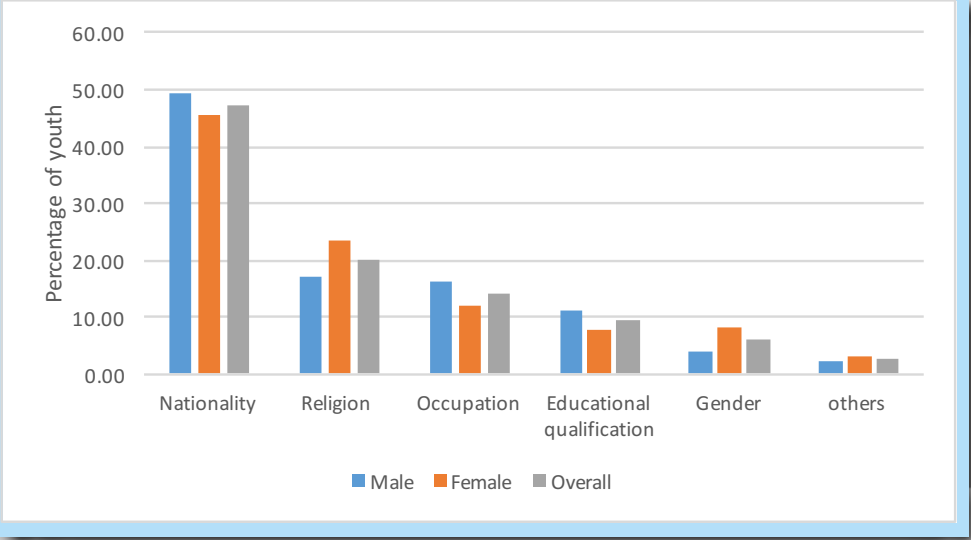
The term 'self-identity' reflects how people see themselves - what kind of labels they prefer to describe themselves. During the survey, we asked participants how they preferred to identify themselves - giving them five pre-set options and one open one.

Across the different groups and categories, 'nationality' was the top answer, followed by 'religion'. This is not unexpected as these two factors and the struggles between them have remained to be the critical factors behind the birth of our nation, politics and identity.

While for both young men and women, the top two factors were 'nationality' and 'religion', the proportion of women preferring to identify themselves in terms of their religion was much higher compared to men.



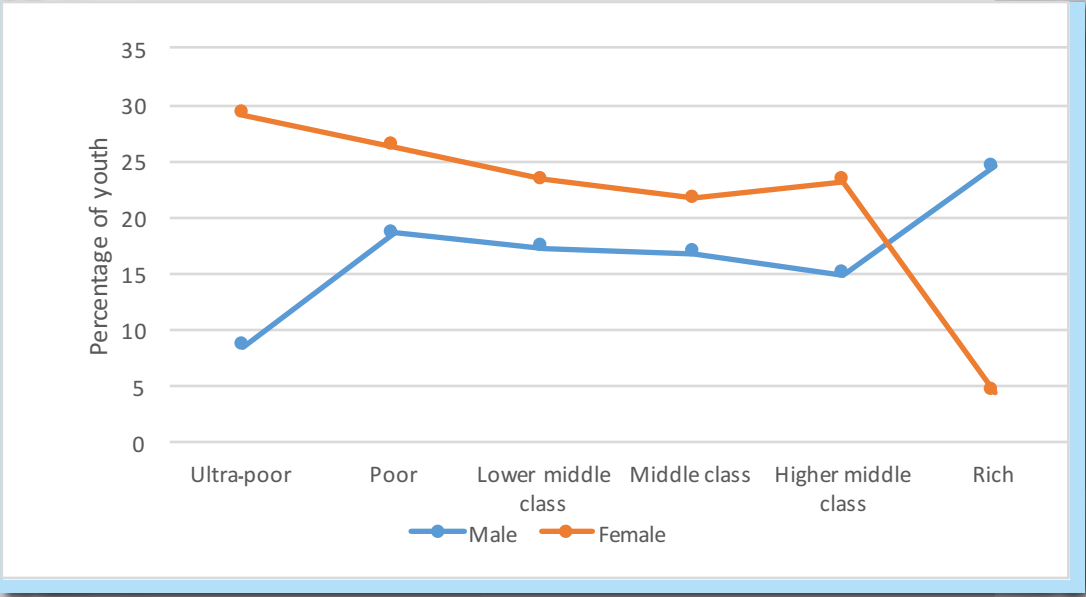
Self-identity and gender



'How consistent is this relative gender gap between young men's and women's preference of religion as the main self-identifier?' This was further explored by disaggregating gender across several variables - such as regional, rural-urban and socioeconomic status.

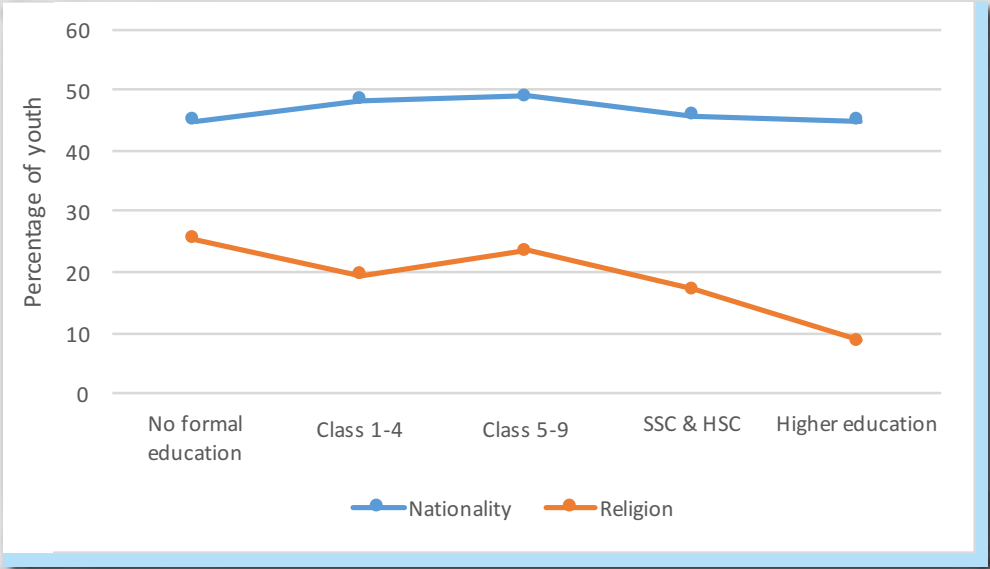
An interesting pattern was found when the socioeconomic status filter was used. Young women from the poorest households preferred religion as the most preferred marker of their self-identity compared to young men from the same socioeconomic status. When it came to young people from rich households, young men preferred to identify themselves in terms of religion more than women.

Mind the gap: How does the gender gap of religion as self-identity change with economic status?



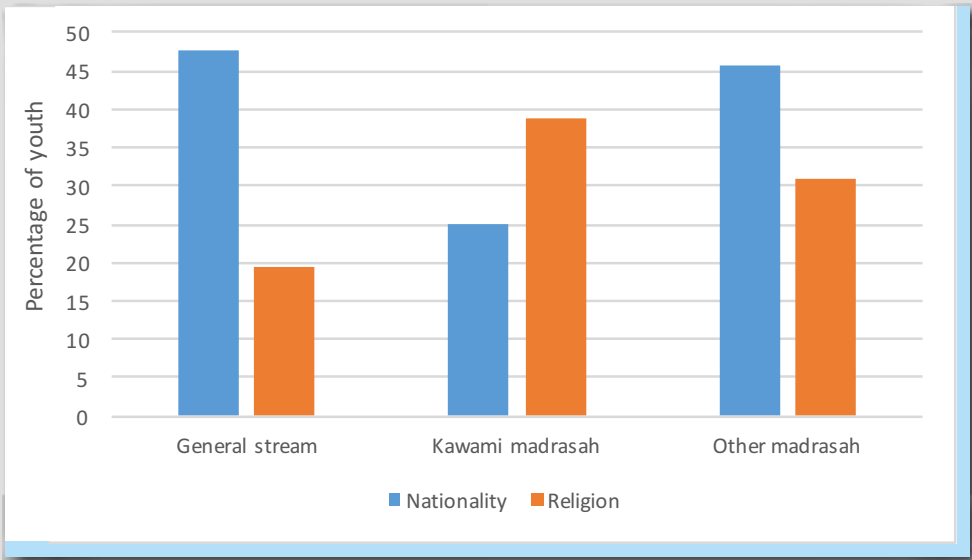
Young people with SSC and higher levels of education opted for 'religion' less compared to those who had no formal education. In contrast, the number of young people who chose 'nationality' as part of their self-identity was significantly higher and it remained relatively unchanged across different levels of educational.

Self-identity and level of education



The answers also varied depending on the type of educational institutes the youth belonged to. A high number of people with Qawmi madrasah background preferred ‘religion’ over ‘nationality’ compared to those belonging to the general stream of education and other madrasahs.

Self-identity and type of educational institution

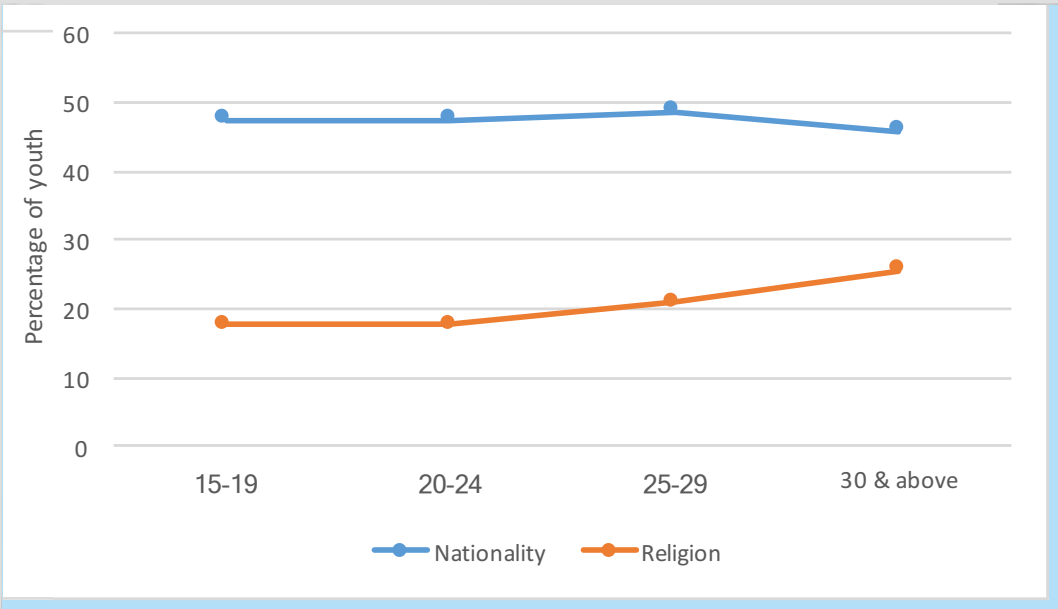


Age also seemed to play an important role in defining one’s self-identity. ‘Nationality’ as an integral part of self-identity remained predominant across the different age groups. The gap between ‘nationality’ and ‘religion’ narrowed post 25 years and beyond.

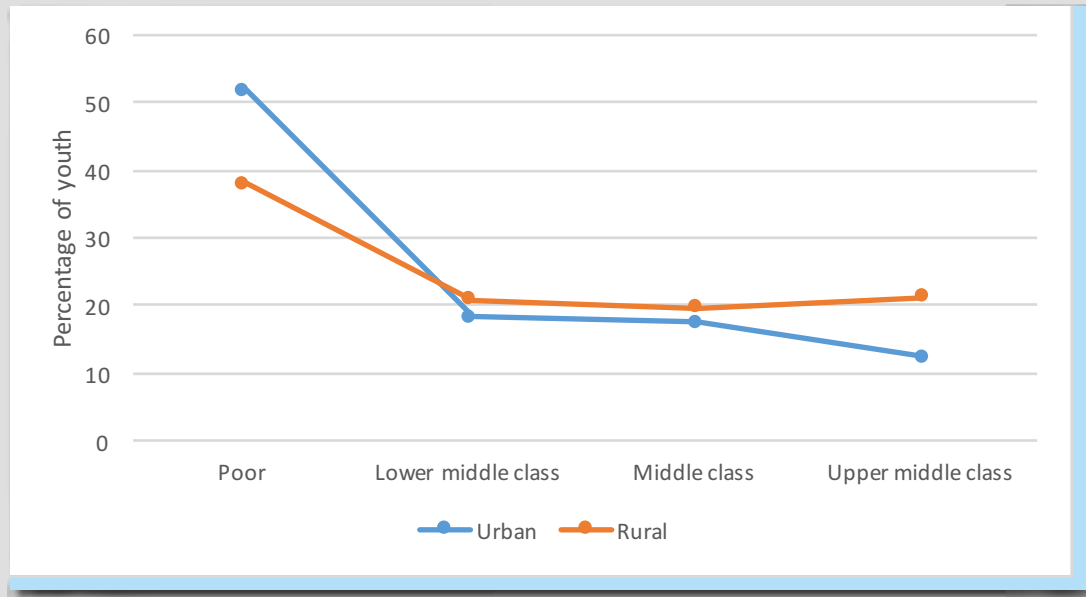
Self-identity and age

We also explored if ‘religion’ as part of self-identity had any relevance with the participant’s socioeconomic and rural-urban statuses. Given the growth in rural income and the rise of a rural middle-class, this was an important pattern to examine. An expected general pattern was observed - young people with improved economic status preferred ‘religion’ less, as indicated in the graph below.

However, there is a rural-urban divide here - young people who came from a rural middle-class background, especially the upper middle-class, reported a much higher preference for ‘religion’ compared to their urban counterparts. The young urban poor, on the other hand, has a stronger preference for ‘religion’ compared to their rural counterparts.



Religion as self-identity: Socioeconomic status and rural-urban pattern



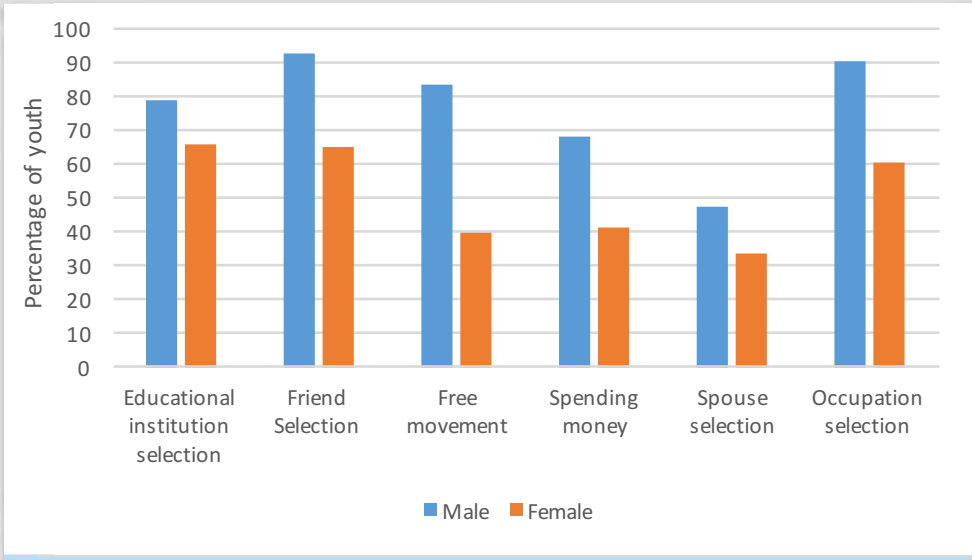
Freedom of choice: Persistent gender gap

Establishing at least some degree of independence is a major area of concern for young people, as in most cases they must continuously engage or negotiate with their parents/guardians to ascertain their ‘freedom of choice’ in different spheres of their lives. During the survey, the youth were asked about the extent of freedom they enjoy in certain activities, such as choosing friends/ spouse/educational institutions/occupation, spending money, and physical mobility.

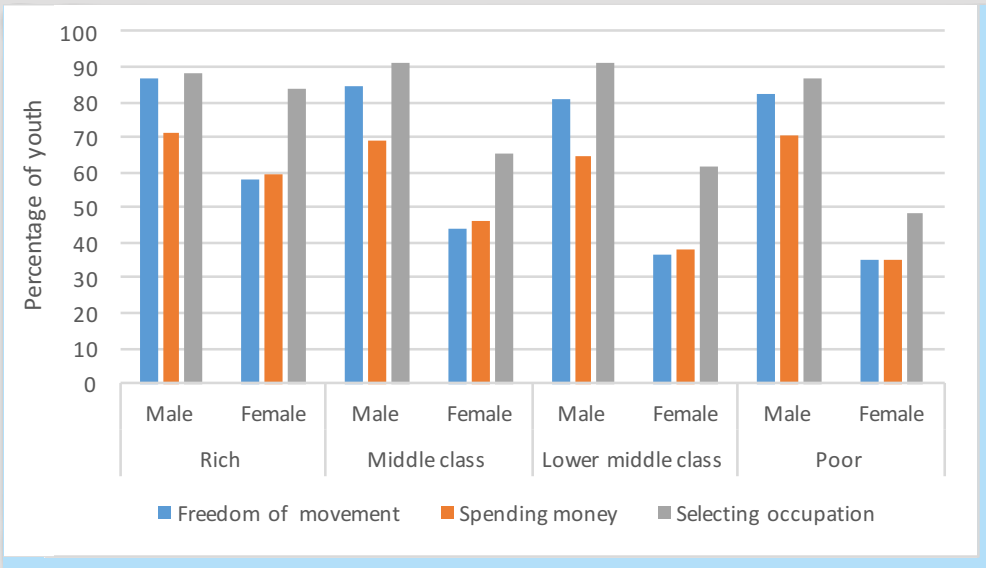
Overall, the ‘freedom of choice’ appears to be quite high, except in the cases of ‘spending money’ and ‘spouse selection’. But when the gender disaggregated results were looked at, a massive gap was found between the experiences of young men and

women across all the different aspects considered here. The gender gap in terms of ‘freedom of choice’ was also seen and this remains to be largely invariant to economic status, suggesting that this is a persistent challenge.

Freedom of choice and gender



Freedom of choice and gender: Persistence across economic status



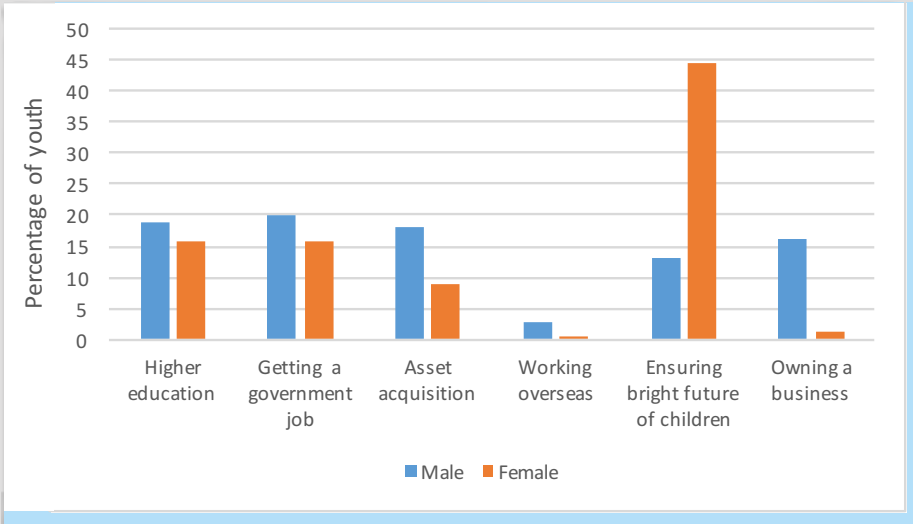
Youth aspirations: Focus on education and intergenerational investments

During the survey, the researchers tried to get some idea about the person’s goals in life. In particular, they were asked, “Among the different things that you want to achieve in life, what is the single most important one?”

As this was an open-ended question, the range of their responses was quite varied. However, there were a few particular ones that turned out to be the most prominent or common.

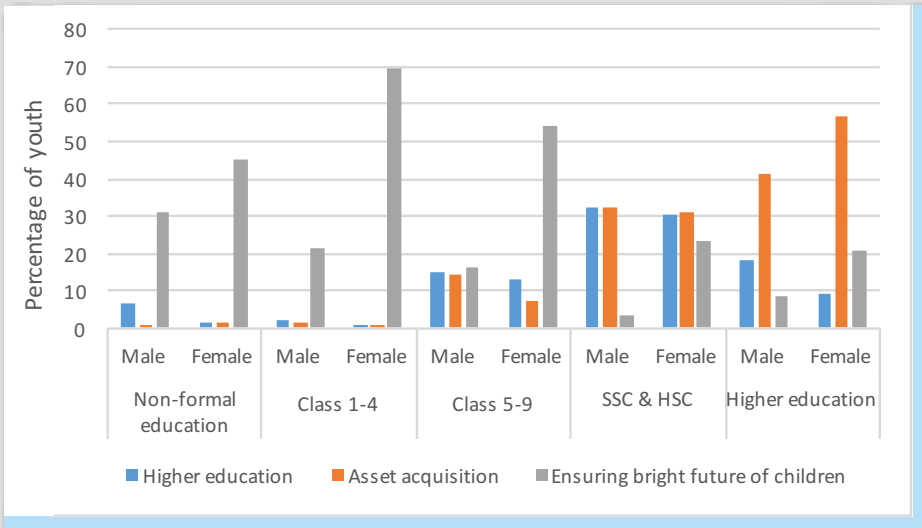
From the gender disaggregated results, it was seen that while ‘ensuring a bright future for their children’ is the most common goal among the young women, for men it is ‘getting a government job’, followed closely by higher education, asset acquisition and owning a business. All of these are important to women as well, but to a much lesser degree.

Life goals on the basis of gender



Disaggregating the youth’s most important life goals further - on the basis of gender and education - it was seen that ‘education’ is a big driver of the responses for young women who received higher education (‘ensuring bright future for children’ as the predominant life goal is replaced by life goals of ‘higher education’ and ‘asset acquisition’).

Life goals on the basis of gender and educational level



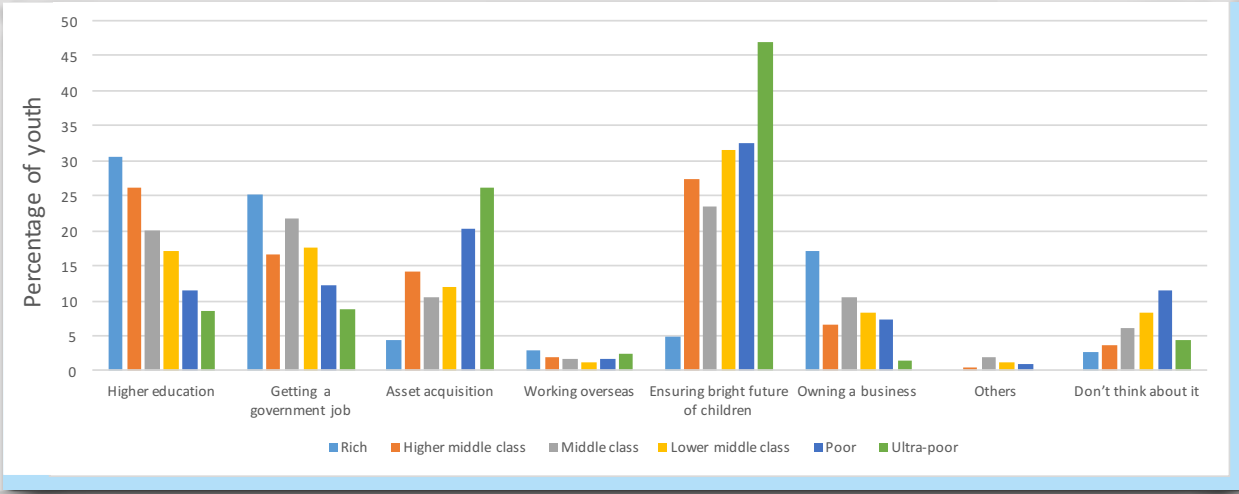
From results disaggregated by self-perceived socioeconomic status of the households, substantial difference was noticed among the priorities of youth coming from different socioeconomic backgrounds.

For example, ‘ensuring a bright future for their children’ is the priority for majority of the youth coming from ultra-poor households, followed by ‘asset acquisition’. On the other hand, for those coming from rich households, obtaining ‘higher education’, ‘getting a government job’ and ‘owning a business’ are among the most common goals. If the overall picture is considered, these responses make sense. Those who are ultra-poor, are often unable to make much changes in their own lives due to lack of scope and time. For them, the only sustainable pathway out of poverty is to ensure a better future for their next generation, which is why they try to invest in their children’s future as much as possible. In doing so, they particularly invest in their children’s education (ie, human capital development) and in establishing a solid asset base.

On the contrary, those coming from rich socioeconomic backgrounds do not need to worry about ‘acquiring assets’ and ‘a bright future for their children’ (as their high socioeconomic status often ensures their children’s access to quality education and high-quality services). This is why, they are able to focus on ways of ensuring that they maintain their high socioeconomic status (indirectly by improving human capital and directly by obtaining high-quality jobs and investing in their own business).

Overall, about 9 per cent of the youth interviewed reported ‘not thinking about their future’ and this shows an interesting inverse U pattern with the youth from the richest and the poorest background (reporting the lowest on this).

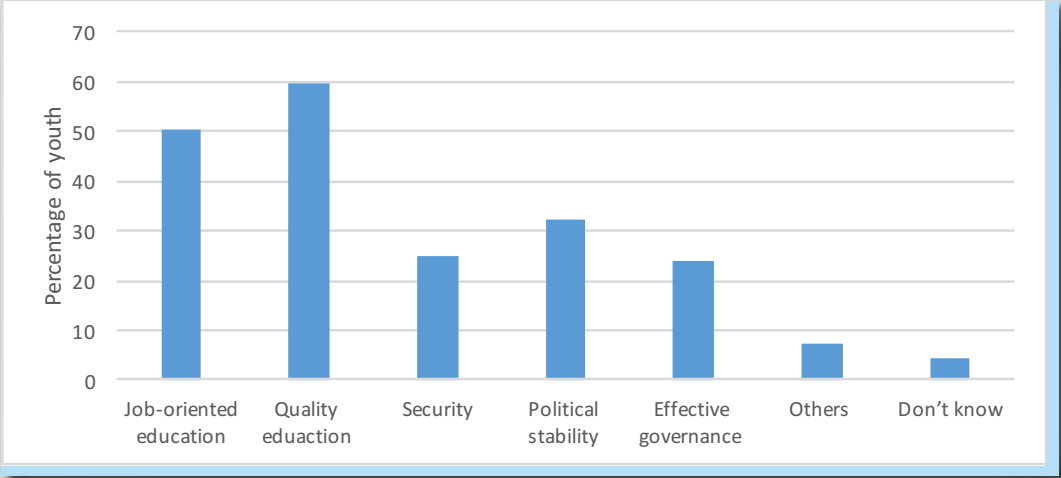
Life goals and socioeconomic status



Expectation about the country: Drivers and constraints

Given that the youth are a substantial portion of the total population of Bangladesh and the country’s future direction will depend a lot on them, it is important to know what their thoughts and expectations are about the country’s future. In order to get a sense of this, several relevant questions were asked. In responding to “Which factors do you consider to be the most important for the country’s socioeconomic development?”, the majority identified two key themes - one related to education in terms of more job-oriented and improved quality of education, while the other set of factors related to security, political stability, effective governance, etc.

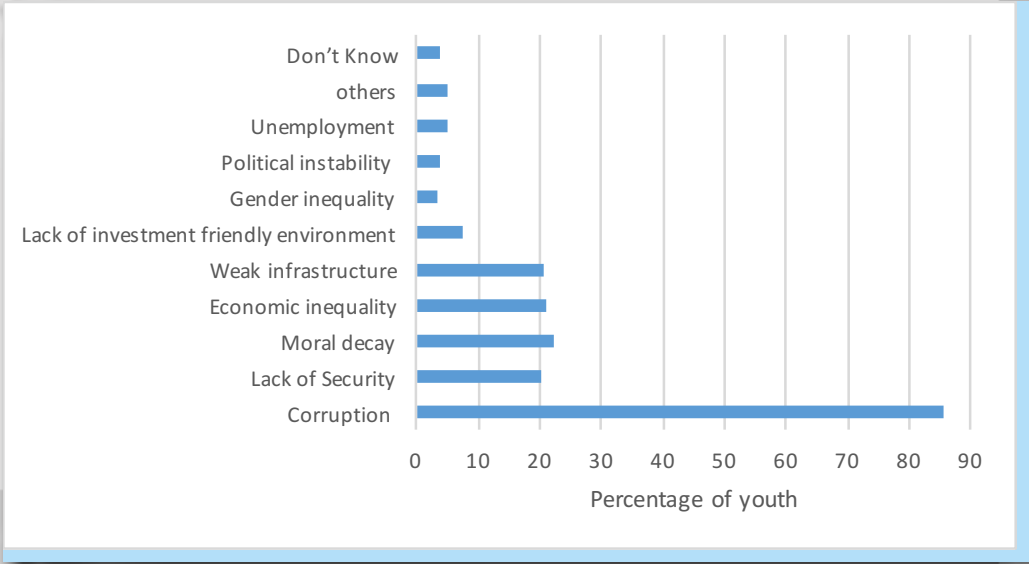
Key drivers of development



**Please note that multiple responses were recorded here.*

The participants were also asked what they considered to be major obstacles in achieving socioeconomic development of the country. The most frequent response, by far, was ‘corruption’, followed by related issues of poor governance such as ‘lack of security’ and ‘moral decay’.

Key constraints to development



**Please note that multiple responses were recorded here.*

Moving forward

A number of interesting patterns as to how the youth self-identified themselves were found. In the overall picture, young people predominantly preferred ‘nationality’ followed by ‘religion’ as integral parts of themselves. This calls for further analysis and research. The role of ‘religion’ and ‘nationality’ in forming one’s self-identity and how these interact to form opinions, shape perspectives and politics of the youth are vital when it comes to understanding the future of the society and its polity. The gender and rural-urban divide, especially among the youth from the middle socioeconomic class is of particular importance for deeper understanding. Young women are at a disadvantage with respect to all major domains of ‘freedom of choice’, and this disadvantage is persistent across all economic statuses. These ‘unfreedoms’ are both intrinsically and instrumentally important, as they are adversely affecting their life goals and human potential. A better understanding of the relationship between such perceived ‘unfreedoms’ (with the relative importance of ‘religion’) and self-identity found among young women is required.

Aspirations measured in terms of life goals by the youth in the aggregate is also highly gendered. Young men expressed relatively stronger aspirations of entrepreneurship such as ‘owning a business’, or ‘asset acquisition’ compared to young women.

Relatively lower level of gender gap were found in terms of life goals in areas that are related to ‘education’ or ‘employment’. Interestingly, few participants chose the option of ‘migrating overseas’ as their main life goal. Young women, who were less educated or whose educational level was below SSC, preferred the option of ‘ensuring a bright future for their children’ as their most important life goal. This indicates that there is a critical need for policies and interventions design to ensure the continuation of female education beyond SSC.

We also found a rich-poor divide in terms of life goals - youth from poorer households tend to prioritise ‘ensuring a bright future for their children’ as a life

goal as opposed to those who belonged to higher levels of economic status. This only indicates that more interventions are needed in pursuit of making youth from poorer backgrounds more financially sound. The youth think quality general education is the most important driver for the overall development of the country, followed by good governance which includes security and political stability, and tackling corruption.

-Md Shakil Ahmed is a research associate and Anindita Bhattacharjee is a senior research associate at BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD), BRAC University.





Am I okay?

Research-led insights into the provision of sexual and reproductive health information for youth in the digital age

Bachera Aktar and Pushpita Ray

For the fifth of Bangladeshis that arguably need it most, social stigma remains a major barrier to accessing reliable sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) information.

Of the 19 per cent of Bangladeshis estimated by the UN to be aged 15-24, few have access to reliable SRHR information or services because of the shame and stigma attached to discussing these issues with young people, especially if they are unmarried. Inadequate access to SRHR information and services makes young population highly vulnerable to health risks and discriminatory treatment.

Young people often enter their reproductive years poorly informed about their own bodies, health and wellbeing. The stigmatisation of sex and sexuality obstructs effective SRHR communication and compels young Bangladeshis to seek information elsewhere.

Increasingly the source of this information is the internet.

Online sites offer a wide range of ways for young people to acquire SRHR information. Unlike other sources of health information, the internet offers portability, anonymity, the opportunity to formulate questions and seek personalised responses, and the ability to interact with peers who are not local and not connected through face-to-face networks.

While the internet has resulted in an explosion of sources of SRHR information, they are usually outside formal government health and education domains.

The Centre of Excellence for Gender, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (CGSRHR) at the James P Grant School of Public Health, BRAC University, in collaboration with the Amsterdam Institute of Social Science Research, University of Amsterdam, recently conducted a study titled *Digital Sister for Urban Youth* to assess the sexual and reproductive health and rights

information and service needs of urban Bangladeshis aged 15-24.

Financial support for the study was provided by NWO, the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research.

The objective was to explore the use of online platforms by Bangladeshi urban youth seeking SRHR information. The study looked at the types of SRHR information that urban Bangladeshi youth sought, and the platforms they used to obtain that information.

Researchers conducted focus group discussions with over 200 young men and women (aged 15-24) from 11 universities, schools and youth-based organisations in Dhaka and Chittagong. In addition, researchers analysed 1,000 questions about SRHR issues posted on Maya Apa, the online anonymous messaging platform.

The study found that young people use a variety of digital media as sources of SRHR information.

Search engines like Google, social networking sites like Facebook and video-sharing sites like YouTube were popular sources of both information and networking with peers and the outside world.

Young people were more comfortable obtaining SRHR information online - and on their own - than with discussing these topics openly. Privacy and anonymity were important considerations. The advantages of accessibility and availability were also important - digital platforms provided ease of access from any device, anywhere, and searches resulted in an abundance of readily available information.

Respondents said that they were allowed to use digital devices - laptops, desktops and smartphones - and the internet for educational purposes. They said there were neither gatekeepers nor guards to monitor their activities on digital media. This made searches for sensitive topics like sex and sexuality simple.

One 22-year-old woman said, “I turn to Google because I can hide my identity there.”

Another reason for preferring online platforms over personal interaction was the fear of judgment from those they sought advice or information from.

Respondents told researchers that young people asking questions about sex or sexuality were often regarded as morally bad.

The anonymity of online interaction helped them to preserve the social image of being ‘a good person.’

One young woman said, “We still live in a society where this [SRHR issues] is taboo. I won’t let someone judge me for asking a question. Anonymity is very important to me.”

A lack of access to other available sources has meant that pornography also plays a vital role in disseminating

“Google is a solution for hiding identity, because no one is able to know my name or identity on Google.”



information about sex and sexuality for this age group.

Young people, mostly males, sought out pornography out of curiosity. Male participants reported that men of their age group were attracted to watching pornography and thought this may have negative consequences on their health. Social and cultural restrictions on accessing sexuality-related information or even discussing such issues were important drivers for seeking information elsewhere.

The study found that people in this age group were mostly interested in learning about their bodies, sex, sexuality and sexual performance. They were very interested in finding

“We are still in a society where this is (SRH issues) a taboo. I would not let someone to judge me for what I am asking.”

solutions to their personal SRHR-related problems and concerns.

An analysis of online messaging platform queries found that young people asked questions as basic as “What is sex?” to very personal queries about genital size and body shape.

Male health questions were mostly related to sexual performance, masturbation, the size and shape of the genital organ, premature ejaculation and erectile dysfunction.

Female health questions focused on menstruation, including late or irregular periods and abdominal pain during menstruation, and on emergency contraception and family planning.

Some examples of questions asked on Maya Apa are: During group discussion, many girls reported facing problems regarding irregular or late periods and abdominal pain during periods.

“I am having irregular periods. What can I do to make my period regular?”
[Female, 24 years]

“The size of my penis is 4 inches. Is it okay?”
[Male, 22 years]



Some reported feelings of shame about their bodies related to pubertal changes and vaginal discharge. Most males frequently mentioned masturbation and wet dreams, and expressed concerns about the negative impact of this on their health.



Sex, sexuality and STDs/STIs were common areas of interest among both young men and women, although men reported this more. Respondents said people of their age group were very curious about sex and sexuality.

Sex and sexuality-related information covers a range of issues including sexual orientation, sexual intercourse and performance, and the relationship between sex and pregnancy.

Male respondents said pornography was a popular source of information about sex and sexuality in their age group, followed by YouTube videos and closed Facebook pages.

Female respondents reported that young women of their age group mostly searched for menstrual health issues, especially for ways of making irregular periods regular. Some adolescent girls said that after menarche they searched online for medicine to stop menstruation. During group discussion, young women shared about their experiences of sexual harassment in daily life. Almost all female

participants said that women of their age were worried about sexual harassment. Male participants said that young men were also victims of sexual harassment, mostly in public places and by older men. They reported several forms of sexual harassment, including male-to-male, female-to-male, and harassment by transgender people.

Both male and female respondents said that people of their age were also concerned about romantic relationships. Female respondents said young women in romantic relationships most often faced pressure from their partners to have sexual relations.

Young people want to receive SRHR information in a private and discrete

manner that keeps their identity anonymous. They want a trustworthy medium where they can share their personal queries and opinions while maintaining privacy. This is one of the main reasons why they rely on cyberspace more than on their close friends and relatives.

They acknowledge that online platforms were not always accurate.

Despite the drawbacks, they still consider it an open space and a source of information that is not available elsewhere.

Bachera Aktar is a senior coordinator and Pushpita Ray is a senior research assistant at the James P Grant School of Public Health, BRAC University.



DID YOU KNOW

Women in sub-Saharan Africa are as likely to die during pregnancy or childbirth as women in 19th century England when Charles Dickens described these horrors in *Oliver Twist* and *A Christmas Carol*.

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Tea stalls and hard talk Engaging men and boys in the Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar in the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence

Jebi Rahman

Perched on a hilltop in Chakmarkul, Teknaf, a makeshift stall selling snacks and tea plays impromptu host to a group of young men. The narrow seating area is shaded from the midday sun by a thatched bamboo and tarp cover. One side overlooks a verdant green landscape. On the other side a sprawling mass of settlements that many of the tea stall participants currently call home stretch out as far as the eye can see.

There are no cups of tea at this gathering. Instead, tea stalls are a convenient place in the densely populated camps to raise awareness about the pressing protection issues that concern the men and boys who frequent them.

Two BRAC staff members, dressed in magenta pink staff vests and baseball caps, facilitate a discussion on child, early and forced marriage. Nine adolescent boys, in their late teens, lean in on low plastic stools to listen to

the social and health implications if they get married and get women pregnant at a young age.

The tea stall owner seems unperturbed that no one is buying his goods as he

listens in as well. Passers-by, mostly older men or younger boys, peer in or linger for a while before moving on with their day. It is a curious conversation for all.



Rising rates of child early and forced marriage

Decades of persecution by the Myanmar military has seen the Rohingya community adopt child marriage as a strategy to prevent girls from being raped by the army. The rationale is that if a girl who reaches puberty is married and gets pregnant immediately, she will not be a target for soldiers. If a girl is raped before she is married, it will be harder to find her a husband as she will be considered ‘damaged good’ by her own community. Stigma about rape is deep-rooted.

In November 2017, Human Rights Watch highlighted the hundreds of reported cases of sexual violence against Rohingya women and girls before they fled Myanmar last year. The main barrier interviewees gave for not reporting rape or seeking healthcare, despite experiencing severe pain, was stigma and shame. It is common to prevent women and girls from openly talking about rape.

Child marriage is often a response to the fear of sexual assault and harassment in the densely populated and mostly poorly-lit camps. Families, as many as 16 per cent headed by vulnerable single mothers, have had to make shelters among strangers. The threat of trafficking is high.

This confines women and in particular adolescent girls, within their shelters, despite the stifling heat. Cultural and religious practices about female modesty and *purdah* (the practice of screening women from men or strangers) means they cannot even leave their home to use the bathroom without wearing a *burqa*. These garments are in short supply, and often have to be shared by female household members.

A study by Plan International on the experiences of adolescent girls in the camps in April 2018 revealed that one of the most pressing challenges they face is the lack of freedom of movement. Unlike men and boys, many are not at liberty to roam the camps, access services without permission from the head of the household, or spend their spare time sitting in tea stalls.

Humanitarian agencies are concerned that child marriage is being used as a harmful coping mechanism by families

to access additional food rations. Ration cards are distributed per household, and families have been known to separate, or claim they are separated, to ward off food insecurity. A married couple can be put forward as a different household.

Polygamy as a coping mechanism

Polygamy, or more specifically polygyny, where a man has two or more wives, is also rising. The practice is culturally accepted among Rohingya Muslims, as Islamic marital jurisprudence allows a man to take up to four wives. The practice has increased due to the scarcity of men in the community, however.



There are 5 per cent more women than men aged 18-59 years old in the camps.

Significant numbers of Rohingya men were killed by the military in Myanmar in the latest attacks. Surveys carried out by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) in November 2017 conservatively estimated that 75 per cent of the 6,700 Rohingyas killed due to violence were male. An undetermined number of men have also migrated beyond the settlements in Cox’s Bazar in search of livelihood opportunities.

The predicament with polygyny in the camps is that, instead of treating all wives equally as Islam prescribes, Rohingya men are abandoning their existing wives, who often have large families and small children to take care of. They set up homes with their new brides, leaving the former to fend for themselves with a multitude of daily tasks in hazardous conditions, from collecting firewood and water to rain-proofing their shelters.

Polygyny has been classified by workers in the aid sector as gender-based violence, as a result of the disruption it is causing within families suffering from trauma.

Marriage: An easier prospect

The tea stall owner interjects to give his understanding of why the rate of marriage has increased in the camps. In Myanmar, the process was made difficult for the Rohingya by the authorities. Before getting married, they had to submit a form at the marriage registration office, pay a sizeable fee, and wait for approval. In the camps, families do not need to go through these strict legal procedures and costs. In fact, due to their lack of recognised legal status, Rohingyas cannot have births, marriages or deaths legally registered in Bangladesh.

The marriage takes place under a religious ceremony, and the groom’s family demands a dowry from the bride’s, even though Islamic law does not permit dowries. The BRAC staff discuss this cultural and religious contradiction with the boys in their group, and whether it is fair for women and girls and their families.

Domestic and intimate partner violence: Also on the rise

The conversation switches to domestic and intimate partner violence, which is a rising concern in this protracted and highly stressful situation. One of the boys in the group does not grasp what the

dilemma is. “Surely it is okay to beat your wife?” he asks.

The BRAC staff shake their heads in dismay. Before starting the discussion, they had appointed a role model from the Rohingya community to help reinforce their messages against sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). They turn to him for support.

“It’s *gunah*,” he says, using the Arabic word for ‘sin’, and appealing to the Islamic faith of his peers. Together with the BRAC staff, he explains why it is not acceptable to be physically or psychologically abusive towards family members, or to anyone for that matter.



Protection: A crisis within a crisis

The Rohingya crisis is at its core a protection crisis, states the humanitarian community Joint Response Plan for 2018, led by the Inter-Sector Coordination Group in Cox’s Bazar. From the atrocities in Myanmar to talks of relocation in Bangladesh, to the ultimate question of repatriation, the rights and wellbeing of Rohingya women, men, girls and boys, must be protected. Root causes need to be addressed and comprehensive solutions found.

A major focus of BRAC’s sexual and

gender-based violence work has been on setting up women friendly spaces. Over time, these have come to be known as ‘*shanti khana*’, meaning ‘peaceful house’ in both Bangla and the Rohingya language. They are places where women and adolescent girls can access legal case management, guidance, referrals and counselling support.

“Women and adolescent girls were asked what they want to do in these spaces,” explains Tahmina Yeasmin, who is leading BRAC’s protection programme in Cox’s Bazar of the two-way dialogue they have developed with the Rohingya community.

“They expressed interest in embroidery, painting, having the newspaper read to them so that they can keep up-to-date on their situation. They wanted a safe space to spend time with their children, or find a spot to sleep away from their own shelter.”

Handicraft, tailoring, drawing and newspaper reading now form part of the daily activities in the women friendly spaces. “Creative and informative activities, and talking to one another help to heal the psychosocial damage they have been through,” says Yeasmin.

So far, BRAC staff have provided 112,215 psychosocial support sessions. Leadership sessions have also been

provided to women to help them make decisions that concern them and their children.

Exposing new vulnerabilities

Earlier this year, given the unfolding sexual and gender-based violence issues, BRAC added a new component to its SGBV portfolio. Recognising the different roles that men and boys can play in these problems and their solutions, and the fact that many perpetrators are in need of assistance themselves, BRAC, together with UNHCR, initiated a programme to engage men and boys in sexual and gender-based violence prevention and response.

The aims of the initiative are two-fold, as Samsad Asad Khan, senior protection assistant (SGBV) at UNHCR, outlines, “Our objectives for engaging men and boys is to reduce violence in the Rohingya community, and to provide equitable access to services for male survivors of violence.” Shakh Jahidur Rahman, a men

and boys engagement manager at BRAC, adds, “To make a concrete and sustainable sexual and gender-based violence programme, engaging men and boys is essential, as they can be perpetrators, survivors, and agents of change.”

Pledging to never commit, condone or remain silent

Engaging men and boys has, in the past decade or so, emerged as a vital strategy for ending gender-based violence in crisis settings. BRAC has been increasing

the participation of men and boys in preventing violence against women, as part of its gender equality and community empowerment work, for a number of years.

With permission from UNHCR, BRAC invited an expert in sexual and gender-based violence, Suhail Abualsameed, with experience of working in displacement contexts in Jordan, Kenya and Greece, to design a tailored intervention in Cox's Bazar.

A situation assessment was carried out in April 2018, which included focus group discussions and one-to-one interviews with *majhis* (camp leaders), *imams* (religious leaders), a cross-section of Rohingya boys, parents, young adults, men and women, and frontline staff.

The assessment found that there were a lack of programmes targeting men and boys in the camps, although actors in the sector acknowledged that the need for such efforts are great. Initial outreach work by BRAC's Community Based Protection community outreach members revealed worrying anecdotal evidence of sexual and gender-based violence against men and boys both pre-displacement in Myanmar, and within the camps.

Another opportunity the assessment identified is that the stakeholders showed an interest in engaging and learning. The focus group discussions and capacity

"We raise awareness about a number of issues, including child marriage, polygamy, dowry, domestic and intimate partner violence. We also talk about maintaining healthy family relationships, and positive constructions of masculinity," explains Rahman. "We hold these discussions in tea stalls, community centres, learning centres, child friendly spaces, mosques, sports grounds - wherever we can find space and people."



building sessions provide a chance to break the monotony of everyday life in the camps, and a space for social interaction. As a result, the community-based awareness-raising discussions, such as the tea stall conversations, play a significant feature in this outreach programme.

Other activities to engage men and boys include rapport building through sports and games. Before launching into these difficult debates, staff invest time to get to know the community and gain their trust. Sports and games help them to break the ice, and over time, speak to young men and boys about the harmful norms of masculinity and their impacts on the lives of women and girls and their own lives.

Seventy-six men and boys groups have been set up so far, each comprising of 6-20 similarly aged members, to work with on these activities, with a view to increasing this significantly in 2019. Group members are encouraged to speak out against violence, and contribute to developing positive ideas about masculinity among their friends.

125 role models have also been identified from the Rohingya community, who demonstrate a positive attitude towards the issues discussed, and have the ability to be an agent of change. In order to diversify leadership within the camps, role models cannot be *majhis*, although having *imams* in this position is helpful. One of the challenges the situation assessment highlighted is that in the absence of education and media outlets, *imams* can often be the only source of

learning and information for the Rohingya community. Many of the *imams* hold very conservative interpretations of Islam, and can present a barrier towards the change the programme seeks to achieve.

Initial sensitisation activities were held with *imams* by Abualsameed, and there are future plans to run more of these, with *imams* and *majhis*, in partnership with Islamic Foundation. Rather than working against religion, and its associated risks of radicalisation, the programme endeavours to work with the tools of resilience and healing it can bring.

Another challenge the assessment mentioned is the lack of experience frontline staff have in tackling violence and working in humanitarian settings. In connection to this, there is a risk that the activities could trigger traumatic reactions from participants, and that the specialised mental health support services needed are few and far between. Abualsameed ran a four-day training for BRAC programme organisers, covering the principles of SGBV and engaging men and boys, and co-created the programme strategy and work plan with them and BRAC staff. In addition, they received sessions on male engagement from UNHCR, and psychosocial first aid from BRAC.

The programme organisers for this initiative are male, aged 24-30 years, and recruited from the host community. They can communicate in the local Chittagong dialect, which is similar to the Rohingya language, as well as in Bangla and English. They generally have Bachelor's and Master's degrees,

given the myriad of complexities and sensitivities the programme tackles. Each of the programme organisers is responsible for overseeing of the men and boys' groups, supporting the role models, and facilitating awareness raising discussions each week.

To date, 18,642 men and boys have been reached through community-based and sports and games interventions. The programme's ambition to work towards ensuring equitable access to services for male survivors of SGBV is harder to achieve, points out Rahman, due to the dearth of service providers working in this space.

"The other challenge," continues Rahman, "is engaging men and boys in a programme that does not develop their skills per se, or lead to education or employment opportunities". The young men at the tea stall are bored in the camps. Other than collecting food rations and carrying them home, there is little else for them to do. They don't even have a football pitch here in Chakmarkul, Camp 21 out of 32.

Back home, they used to go to school, and play football in their spare time. Some studied up to Class 9 or 10, and wanted to continue with their studies. Those that worked were involved in farming or fishing in the land they had to leave behind on the other side of the Naf River.

They are interested in learning computer skills or mechanics in the camps, to help them earn money when they return. However, there is no humanitarian response budget for formal education or youth development, and adolescent boys and girls are in particular danger of becoming a 'lost generation'.

Alcohol and drug abuse are also said to be increasing among men and boys as they grapple with the horrors they have seen and the stress of not having the means to support their families.

The conversation turns to eve-teasing, or public sexual harassment of women and girls. A couple of the boys' snigger and suggest this is normal. They catch themselves as the BRAC programme organisers look at them sternly, and their peers turn away, shamefaced. "Of course," says one of the boys earnestly, "with the right guidance, we will change."

Jebi Rahman is an international and sustainable development consultant, and has previously worked with BRAC UK.

"Of course," says one of the boys earnestly, "with the right guidance, we will change"





Can play save a displaced generation?

Humanitarian Play Labs: A new model for children in displaced and refugee situations

Dr Erum Marium and Sarah-Jane Saltmarsh

Little colourful sanctuaries, shaded by bamboo verandahs, walls covered in handpainted flowers and ceilings lined with shamianas (the cloth commonly used by Rohingya women to decorate doorways). 30 tiny children under six years of age laughing, dancing, playing, rolling and tumbling over each other. The bells of the tambourine being shaken, the chanting of tiny voices singing songs and the squeals as the skipping rope is turned. These are Humanitarian Play Labs in the Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar.

In September 2017 we drove down the uneven roads of the small coastal town of Ukhiya through a sea of shelters. The car bumped and jolted on the road as we entered Kutupalong Registered Camp. There were women, infants and children everywhere. All the eyes we looked into were veiled with the same lost look.

On the side of one of the hills was a child-friendly space, clinging onto the edge of a small piece of dirt, shaded by a lone tree. A rare splash of colour and sound in the eerily quiet, monotonously orange and white camps where the only other consistent sound was raspy coughing. We stepped

into a room full of children who had seen more trauma in the last two weeks than most people have seen in our whole lives. Tiny, unseeing eyes, tired, cut and bruised feet and hands who have carried siblings and solar panels for days, holding onto pencils and toys.

They spoke as if they were 60 years old, and yet not one had turned six.

We talked to Amin who looked at us with a vacant face and said, "I watched my daddy get killed. They found him in the forest and cut him and I saw the blood." He did not cry, describing the torture with a completely normal face as if he was talking about what his house looked like. The painting in front of him had a person with blood coming out of his head, guns pointed at flailing hands, bodies in piles on

the ground and a helicopter in the sky.

Some children fought, others looked disinterested and stared blankly at the wall, and others peered around nervously at others. They threw the toys and pushed each other. The facilitators were trying hard, but keeping the children engaged in a completely unfamiliar place was not an easy task for anyone. One of the children started to sing an angry song, and another started to cry.

Of the million people who now live in the camps of Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, UNICEF estimates that half of them are under 18. The world is now witnessing the highest levels of displacement on record, with UNHCR estimating that we have nearly 25.4 million refugees, over half of whom are under the age of 18.

DID YOU KNOW

In 2016, 263 million children were out of school, according to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS). The total includes 63 million children of primary school age, 61 million adolescents of lower secondary school age and 139 million young people of upper secondary school age.

Building a lens of play, as well as protection

BRAC quickly realised that it would have to invent a new model. The facilitators started by asking the children a single question: what did you like doing in Myanmar? With that, a treasure chest was unlocked.

Boxes of Monopoly and Scrabble were removed and practical toys such as cars, cooking sets and dolls were introduced. Time and space was set aside for physical play. Boys and girls made human pyramids shaped like elephants and playing skipping games.

Facilitators heard children chanting *kabbiyas* (traditional Rohingya rhymes) and asked the children to help them learn the words. Specific times for recitation were set aside each day. The sound turned into a constant beat in the camps. Facilitators learnt the rhymes and started developing them into a cultural anthology.

Various research has shown that chanting has enormous positive effects on human cognitive abilities. A study done by Alfred Tomatis of the French Academy of Science and Medicine found that chanting sounds have a therapeutic effect on the body. According to research done at the Cleveland University, the rhythmic tones involved in chanting create a melodious effect in the body called the neuro-linguistic effect. When we know the meaning of what we are reciting, it creates a psycholinguistic effect on the body. A study by Dr Alan Watkins revealed that while chanting, our heart rate and blood pressure dip to its lowest in the day, and that it promotes a sense of well-being and helps us bond better with people around us, especially when practiced in a group.

Structure was introduced. While child-friendly spaces are open for children of all ages all the time, opening hours were divided into specific time slots where children of specific ages were welcome. The first two hours were for children aged 2-6, the second two hours were for children ages 6-14, there was a break when children would go home for lunch

and usually religious practice, and then the space would open in the afternoon for all ages.

A strong focus on mental health and child protection

Children talked a lot about revenge, and wanting to kill people who had wronged them and their family members. Not only were strong child protection and mental health components needed, but parents also had to be supported. We found out quickly that there was very little understanding among the newly-arrived community that people experiencing trauma need support.

Mental health and child protection pathways were developed. Frontline staff, known as barefoot counsellors, became the first point of contact, and received basic training and monthly refreshers in child protection and mental health. Barefoot counsellors were supervised by para-counsellors. One psychologist was assigned to help every five para-counsellors, and extreme cases were referred to public and private psychiatrists. High levels of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and grief were reported by staff at all levels.

Parents needed skills to support their children. A home-based prevention and case management outreach approach was implemented, with the para-counsellors tasked with regularly visiting 25 households each surrounding BRAC facilities.

Two facilitators looked after each space, one from the host community and one from the Rohingya community. The facilitators were trained for ten days in play therapy and art, as well as mental health and child protection. Refresher sessions were held every month. The facilitators were young and mostly female, and learning themselves as the spaces developed. For most of them, this was their first job, and the first time that the Rohingya women had spent significant time outside of the house. It was a journey for all involved.

After the first three months, which focused just on listening and learning about their culture and giving it back to them, focus group discussions began. Topics covered included what early childhood development meant in the Rohingya community, when should learning start and what role should play have in that. The discussions revealed that there was no concept of pre-primary education. Parents taught children basic pre-math and language, and then school began. We collected the informal pre-primary lessons that they taught and added them to the anthology.



Twelve months on from the crisis: Making a curriculum from a cultural anthology

It took one year to set the basic components of the model. Three objectives had emerged: create a space that is safe, one that nurtures children's natural spontaneity, and ensure that it preserves the culture of the Rohingya. A curriculum keeping these three principles in mind was developed from the anthology of learning gathered over the past 12 months.

The Humanitarian Play Labs sound like happiness. Hordes of children welcome visitors loudly and warmly, and give them pictures of people playing, colourful flowers and trees. Play Leaders struggle to contain the children's enthusiasm for singing and dancing.

What brought about this change in their behaviour? Time, of course, but these little hubs of fun undeniably also had a significant impact - just ask any of the parents peering in through the windows, or the passersby pausing to enjoy the rhythm of the singing and playing. It's not just the children that are calmer, but the whole community. The spaces have brought a new rhythm to the settlements, and act as a string of sanctuaries for the generation that everyone in the community cares the most about.

Continuing to grow

While the main tenets of the Humanitarian Play Lab have been set, it will continue to develop. For example, it was noticed that *kissa* (traditional folk tales) are known by most children. The tales are being documented and added to the anthology.

With the help of a team of volunteer architects, fathers are adding verandahs to the structures, mothers sewing the *shamianas* (traditional ceiling decorations made of coloured cloth) and children painting the walls. The spaces also now have their own name in the Rohingya language - *kele peeye neyora* - (universe of play).

A census is also currently being undertaken that will check on the status of children in every household in the camps.



The science of play

The Humanitarian Play Lab model is an extension of the Play Lab model, created by architects and play scholars from around the world, which has been operating for the last three years in Bangladesh, Uganda and Tanzania.

The basic idea is to ensure children in poor communities - and now displaced and refugee settings - can access activities that neuroscience shows helps to build young brains. The focus is on children aged 0-6, the years when the most significant part of a child's cognitive development happens. The central tenet is that a child's brain will be approximately 80% the size of an adult brain at just three years old.

The difference between Humanitarian Play Labs and Play Labs is the addition of playing to heal, as well as playing to learn.

Researchers argue that the potential benefits of play are enormous, extending beyond simply making kids ready for school to helping them prepare better for life. For children in a humanitarian crisis, the impact is even more powerful. If you want to see what play can do, there is no more clear evidence than in these colourful drawings, in the children's

self-esteem, and in the way that these children engage, make teams and cooperate.

BRAC is now scaling these play labs up to reach 70% of the Rohingya children aged 0-6 as well as children in the communities surrounding the settlements. As Child Friendly Spaces are a well-known concept in the humanitarian sector, Humanitarian Play Labs will operate within Child Friendly Spaces. The current 242 spaces for children in the camps will be 500 by the middle of 2019 and is planned to reach 1000 by the end of 2019.

In a world where nearly one person is forcibly displaced every two seconds as a result of conflict or persecution, and in Cox's Bazar, where 60 babies are being born each day, Humanitarian Play Labs hold an important key to making sure all of our smallest generations get the biggest start in life.

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What do young professionals want?

Nasif Rashad Khan

A few days back, I was having a conversation with a group of professionals about skills in Bangladesh. At one point in the discussion, a C-suite member of a large corporation stated it's impossible to understand today's young professionals.

I thought about that comment after the discussion. Is it really that difficult to understand what millennials, or Generation Z, aspires to be?

52.6 million search results, thousands of books, seminars, and articles with titles like *Kids These Days*, *Marketing Millennials*, *When Millennials Take Over* have been written, and it is a prominent segment of a USD 150 billion HR consulting market, but there are still not many conclusive answers.

There is one thing in common in almost everything that has been written though: there are very few stories from actual millennials. This piece is my attempt to fill that gap. I have taken an introspective look at my 6+ year-long professional career and tried to capture the three main reasons behind what I did and did not do, why, and what I have learned along the way.

The first thing that drives me is: I want to leave a mark on the world.

I knew from my school years that I wanted to do something meaningful. I did not know what that meant at the start, but as I began to work in different sectors (private/development/humanitarian) in different functions, it began to take shape. When I see a student from the madrasah medium who I used to train on leadership, and who is now breaking stereotypes by working in arts and media, or my work in responding to the Rohingya crisis, I feel that I am on my way to achieving what I had set out for.

Seeing positive change in people's lives is what gives that meaning. It is important for me to know what my organisation stands for, the values it holds, and how my work is contributing to the goal of the organisation.

The second thing that drives me is: I want to continually grow.

Learning, development,

and career growth are crucial. I have this aching sense that my time is short, and I want it to be meaningful. To make the best of it, I need to learn fast and grow faster. From my first job to my current, I have always been conscious of what I can learn from an organisation - both from the process of the work and from the individuals I work with - and whether I am seeing the growth that I deserve. I opt out of situations where I feel that my learning and growth is slowing down.

The third thing that drives me is: I want to be recognised both financially and psychologically.

Both are important to me and helps me to be motivated and committed to my



work. Apart from providing the necessary stability in life, financial recognition gives me the sense of the value of my work. On the other hand, through psychological recognition, I feel that my opinions are heard, my contribution are valued, and my presence is respected. For me, these two are inseparable and one cannot replace another.

A couple of things that I learned along the way: The road is not always smooth.

In the past 6+ years, I have worked on building strategic units in start-up and established organisations across the development and humanitarian sectors. And, during this time, I have worked on multiple functions, from programme design to resource mobilisation to project management and system design. It has not been an easy journey. I did not get what I wanted all the time. I could not witness my work contributing to the bigger picture all the time. I did not get recognition for my contribution all the time. There were rough patches that I had to endure. Throughout my journey so far, I built my ethos to ensure that my progression does not slow down.

There is a lot to learn from those with more experience.

In the early days of my career, I was not as open to learn as I am now. I was aggressive and wanted to see fast results, thus overlooked the need to learn from experienced professionals. Now having worked in different roles, I realise how important it is to learn from experienced professionals. Their insights gave me better understanding of the issues that I worked on. I learned to be humble from working with experienced professionals - from different walks of life - to collaborate to bring positive changes in the organisation.

Audacity - with humility - is crucial.

I learned that humility and audacity needs to go hand-in-hand to actually make things happen. I had to learn to navigate the system by myself, and exercise leadership wherever I could. Not every time I had the guidance - and I genuinely see the value of not having that, as that helped me grow as a person and as a professional. Though I did not get guidance all the time, but I found mentors. I still actively seek out for mentorship, both within the organisation and externally, from people who I look up to.

Results are the only thing that matters.

The most important thing that I learned

is I have to consistently deliver results at a high quality if I want to get recognition. Unless I pay my dues, recognition is hard to come by. Thus, I have learned to be humble and stay focused on delivering results.

Circling back to the point of whether millennials are that difficult to understand, probably there is no binary answer to this. When it comes to what we want from our lives, perhaps they are not that different from our earlier generational cohorts. The specifics of wants might be different, but it is fundamentally the same across all generations.

I cannot possibly speak on behalf of all the millennials of the world, but I can say this: the world is much different from the one that my earlier generations knew. With the advent of new technologies, there are immense possibilities for new innovations and development. On the flipside, it is easy to get distracted, both as an individual and as an organisation. Thus, the key concern for both the organisation and the individual is, how do we keep our focus right to achieve what we set out for?

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Note: This piece is written in the context of Bangladesh, keeping young professionals who belong to the millennial and/or Generation Z group in mind. Points raised and insights presented here are based on the writer's personal experiences and observations.



The Global Youth Development Index report by the Commonwealth Secretariat found that globally the participation of young people in formal politics is declining, underscoring growing frustration amid unmet aspirations, although digital activism, protests and volunteering are growing.

Role of youth organisations in the development of Bangladesh

Chiraranjan Sarker and Moon Moon Hossain

Bangladesh has the scope of being a future leader of countries where the youth have the space to be successful policymakers.

The Youth Development Department has been making strenuous efforts along with the Ministry of Youth and Sports to transform the youth segment of the country into an organised and productive power. It needs to be mentioned that Bangladesh is facing a paradoxical situation when it comes to tackling

issues concerning youth.

Youth in Bangladesh account for approximately 48 million of the total population. However, opportunities for this segment have been scant as reflected by the high unemployment rate in Bangladesh.

Failing to utilise their potential has a deep impact on the socioeconomic future of Bangladesh and its push towards achieving the status of a middle-

income country. Lack of guidance and safe space for expression is driving Bangladeshi youth to increasingly feel alienated, making them vulnerable to radicalisation and unlawful activities.

Youth organisations, NGOs and voluntary organisations play important roles in the development and welfare of youth in Bangladesh. Some organisations have performed tremendously well in upholding the role of young people in the country's development, especially over the last three decades.

Different roles for development

Most youth organisations work to eliminate poverty, improve education, and empower youth in the grassroots. Other organisations with similar focus include:

Relief and welfare organisations: These organisations are working to provide relief support. These organisations step in to support the affected people in case of a disaster, natural or man-made.

Service organisations: These organisations deliver services to the targeted segment. For example, some

organisations work specifically for the Dalit community, others with persons with disabilities, while others focus on violence against women and children.

Funding organisations: These organisations operate as conduits of foreign donors. They are engaged in making grants to organisations and enable local NGOs find foreign assistance.

Networking/coordinating organisations: These organisations work to facilitate mutual sharing of learning

and experiences and also promote mutual support and co-operation among the community.

Development organisations: These organisations operate to mobilise people in poverty through education and awareness so that they can nurture their development activities into success stories.

vi) Consulting organisations: These organisations provide consulting services to the government, donor agencies and other actors for successful completion of the programmes.



Youth empowerment

The Government of Bangladesh is morally entrusted to empower the youth for the overall development of the country. There are many skills development initiatives by the government, ones that especially focus on rural development through self-help. These initiatives include vocational training in shorthand and typewriting, watch repairing, radio mechanism, carpentry, photography, training on home management and childcare, nutrition, family planning, etc.

Entities like youth clubs operate as training and production centres with the aim to build income generation among marginalised groups such as women from rural areas, unemployed youth and landless labour. These centres also work on the reduction of illiteracy, development of health, nutrition and education so that young people, no matter where they are from, can develop awareness and participate in important decision-making.

Non-profit organisations like BRAC, Plan, Save the Children, Asia Foundation, and CARE work for youth empowerment in both rural and urban Bangladesh.

Microcredit programme

Imparting skills and vocational training are not enough to reduce unemployment, as employment opportunity in the formal sector is not proportional to the unemployment rate. In order to get the desired result, it is necessary to create self-employment opportunities.

However, due to poverty, even after receiving training on different trades, many young people fail to adopt self-employment projects. On the other hand, in the absence of collateral resources, youth from disadvantaged backgrounds have limited access to loans from the formal sector and thus normally depend on the informal sector where the cost of finance is traditionally high.

Taking in the reality that in order to properly utilise human resources and



expedite the youth empowerment process, organisations such as BRAC, ASA, Grameen Bank and other voluntary associations have focused on collateral-free credit programme. The main aim of these organisations is to direct their programmes towards integrating the youth into the empowerment process through self-employment and income generating activities.

They have a provision to reward and grant the youth and youth organisations (in cash and material) for their exceptional performance in self-employment, income generation, skills training, mobilisation of resources etc.

Data shows that most of the participants (58 per cent) have made profit from these projects. Rest could not make profit due to natural calamities, paying off previous loans from present credit, using the money in unproductive sector and non-cooperation of family members.

BRAC, ASA, Grameen Bank among others operate microcredit programmes through a ‘target group’ approach. The target population consists of communities in the remotest regions, most of who are young. This approach has increased the labour force participation rate and improved the overall socioeconomic condition of the country.

Other organisations, networks and programmes

Youth-led organisations and networks exist in almost every district of Bangladesh. Engaging rural youth increases the overall success rate of awareness campaigns, leading to better exposure in the international arena. JAAGO Foundation, Volunteer for Bangladesh (VBD), Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB), Youth Engagement and Support (YES) platforms, Red Cross Society, Bangladesh Girl Guides Association are some of the renowned organisations in this sector. They work on selected areas along with cross-cutting issues related to the youth of the country.

For example, JAAGO Foundation mostly works towards the betterment of people living below the poverty line. Additionally, they focus on quality education and professional growth.

Volunteer for Bangladesh is a platform where young people learn new skills. So far, volunteers have been arranging diverse programmes on education,



environment, health, law and rights, human rights, civic participation and democratic engagement for community development.

YES focuses on sensitising and nurturing strong ethical values and democratic governance amongst young people primarily at the local level and, on a limited scale at the national level, through cultural and other activities.

TIB believes that young people have the potential to transform their respective communities and tangibly fight corruption. Whereas older generations may have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo, the youth are usually more open to change and have the courage and strength to actively seek out that change.

Red Crescent Society has a youth wing named Red Crescent Youth. They have been implementing different activities like first aid training, health awareness training, orientation of HIV, anti-stigma

campaigns, establishing flower gardens and book banks, organising inter-school games, debates, painting and essay competitions, improving sanitation facilities, providing books and stationary materials to orphans and poor students etc in 50 schools of every year.

Bangladesh Girl Guides Association also played an important role in the development of Bangladesh 374,300 young members. They offer leadership training to girls and young women.

In addition, guiding has been incorporated into the student curriculum at the Government Physical Education College and at the Primary Teachers’ Training Institute. Every year more than 80 young women participate in training. Guiding is also an integral part of the secondary school curriculum for girls.

The main objective of Bangladesh Scout is to contribute to the development of young people in achieving their full physical, intellectual, social and spiritual

potential as individuals, as responsible citizens and members of local, national and international communities.

Apart from all these renowned institutions, there are 50 other youth-led organisations throughout Bangladesh, names of which may not be as well-known but nonetheless are bringing significant impact through their work.

All the organisations are working hard with limited capacities and budgets. Supporting them with the right resources, direction, coordination while focusing more on skills development, accountability, transparency and technological advancement will allow young people to play the role desired from them.

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Learning to weather the storm

Fostering BRAC's youth-led climate initiatives

Tahmina Hadi and Mrityunjoy Das

Climate change poses an existential threat to humanity.

One remediable consequence of climate change concerns inter and intra-generational justice.

Thirty years after the Brundtland Report highlighted the paradigm-shifting principle of sustainable development, little has been done to involve youth in the key decisions of our times.

The report titled *Our Common Future* and published by the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987, offered this definition:

“Sustainable development is development that meets the need of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

The principle of sustainability involves two elements-realising justice within and between generations, and undertaking economic development.

The impact of climatic variations

- including the intensification of natural disasters and adverse climatic modifications, will hinder current and future development.

These adverse effects will be unequally distributed according to geographical setting, socioeconomic status, entrenched gender inequalities and cultural issues.

Youth, especially those residing in developing and climate-sensitive countries, will suffer the most, primarily due to prevailing poor socioeconomic conditions.

It is imperative for youth-led initiatives and approaches to be integrated into the climate actions, at both local and national levels, of developing countries.

Definitions of youth

The definition of youth varies in different countries and among different multilateral bodies.

The United Nations defines youth as the

segment of the population aged between 15 and 24, whereas the Commonwealth defines youth as those aged 15 to 29.

The Bangladesh National Youth Policy (2003) defines youth as those aged 18 to 35.

BRAC's youth-driven initiatives on climate education

In 2016, the then disaster management and climate change programme, currently known as the humanitarian programme, in collaboration with BRAC's education programme convened a convention titled Kishoree Kishore Convention which was held in four regions-Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna, Rajshahi-of Bangladesh.

The primary objective of the convention was to foster the role of youth in disaster risk reduction (DRR), climate change adaptation, and the prevention of child

marriages, primarily through sensitisation and awareness-raising activities.

About 415 members of BRAC's adolescent clubs, aged 15-18, participated in the event. The convention facilitated the creation of youth-led, district-wise, location-specific DRR action plans.

Representatives of the adolescent group from each district designed disaster risk reduction action plans by integrating lessons learnt from the convention and from indigenous knowledge of their respective communities.

The objective of the initiative was to help participants in the age group identify climate-induced disasters and natural hazards, and to respond accordingly.

BRAC's education programme has developed a teacher's guide and activity calendar with the aim of raising awareness on climate change and environmental issues among children at BRAC primary and secondary levels and BRAC-supported non-governmental high schools in Bangladesh (from class 6 to 10).

The teacher's guide was developed in line with SDG Goal 13-Climate Action, and the National Curriculum and Textbook Board.

Various concepts, climate change, environmental factors have been incorporated into the learning material which includes aids like flipcharts and supplementary material.



Gonokendra, a peer mentoring, multi-purpose community learning centre, and Medhabikash, a scholarship initiative, have also been deployed to enhance climate change knowledge among children, the youth, and the community at large.

The approaches to sensitisation include

- Providing climate change education to primary and secondary school students
- Enhancing knowledge and raising awareness on climate change issues at the community level
- Promoting climate-friendly schools and develop students as future climate leaders
- Exploring climate change and disaster risk reduction (DRR) education through action
- Promoting the generation of ideas to enhance knowledge of climate change issues through education

Engaging youth in climate change actions

The United Nations estimates that in 2018, the global population of people aged 10 to 24 was approximately 1.8 billion.

Of this, some 90 per cent reside in developing countries.

In Bangladesh, those aged 10 to 24 numbered 48 million, according to the UNFPA (2014).

If growth rates hold, this number is likely to increase.

Involving younger generations in decision-making about climate actions could prove to be revolutionary. Young people are receptive, active, open to learning new ideas, innovative, and adaptable.

They have the power, as voters, to influence political leaders and implement action that supports mitigation and adaptation, and to push these issues higher up the political agenda.

The participation of youth has been recognised and promoted at different international conventions and actions.

The time is now

Agenda 21 includes a chapter dedicated to promoting the participation of youth in the decision-making process, particularly to protect the environment and promote economic and social development.

Youth from different parts of the world were encouraged to actively participate in all stages of the decision-making process, because any development of policies, laws, and actions would have serious implications for their current and future lives.

It has been acknowledged that the participation of youth would help to bring a unique perspective to the process.

The Doha Work Programme on Article 6 of the Convention, adopted in 2012, identified youth as one of the major groups to materialise effective formulation and implementation of decision-making processes on climate change.

Bangladesh has been recognised as among the countries most vulnerable to climate change because of its geographic setting and meteorological features. The occurrence of floods, cyclones, and droughts has intensified. This, in turn, has had a serious impact on the social, economic, and environmental development of the country.

Some 52 per cent of the country's youth are engaged in agricultural and forestry activities, according to BIDS. This large and vulnerable segment of the population will bear the brunt of climate change impacts.

Despite the country's grave vulnerability, the preparation of the country's youth to tackle climate challenges has been inadequate. Educational and other initiatives have not been undertaken in a planned manner.

Currently, the youth are being sensitised about climate change through different educational institutions, government agencies, and NGOs. But these efforts have been restricted largely to educational initiatives and raising awareness.

The active participation of youth in the formulation and implementation of decision-making processes does not yet take place.

The way forward

Today’s youth represent the future. Their contributions are imperative to advancing low-carbon, climate-resilient, and green development.

In Bangladesh, young people are already actively engaged with awareness-raising and educational activities about climate change at local and national levels. But these efforts will be of limited efficacy if the youth are not involved in major decision formulation and implementation processes.

Youth involvement has the added advantage of introducing unique perspectives which is beneficial for society as a whole.

It is imperative for BRAC to help enable the youth to express their concerns and equip them to take part in decision and policy formulation processes.

To smoothen the transition towards this process, dialogue and discussion sessions could be held within existing platforms such as the adolescent clubs and Gonokendra.

This would allow the youth to share knowledge, generate new ideas, and engage in dialogue with peers. These platforms should also be extended to the district, rural, regional, and local levels.

This would help the youth to be more involved in mainstream climate change development at the national and

international levels in the future. Representatives from knowledge sharing clubs at the district, regional, and local levels could also be connected with environmental practitioners, policymakers, and researchers by convening a convention or a conference.

This input would help policy makers, politicians, and environmental practitioners understand the views of the youth.

The youth are our future leaders. We must enable them to explore their full potential and effectively utilise their capacity.

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Will the torchbearers of tomorrow even have a torch?

Nimmi Nusrat Hamid

Born not too long ago, Bangladesh was a nation that was popularly dubbed a basket case. Now, 47 years later, it is en route to becoming a developed country by 2041. This would not have been possible without the contribution of the country’s young population - the most proactive and fearless force, fuelling the engine of the country’s progress. They are the torchbearers of the developed and prosperous Bangladesh that every Bangladeshi aspires to build - well, at least that is the role that has been inconspicuously bestowed upon them.

This leads one to ask: Are these torchbearers of tomorrow adequately equipped to play the significant role in taking the country to the next level? Have they been given the opportunity or the space required to fulfil their responsibility?

Skills and competency

Bangladesh’s literacy rate reached an all-time high of 72.76 per cent in 2016

in addition to the exponential rise in the tertiary level student enrollment. However, experts argue that the economy is still a long way from equipping the youth with the skills and competencies that they need. Findings from the last National Student Assessment (NSA) by Directorate of Primary Education also concur with this notion. The result shows that 66 per cent of class 3 students and 80 per cent of class 5 students demonstrate below par proficiency in Bengali. In mathematics, the figure is 60 per cent and 90 per cent, respectively. Discussed below are three issues that need to be addressed.

First, the national curriculum is outdated. Despite a lot of interest to incorporate the ‘21st century skills’ into the national curriculum, improvement has been limited. An assessment of the Secondary Education Sector Development Programme (SESDP) has shed some light on the reasons behind it. The assessment concluded that the attempt to inculcate inventiveness through

introduction of ‘creative questions’ has actually increased dependency on ‘note books’. Additionally, there are scores of curriculums that need to be fixed. For example, primary level educational institutions own as many as 11 types of curriculums, aligned with their somewhat different objectives. This is a cause for alarm because it creates intellectual division and weakens the potential of the youth as the driving agents for change.

Second, the country simply does not have enough teachers. A recent study reveals that 60 per cent of the government primary schools do not have sufficient number of teachers. To be precise, 8,560 institutions in hard-to-reach areas face acute shortages. The problem does not stop there. There are instances where enough teachers are available, but their level of skill and aptitude remains questionable. For example, an assessment by CAMPE suggests that as many as 40 per cent of the teachers in both primary schools and secondary schools have not received



In Bangladesh, young people are already actively engaged with awareness-raising and educational activities about climate change at local and national levels.

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their subject-based pedagogical training. The third and final issue is the lack of innovation in the teaching-learning methods. The limits of the present day education system of one curriculum, standardised testing, and the process followed to impart knowledge are well recognised. Instead of making education a mundane obligation, it is important for teachers to motivate students to be curious about learning new information and generating fresh ideas.

One of the effective methods for teachers is to propose and discuss a question in the classroom, then urge learners to dig deeper into the topic through real-life settings, such as a museum visit or field trip, collecting photos or notes as evidence, then sharing their findings to produce individual or group answers. Such crossover and context-based learning experiences may encourage students to come up with authentic and fresh angles of evaluating the topics being covered. While countries wide and far are taking specific steps to individualise the process of education, leverage technology, and reduce burden on human teachers, discussion of such innovation is absent in most of the government policy documents in Bangladesh.

Opportunity for the youth

Though the literacy rate in Bangladesh has increased as mentioned above, the share of youth population who are 'not in education, employment or training' (NEET) still remains as high as 27.39 per cent. At 44.55 per cent, NEET is much higher among young females. The measurement indicates that more than a quarter of Bangladeshi youth and about half of young females are simply absent from the mainstream economy.

Unemployment rate among youth with tertiary education is at 20.8 per cent. This implies that while the country's universities are churning out a lot of graduates, a good number of them are unable to find suitable jobs. It is evident that if the youth are not given the scope to contribute, they will not be able to play their role as torchbearers competently. This calls for three more issues to take into consideration.

First, Bangladesh's economic transition

from agriculture to the industrial sector has failed to create as many jobs as anticipated. According to Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), only around seven million new jobs were created between 2010 and 2016-17 against nearly 13 million new entrants to the market. The manufacturing sector especially, could generate only 0.3 million new jobs during this period. Hence, it is essential that Bangladesh promotes labour intensive sectors like the jute industry and build infrastructure, for instance, industrial parks, ports, etc to enhance employment generation.

A related issue is the skill gap in the education system. The country's technical and vocational education training (TVET) system has a combined capacity of 100,000 graduates per year - this is inadequate compared to the need. Moreover, most jobs available for TVET are in the informal sector. These are not seen as dignified and secure as other conventional career paths in Bangladesh. Consequently, the demand for TVET has not grown yet.

Second, women's participation in the workforce and their wage gap has been a key topic of concern. With automation on the rise, traditional roles of women in the industrial sector like ready-made garment have been on the decline. According to Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), female employment in the sector has come down by about 850,000 between 2013 and 2017. The latest LFS notes that at the national level, only 8.2 per cent females are engaged



in formal employment compared to 17.9 per cent males. Contrarily, the informal sector employs more females than males, 91.8 per cent and 82.1 per cent respectively. Nonetheless, data shows that the average monthly income from employment in the formal sector was BDT 13,583 for a male, which is slightly higher than what the female employees earned at BDT 12,254. This gap also exists in the informal sector and is expected to be even wider.

Finally, irrespective of any attempt to create more jobs, it is important to be aware of the fact that the two million Bangladeshi youths joining the employment market every year have to become entrepreneurs. Needless to say, becoming an entrepreneur is not easy here. Bangladesh was ranked 103rd out of 140 countries in Global Competitiveness Index and 176th out of 190 countries for ease of doing business. In fact, Bangladesh is ranked lowest among the South Asian nations in the latter index. A long list of governance problems are casting a shadow on the country's financial institutions - issues associated with difficulties in getting public services and access to justice are some of the main concerns that prevail.

Space for the youth

Young people are considered to be one of the most powerful forces in bringing about political and social change in a country. The independence of



Bangladesh, the movement for mother language, or the movement to improve road safety are but a few examples of youth-led actions. Indeed, the youth has been in the forefront of all social transitions in the country, but they are almost always absent in the design of development work, policies, or priority setting. The prospect of forming a safe space for Bangladeshi youth to participate in these activities is narrow and in all probability, is getting narrower.

There is a lack of institutional structure that supports youth participation. For instance, the National Youth Policy (NYP), 2013 and the NYP, 2017 promised to involve the youth to develop programmes at the sub-district level. However, nothing significant happened ultimately. It must be noted that there are some youth organisations which are mostly Dhaka-based. They somehow find their ways into public discussions, but they are sporadic and their geographical position do not allow them to be inclusive for all. The traditional institutional framework in the form of sports or youth clubs of '70s and '80s are all but gone. Lack of national and local level sponsorships and scarce political attention might be responsible for

this mass extinction to a large extent. A similar scenario is prevalent at academic institutions. While attempts have been made in Bangladesh to introduce school-level election and to create space for the elected representatives in the school management committee - it has not lasted long. Correspondingly, most public universities also have a system of electing a student body that facilitates student participation in the management of the university. But most of them have also been unproductive at the practical level.

That being said, often times it is more convenient to point fingers at social institutions in the public realm. Unfortunately, some young people do not have it any easier in the private spheres such as home and within family. Poorer socioeconomic status, inadequate availability of resources, or a combination of both can be a hindrance to receiving the support essential for the youth today. Neither do they have the safe space where they can find support nor do they have the freedom to express themselves. A point has been reached where the woefully unequipped spaces to deal with anyone who has mental

health issues has become detrimental and catastrophic, as marked by the unfortunate attack on the Holey Artisan Bakery in July 2016.

Far from the theoretical approaches on paper, Bangladeshi youth are yet to find a seat at the decision-making table. While they have a voice, loud and clear, they need to be heard. Youth are individuals from heterogeneous communities and it is essential that their opinions are seriously considered.

At the end of the day, one cannot pertinently decide what the other person is lacking and requires unless they have walked in their shoes. Therefore, the youth should be given the space to speak out and take action. They know best what they need to defy the odds barricading them from exercising their potential and contributing to their own welfare as well as the society's.

How do we move forward?

Time and again, we have seen first-hand that when young people rise up, incredible things can happen. The youth population today are empowered, informed and have diverse opinions. Yet, they continue to be treated as a homogenous group of voiceless entities with choices best made on their behalf.

In order to make Bangladesh a thriving future-ready country, it is crucial to provide the youth with the platform where they can share their insights and help construct the country's road ahead. Their views are important not only because a massive portion of the nation's population are youth, but also because decisions and policies made today will directly affect them as they inherit the future. Additionally, a stronger commitment is needed to effectively invest in grooming the youth into leaders

“Time and again, we have seen first-hand that when young people rise up, incredible things can happen.”

for tomorrow. Following initiatives may be considered to support the youth and their future in a more concrete manner:

- Introduce new learning methods at academic units to enhance creative growth among students and encourage them to think outside the box from an early stage
- Educators and family members should work to help them break free from societal stigmas that nurture the idea that only formal education and employment is prestigious
- Since attaining full employment is more idealistic than pragmatic, the youth should be encouraged to be entrepreneurs and the process of doing business should be made more convenient with proper infrastructure and easily accessible resources
- Private sectors hiring females should be incentivised to enhance the process and promote gender equality
- Last but not the least, it has become absolutely essential to take mental health issues among youth as real. Therefore, funds should be allocated mindfully to address their issues through competent counsellors and medical support

It is fundamental to acknowledge that while the youth have the power to shape the future of the nation, they are also shaped by the unrelenting socio-cultural context and structures they live in

All stakeholders have to support creating an environment where they are able to excel. Only then will the youth be successful at competently obtaining the torch and playing the significant role of being the torchbearers of Bangladesh's tomorrow.

Nimmi Nusrat Hamid is working as a consultant at BRAC Advocacy for Social Change.



Spending my 20s in Bangladesh: Journal of a young Aussie

Sarah-Jane Saltmarsh

I have spent most of my 20s in Bangladesh.

It was not a path I took by choice. I love Australia, but I grew up on a boat with gypsy sailor parents and inherited itchy feet. My mother left home on the back of a motorbike before she was 18 and ended up as a rock journalist in London, modelling in Malaysia, and starting a resort on an island in Thailand. My dad's first job out of school was sailing from Singapore to San Francisco. He had a 9-5 job while I was growing up, but it was to jump crocodiles and handle snakes. My earliest days were spent on a sailing safari where he taught scuba diving and pro fishing.

My parents always had a story.

While I still find myself on some days wondering why I live here - like when I am stuck in a deafening traffic jam on a day where the stench of the drains is almost enough to knock someone out - the Dhaka jam keeps me coming back. The country of a dollar and a dream, where anything happens. Dhaka isn't a

poverty lab on the other side of the world speculating on "developing" countries; it's the frontline of some of the world's biggest challenges: climate change, environmental pollution, and workers' struggles. It's gritty, grimy and real. It's a place that has accepted almost a million refugees in the last 18 months, where I personally watched some of the poorest people I've ever met give the clothes off their own backs to complete strangers.

As I am writing this I am listening to construction workers hurling materials around building sites, steel rods crashing on the ground because they are being dropped instead of using lowering equipment, no one wearing safety gear, in the middle of the night. At the same time I cannot help but be entranced by the soft notes of a lone flute player wandering the streets playing a folk tune.

Bangladesh is a country of contrasts. Today you are stuck in unimaginable bureaucracy and tomorrow you are getting things delivered at an unimaginable speed. No work orders, no quotes, no straight lines - just hustle, before they would have

had time to open the paperwork at home. It's a place where things happen.

I grew up reading Enid Blyton - *The Secret Seven*, *The Famous Five*, and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *Tom Sawyer* - and my only dream was to have adventures. Bangladesh is that for me. Every day, without fail - and without choice - is an adventure. There's always a festival, a celebration, a strike, some human chain, a protest, a show. It's a flood of humanity that gets into every pore.

Spending a large part of my 20s here has been an experience.

A huge worldview

One of my first feelings when I arrived here was embarrassment. I just did not have the knowledge of history, global politics, geography, literature, music and poetry, or the academic background of so many people I met. I did not even know where Bangladesh was before

I came here. But every person I met knew Australia - and generally a little about its heritage and gruesome history. I come from an island - albeit a large one - but it had never occurred to me how much influence that had on me until I left its shores. It still shocks me when I go home, when the things I generally discuss with friends in Bangladesh, such as Yemen, or the plight of the Rohingya community, are “those issues”.

Bangladeshis are generally curious. They do not necessarily want to permanently move outside of the country, but travel because they are curious about how others live. One of the sweetest things I hear every day is people trying to speak English. Interestingly, this is not usually a second language either. A lot of content on television is in Hindi, and most students learn Arabic in school and often some Urdu along the way. So English is a fourth or fifth language.

Equally huge limitations

I was the first in my family to get a university degree, and I still do not have a Master's degree - and that has never presented a barrier. We start working when we are still in school, and a lot of people do not continue from school

into university. You can make as much or more money in blue collar jobs. If you do get a Bachelor's degree, you work for a few years before thinking about further studies. Nobody asks about what school you went to, or what qualifications you have. People are not treated differently depending on it, or depending on their age. There is very little power difference. The CEO will often be the person at the back wearing the least fancy clothes, and they will introduce themselves last.

The respect for age and for hierarchy affects everything in Bangladesh. The power distance is even enshrined into the language (*apni, tumi*, etc). There is a head table with large bunches of flowers wrapped in plastic at every event, a protocol guideline needed to distinguish between chief guests and special guests, and a concept called a VVIP exists. There is a definite hierarchy on the road as traffic is stopped for a few minutes due to VVIP movement. Everyone who can hire house help does, and it is completely normal for those people to eat at separate times, in a separate place, and even with separate dishes, even though they are living in the same house as the people who pay their wages. The constant deference is seen as respectful, and definitely promotes social cohesion. But in my opinion, respect should apply more to helping people across a road or deciding who gets served first at the dinner table.

The barriers are just as stark for young people wanting to leave the country. It is of course clichéd, but I had never really thought about privilege. For example, visas. I booked holidays a few days before I wanted to go, and I had never imagined that there was any part of the world where, if I had the money, I would not be able to visit. When I went with two Bangladeshi friends, Kanak Aditya and Muntasir Mamun, to cycle across Canada and Alaska, I had to experience days of waiting in lines with them. The questions they had to face when we crossed the border into the US, and then getting stopped by police in a park because Muntasir had his hands in his jacket pockets (because they were freezing!), the experience had as much impact on me as the three-month cycling trip. I had always taken the Aussie rite of passage for granted; a ski season in Canada, a year abroad working in an entry-level job in the UK, a Eurotrip, sightseeing in New York and visiting American friends I met in Australia and the beaches of Thailand and Bali. A stark difference to my friend who flinches at my holiday pictures of France because he has been invited to Europe so many times to speak at conferences or run workshops, but has now completely given up because his visa has prevented it every time.

Young people in Bangladesh have a lot to say but are limited in where they are saying it - both within the country and outside of it.

Getting outdoors

So many people here can do so much. All my friends in Bangladesh can sing, play an instrument, have at least one Master's degree, and write poetry. My friends at home are just as talented. But we choose to spend our time in different ways. In Australia, kids cannot stay inside if the sun is out. Or if it's not. Rain, hail, or shine we are out. Everyone has a skateboard, a bike, a tent and a swag. It's like a how-to-be-an-Aussie starter kit. It's unfathomable if you don't go camping every two weeks, a road trip once a month, a bushwalk every other week. We mostly all live on the coast, or near water, and no one is very far from a wild place. You spend every weekend in a forest somewhere. Then when you start travelling, you explore forests and hiking trails and beaches. You see the world through maps, binoculars, with bare feet and a backpack.

It was such a shock to meet people who could write beautiful poetry but who had never changed a tyre.

There is a romanticism of nature in Bangladesh that somehow does not exist in Australia. Here it's something that is written about, admired, photographed.

In Australia it's lived. It's not a concept, a place to visit, something that you can choose to enter and leave - wild places are everything. There is no end and no beginning. It's home. The respect comes inherent because it feels like your house. Throwing rubbish is disrespecting yourself.

I feel as if there is a beauty in both. Both reading and writing, and adventures, build empathy. Young people need to be able to access both books and nature.

There is also something which is uncannily similar - Australia is a country which has been built by hands. It is unrelenting, angry, harsh, scary, and untameable. The rain buckets from the sky in Northern Australia, and floods every road in the same way as it does here. The nor'westers,

or *kal boishakhis*, sweep up entire towns and stop everyone living in them in their tracks for that hour or so. The best shows in the entire country are in the sky during monsoon, when we spend months mesmerised and terrified about whether the storms will turn into a cyclone. The strong self of self-identity in Bangladesh because of the struggle of building the country by hand is changing fast though. That is not life anymore - they are now childhood memories, realities only for parents, not for young people who have grown up surrounded instead by the fruits of that struggle. Instead of boats and hardship, and swashbuckling adventures, they have smartphones and boredom - and loneliness. The roads are still referred to as *rasta ghat*, but there is a lot more *rasta* and a lot less *ghat* in Bangladesh's cities.

Oh Bangladesh!

Living here is being enveloped by what sometimes seems like a whole universe of traditions, beliefs and tiny symbols that all have so much history. People do have traditions and culture at home, but it's something you need to search out and opt into. In Bangladesh, there is

no opt-out button. You are immersed in it, all of the time. It affects everything - from office timing, to traffic, to the type of food available in the market and what you need to have in your wardrobe. There is a government department that monitors moon activity to decide on public holidays.

Never at home would I walk into the office in the morning feeling like I have tackled a war zone by 8am, and then walk out at the end of the day reinvigorated by hundreds moving in procession throwing dye, singing in broad daylight, dancing and everyone wearing costumes - even men dancing - and no one is intoxicated. See women in the most incredibly coloured sarees walking past roads where mass animal slaughtering has just taken place, with the blood lining the drains matching the scarlet red ties on the back of their blouses. Smell the intoxicatingly sweet fragrance of jasmine worn in strings around wrists colliding with the sick, smothering odour of death. Women running Parliament but not always safe on the streets.

It's the little things, like the jingle of the locksmith walking house to house every morning to ply his trade, the pure bliss of sitting in a tea stall overlooking Kaptai Lake and watching the sun go down, and watching a woman openly slap a man in the face, the way that you can walk into anyone's house in a village and ask to use a bathroom and they will not only welcome you in, but you will end up having lunch with them as well.

The sacred and the profane, colliding every single day. Life -in all its complexities and contradictions, all up in your face.

Bangladesh is an incredible place to be young. I could not have planned my own story better if I had tried.

Disclaimers: This is a Dhaka and Darwin-centric opinion, and only representative of my personal experience. I've lived in and out of Bangladesh since 2011, primarily working with the United Nations, and been permanently based in Bangladesh for the last three years with BRAC.

Sarah-Jane Saltmarsh is the head of programme and enterprise communications at BRAC Communications.



Interview

“If you trust your colleagues and give them the responsibility and authority, they can accomplish seemingly impossible things.”

Dr Muhammad Musa

speaks about BRAC's biggest challenge during the past year and beyond and how BRAC is preparing to respond to such challenges. He has also shared his insights as a successful leader for the next generation.

What motivated you to join BRAC?

Dr Muhammad Musa: BRAC's mission fits very well with the ethos of Bangladesh's glorious war of liberation. Our freedom fighters fought against exploitation to uphold our dignity. From day one, BRAC has served as the most prominent social movement to instil the same ethos in our society. And this has been a great motivation for me. Equally motivating has been the prospect of becoming a part of BRAC's founder Sir Fazle Hasan Abed's vision of a world free from all forms of exploitation and discrimination where everyone can realise their potential. I joined BRAC to be able to contribute to the fulfilment of the vision. I have worked in the development sector for more than 30 years (including 20 years abroad) - but BRAC is not just a job for me. It is more than that.

What qualities do you think are required in a successful leader?

Dr Muhammad Musa: A leader needs to have the skills to facilitate the development of a shared vision, promote team cohesion so that the members are excited to contribute to the attainment of the shared vision and ensure that each of the team member's concerns, suggestions, aspiration, are taken care of.

Additionally, a good leader should have a high degree of emotional intelligence, political and entrepreneurial acumen. Emotional intelligence enables a leader to know of, control, and express his/her emotions, and to handle interpersonal relationships judiciously and with empathy. Political acumen enables the leader to remain abreast of various groups and institutional issues that have an influence on the rest of the team. Finally, in a market-based economy, where the demand and supply are in a constant state of flux, a leader needs to have entrepreneurial acumen to accurately understand and quickly respond to changes.

What advice would you give to someone who took up a leadership position and for someone who is already in a leadership position?

Dr Muhammad Musa: Leaders need to believe in the team's success, only then a team can be successful. Hence, for a new leader, my first advice is to remain positive. S/he should be careful about his/her gestures, postures, choice of words - all of which profoundly impact a team's behaviour. Secondly, no leader is an expert at everything. So, s/he needs to identify the expert in the team and make



the best use of that expertise. Each of the team members needs to have space and respect to be able to contribute to the best of their ability and attain a sense of accomplishment.

To improve and grow as a leader, one needs to have learning agility and openness. Leaders need to learn every day from the most junior to the most senior colleagues, and from the tea room to the board room. Every now and then s/he also needs to reflect his/her learnings to extract the wisdom from them and apply that in different situations.

Where would you like to see BRAC in 20 years?

Dr Muhammad Musa: I would like to see BRAC as a global leader from the South in the ever-changing humanitarian and development sector. The future BRAC would meet the challenges that societies, families, individuals throughout the world face with innovative solutions. I would like to see BRAC foresee issues and produce innovative and cutting-edge solutions to emerging socioeconomic and associated challenges.

BRAC also needs to be recognised for its technology-enabled operational excellence as well as for its knowledge leadership so that we remain the partner

of choice for governments, NGOs, private sectors, etc.

What are the key indicators by which BRAC measures its impact?

Dr Muhammad Musa: Our programmes are aligned with many of the Sustainable Development Goals, and the respective indicators constitute much of our results framework. We are specifically interested to see that every human being - irrespective of their race, gender, economic condition - is empowered to take full control of their lives.

We are interested to see that the people have the agency - ie skills, access to the market and finance - to shape their lives. We work to ensure that the power relationship inside and outside their households support communities and individuals unleash their potential. Finally, we work with social, administrative and political institutes to promote an atmosphere that sustains and advances an individual's dignity and choice.

What transformations, outside or within the organisation, have you led that you believe have created an impact on people's lives?

Dr Muhammad Musa: Transformations

in BRAC are happening at several levels. At the programmatic level, we are revisiting our intervention basket, upgrading the way these programmes are delivered, and reconfiguring the financial strategy.

In the recent past, several programmes underwent strategic review and redesign. For example, we have thoroughly redesigned our ultra-poor graduation programme after running the programme for more than 10 years. Similarly, we have revised the service list of our health programme to include health services for adolescents. Our gender programme, likewise, now supports system-level changes in addition to offering to individual level support.

Technology has been a key driver to bring changes in the programme delivery processes. Several of the programmes are using advanced technology to deliver services such as health diagnostic services. The skills development programme, for example, is using state-of-the-art data acquisition to closely monitor the progress of our learners. Managers are also adopting data-driven decision making while the decision-making functions are being pushed down to the lower echelons of the organisation.

We are also exploring ways to change the traditional foreign assistance dependent programme into diversified and more self-reliant financing models by adopting other approaches such as cost recovery and social enterprises.

Some of the transformations are taking place at the organisational management

level as well. We have already started implementing an enterprise resource planning (ERP) system to improve efficiency. We are heading towards transforming BRAC into a knowledge organisation. Simultaneously, we have started repositioning our organisation at the global level through advocacy and external communications. One of the big-ticket items in our transformation list involves positioning BRAC in the humanitarian sector. I am happy to say that we have made some noteworthy progress towards this goal already.

These transformations agenda needed cultural change and participation of all staff - from the field level to the head office. It also needed effective internal communication to bring everyone on the same platform. I would like to recognise the support of the communications unit for facilitating this process.

It should be noted that any transformation needs a collective leadership. I am pleased to see BRAC leaders leading this transformation individually in their own programmes and departments as well as collectively for the whole organisation. My job has been to create an atmosphere for the required organisational change, bring the team together, infuse energy into the team about the potential, and develop a common platform for progress.

What was BRAC's biggest challenge in the last 12 months? How has your leadership helped the organisation overcome it?

Dr Muhammad Musa: The sudden

influx of about a million forcibly displaced Rohingya from neighbouring Myanmar was one of the organisation's biggest challenges. It is BRAC's raison d'être to serve people who are disenfranchised and exploited, and so we had to respond fast. The challenge was speed: to address the fast-deteriorating situation, we had to quickly mobilise staff from our ongoing programmes. That decision had a potential fallout as it slowed down the work of programmes from where the staff were moved.

I, as a leader, relied on BRAC's core strength, which is enshrined in this organisation's DNA. BRAC is an organisation built around the ethos of a 'can do' attitude. My role was to remind and inspire colleagues of this ethos and frankly, everyone got on board immediately. I had to keep an eye on our ongoing programmes, their annual operating plans, deliveries, etc so that at the end our work did not get affected.

Let me give you an example. Due to the vacancy of the director for humanitarian programme position, I requested the director who was at the time leading our malaria, tuberculosis and water sanitation portfolio, to step up and manage the Rohingya response too. To ensure that the large portfolio that he was managing was not affected, we worked together to empower the second line leaders of his programme. As a result, our ongoing programme throughout the country went smoothly and we could deliver large-scale humanitarian support for the Rohingyas.

This was also an opportunity for second line leaders to learn new skills and demonstrate their abilities. It was truly a win-win outcome at the end.

I think this is the beauty of BRAC. If you trust your colleagues and give them the responsibility and authority, they can accomplish seemingly impossible things.

In the global context, what are the key elements shaping the future of the social good sector?

Dr Muhammad Musa: There are many but let me mention some of the most pronounced ones. First, the political economy of poverty and deprivation is evolving and will continue to evolve. The emergence of this neo-nationalism has deep-rooted impact on our sector globally as the resourcing of the



humanitarian and development sector is still largely dependent on foreign aid.

The second driver is the changing needs and aspirations of the people we work for. The services which were highly valued in the past do not remain relevant in changing societies.

I would say our youth bulge is a key driver. The role of young people matters— how they behave, and the kind of leadership they take are important determinants

The third driver is technology. It is important that we, as a development agency, embrace technology and stay ahead of the curve.

The fourth driver is the changing demography. The role of young people matters - how they behave, and the kind of leadership they take are important determinants. Another element of demographic change is urbanisation, and the associated challenges such as new forms of poverty, social injustice, etc that our sector must address.

The next issue is the changing climate (which is no longer an issue for the distant future). It is here, and the impact is palpable. Furthermore, the impact is going to shape the development sector for many years to come.

The final driver will be the financing architecture of the humanitarian and development sector. It will no longer be a unidirectional flow of development aid from the North to the South. Rather, the flow will be diversified. The good thing is that new actors like the private sector,

social investors, etc are making their way.

What do you, personally, spend most of your time outside the office?

Dr Muhammad Musa: I am a friend-and-family person. I love to spend my leisure with family - cooking, watching movies, spending time together. I love to stay connected with friends. When alone, I spend my time reading. One of my favourite publications is the Harvard Business Review. I also try to make time to exercise for an hour at least five days a week. Finally, as a believer, I pray.

Dr Muhammad Musa is the executive director of BRAC. He has an extensive background in leading humanitarian, social development, and public health organisations in international, cross-cultural settings. A medical doctor and public health specialist, he has specialised training in maternal and child nutrition, and disaster management.





In focus

Skilling the world's youngest continent

Musharrat Bidita, Lamia Rashid and Abul Kashem Mozumder

The United Nations Data for World Population Prospects 2017 shows that Africa is the world's youngest continent, with **60** per cent of its population aged under **25** years.

Although these young people live in some of the world's fastest growing economies, most face insecure futures and unemployment. The unique vulnerabilities and challenges of young people are often unaddressed, limiting their potential and their ability to contribute to the development of their families, communities, and nations.



The Agenda 2063, which is the African Union's strategic framework for the socioeconomic transformation of the continent over the next 50 years, considers skills development as a means for eliminating youth unemployment.

The agenda is set to promote science, technology, research, innovation, and build on knowledge and human resources for growth and sustainable development.

The development of sub-Saharan Africa is closely linked with the wellbeing of its young people. Helping the youth complete their education, accumulate skills that are relevant to the job market, delay early pregnancy, and start an independent livelihood - are all critical for their wellbeing.

Adolescent girls are vulnerable, and the cost of not protecting them is high. Child marriage often prevents girls from continuing their education and realising their full potential. According to the Malala Fund, 12 years of education for every girl would result in a 64 per cent drop in child marriage.

BRAC aims to make strategic interventions for the social and economic empowerment of young people in Africa.

BRAC works in Uganda, Tanzania, Sierra Leone, South Sudan and Liberia - countries with high child marriage and teenage pregnancy rates. The organisation is determined to unlock the potential of the girls through education, life skills, and livelihood opportunities.



Empowerment and livelihood for adolescents (ELA) programme in the four African countries offered 64,334 adolescent girls an opportunity for a better life through mentorship, life skills, livelihood skills, education support and microfinance in the year 2018.

The programme made use of a total of **1,721** clubs to target girls from disadvantaged backgrounds using the club-based approach.

The ELA programme in Uganda, which pioneered the approach, provided the following support in 2018 to a total of **2,716** programme participants, out of which **1,755** were given livelihood training, **425** were given vocational training, and **536** were trained on apprenticeship.

From 2008 to 2017, randomised control trial (RCT) results showed that income generation went up by **48** per cent and teen pregnancy fell by **34** per cent in villages with ELA clubs. Additionally, cohabitation fell by **62** per cent and girls involved in sexual activities against their wills dropped by **33** per cent.

Furthermore, the ELA programme in Sierra Leone provided livelihood training to **162** programme participants, and vocational and apprenticeship training to another **274**. The elements of the programme involve training on machine repairing, tailoring, electric engineering, welding, and carpentry.

Ilemi Club, one of the ELA clubs on the outskirts of Mbeya, operated by BRAC Tanzania, offers teenage girls with spaces to socialise, and receive mentorship, life skills, financial literacy training, and microloans. Girls get training on tailoring,

food production, hotel management, decoration, and entrepreneurship skills.

The programme builds confidence and instills a sense of self-worth, encourages positive behavioural changes, and improves girls' quality of lives. In 2018, livelihood training was provided to **587** programme participants and vocational training to another **596**. Furthermore, the programme raised awareness on reproductive health, unwanted pregnancy, early marriages, HIV, gender discrimination, all forms of abuse and violence, and helped them become better decision makers.

Similarly, in Liberia, **240** adolescents participated in livelihood and skills training through the ELA programme in 2018. They were provided skills in better decision-making that affects their lives positively and enables them to become active agents of social change. BRAC supported girls to reduce early pregnancy and early marriage, increase awareness on sexually transmitted

diseases, reduce gender-based violence, drug abuse and sexual abuse.

In South Sudan, researchers measured the impact of the 2013 civil war on key indicators, and then measured the extent in villages with ELA clubs. It was found that while schooling activities went down overall by **6.8** per cent, villages with ELA clubs showed a **5.5** per cent rise in schooling. The programme works to socially and financially empower girls between the ages of 11 to 21 years, and supports the continuation of their education.

BRAC aims to enable young people in Africa to fight unwanted social pressures and build healthier futures for themselves. By developing stronger ELA models, and expanding reach to adolescent boys and young men, who are brothers, partners and neighbours of existing ELA club members, BRAC is working towards nurturing inclusive societies.

Musharrat Bidita is the deputy manager, Communications, Lamia Rashid is the director, Africa region and global strategy development, and Abul Kashem Mozumder is the head of education at BRAC International





Real-life heroes: Using skills to flip the script

Mahenaw Wara

Not far from the world's largest mangrove forest lives a young woman with a confident smile. "I'll give you quality refrigerator maintenance if you live close by," 21-year-old Sumia says with pride in her lilting accent distinct to Bangladesh's deep southwest.

Sumia's native district of Satkhira is known for its religious conservatism. Abandoned by her father, and the eldest of seven children, she had to grow up sooner than she should have. Just two years ago, 19-year-old Sumia was unable to support her large family with her ninth-grade education as she had no employable skills. With the help of BRAC's skills development programme (SDP), Sumia has come a long way in a short time.

Her story is a beating-the-odds tale of perseverance, tenacity and grit. And SDP wants to work with thousands like her to write their own tales of triumph.

Today, Sumia has a gaggle of customers who wait for her time to get their fridges repaired. She provides for her entire family and dreams of having a small

electrical repairing shop of her own. Fully aware of the importance of a proper education, Sumia is adamant that her younger brothers and sisters will not have to give up school like she did.

In the rural outskirts of Saidpur in northern Bangladesh, a young Alamgir runs a cell phone servicing outlet. The 17-year-old's upper lip displays a thin trace of a new moustache and his face breaks into a shy smile at compliments which come frequently because of his sincere work.

Alamgir has never had the use of his legs, which was why he could not continue school after sixth grade. His classroom had shifted to the first floor of the school building and climbing two flights was, at the time, an insurmountable obstacle.

He is now more independently mobile. But Alamgir would probably have spent the rest of his life as a burden to his old mother and a brother who is a wage labourer if he had not found an alternative means of acquiring skills.

His situation, like that of thousands

of young men with similar disabilities, seemed beyond remedy, but that was a year ago.

Today he goes to the town market to buy accessories and equipment and is greeted with the respect given to valuable clients.

Sumia and Alamgir embody the spirit of what the skills development programme strives to achieve.

Equipping teenage school dropouts and persons with disabilities with hands-on training and respectable jobs is difficult as it is. Getting a transgender person an apprenticeship at a market is no mean feat in Bangladesh's context.

But what is even more challenging is to place a woman in a male-dominated vocation.

SDP is about nurturing and supporting the Alamgirs and Sumias of Bangladesh.

It is about enabling everyday heroes to overcome odds, shatter stereotypes and move from the margins to the mainstream.

Context

The importance of skills training - through SDP's apprenticeship programme - leading to successful job placement needs to be viewed in the context of Bangladesh. Here 2.2 million young people enter the workforce every year while 2.68 million people over the age of 15 remain unemployed.

To make matters worse, two of every five young people in Bangladesh are neither employed nor in any kind of education or training. On top of that, women, who constitute half the population, account for just over a third (36 per cent) of the labour force.

Three out of every four girls who drop out of school are forced into child marriage. The informal sector of the economy accounts for 85 per cent of employment.

It is against this backdrop that SDP's 95 per cent job placement and almost two-thirds reduction in child marriage stand out.

Apprenticeship

Behind each story lies rigorous study that went into the birth of skills training for advancing resources (STAR), an apprenticeship-based training programme with job placement. STAR remains SDP's flagship initiative to this day.

STAR began in 2012 to provide youth with employable skills sets. It provides hands-on training along with theoretical knowledge to dropouts between 14 and 18 years of age. What sets STAR apart from similar training programmes is its successful job placement and meticulous chaperoning at every step of the way. This raises operation costs but provides for a long-term and sustainable means of livelihood for participants. The six-fold rise in income of learners often means that their families graduate out of poverty.

STAR's success has led to a number of other programmes with the same core standards, principles of social inclusion and placing youth in decent workplaces. These include promoting skills and productivity enhancement for resilience (PROSPER), which is similar to STAR but attempts to generate revenue by charging partial training fee, targeting people who are more well-off.



With the capacity to reach 7,500 young people in 43 districts every year, to date STAR has trained 33,000. This includes the most disadvantaged groups - transgender people, people with disabilities and, of course, women.

Value chain development

Pro-poor growth of rural enterprises through sustainable skills development (PROGRESS) catalyses the development of small, light engineering enterprises and provides business development skills. Besides this value chain development using upward market linkages, the programme utilises BRAC's successful apprenticeship experience to support 5,000 enterprises, train 10,000 youth, half of who are women. The light engineering sector is strengthened through these partnerships while the youth gain employable skills.

Business incubation

Having grown up in poverty and always under the strict presence of her father, Keya's prospects of running her own beauty salon seemed like fantasy. But after her apprenticeship, the fiesty graduate started working at the same salon where she trained.

Despite tripling her salary, Keya wanted to own a salon of her own.

So she bought one.

Promoting incubation support to enterprises (PROMISE) helps small entrepreneurs with business incubation. Open to aspiring entrepreneurs, the programme is a natural next step for STAR graduates. PROMISE includes activity-based classroom training and tailored mentoring support.

Institutional training

These projects deal mainly with the burgeoning non-formal sector which accounts for the bulk of employment. These vocations do not have a systematic regulation of permits and licences. Apprenticeship remains an effective means of securing employment.

In sectors where certification is valued, BRAC's Institute of Skills Development (BRAC-ISD) provides the necessary support.

The institute trains people over 18 years of age in high-demand occupational



skills, with a special focus on training potential migrants, women and persons with disabilities.

The institute also arranges for assessment and accreditation of learners and ensures employment in domestic or overseas jobs. It has a system in place that recognises prior learning through assessment of the competency level of workers, especially from disadvantaged backgrounds, who lack necessary academic qualifications. The initiative ensures that BRAC reaches a wider demographic and is not limited to teenage dropouts or extremely disadvantaged groups.

Rising to the challenge

Moushumi and Habiba's fortunes would have been markedly different had it not been for the Rohingya influx of 2017.

They are two of the 100 learners in an SDP pilot scheme among the host communities of Cox's Bazar that saw incomes plummet during the crisis.

The SDP initiative combined several approaches that proved effective - every single learner found a job. Within a few months of the influx, there was high demand for semi-skilled people with basic education.

Moushumi got a job as an IT operator at an NGO office in a refugee camp and Habiba, who trained as a beautician, has already become an instructor for another NGO-run course.

Given the success of these programmes in the south-eastern coastal district, UNICEF and WFP are funding SDP projects for host communities and Myanmar nationals inside the camps, respectively.

Paperless operations

At the core of SDP operations lies a commitment to technology. The TaroWorks app covers every aspect of the apprenticeship programmes and has been a major factor behind the success of STAR and its sister projects. TaroWorks ensures real-time

monitoring of all field operations in minute detail. This has reduced the amount of paperwork, saving time and energy for field officers as well as their managers.

Distinctly different

Although an overwhelming portion of unemployed youth are dropouts and the non-formal sector accounts for the bulk of employment, popular interventions do not target either of these spaces.

SDP gives dropouts a second chance and a shot at gainful employment by leveraging the potential of Bangladesh's large non-formal sector.

Alamgir, Sumia, Keya, Moushumi, Habiba and thousands of others like them are the real heroes who brave adversity to change their own lives.

Mahenaw Wara is a programme manager for BRAC Skills Development Programme.



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DID YOU KNOW

Youth unemployment is a spectre that looms as threateningly in developed countries as in the developing world, with youths at least twice as likely as adults to be jobless. Between 1997 and 2017, the youth population grew by 139 million, according to ILO, while the youth labour force shrank by 58.7 million. An estimated 70.9 million young people were unemployed globally in 2017.

- World Economic Forum



Pushing the envelope, securing the paycheck

How BRAC is changing the perception of skills training

Deeba Farah Haque

Have you ever wondered why in Bangladesh we hardly ever see women working as housekeepers at hotels or resorts? Or as waitresses? Or as celebrated head chefs at swanky restaurants?

Pause for a moment.

Who makes the beds, cleans the rooms and bathrooms, sets the table and cooks the food in our homes?

The women do. Mothers, wives, daughters, sisters. And the house helps involved in these tasks are generally women too.

However, things are changing. The rise of the nuclear family, and other factors are compelling men to do their fair share in their homes.

But gender gaps persist.

The good news is that the Gender Gap Index 2017 found that Bangladesh topped the list of South Asian countries in gender equality for the third consecutive year, ranking 47th among 144 nations.

The occupational gender gap has a long way to go to reach parity.

The Global Gender Gap Report 2017 says that occupational gender gaps exist due to a myriad set of factors. Fair returns to skills and the availability of deeper talent pools are disrupted by existing gender biases.



Shirley Chisholm, the first African-American woman elected to the United States Congress, said, "If they don't give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair."



In other words, women need to be proactive and cultivate an interest in occupations which have traditionally been perceived as male-dominated.

The percentage of women employed in the service sector in Bangladesh was just 20.8 per cent, compared to 63.1 per cent in the agricultural sector, according to a Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) study referred to in a Daily Star article published in December 2017.

The report went on to say that the reason for this discrepancy came down to gendered perceptions of occupations, both by employees and employers.

Perceptions need to change.

Until they do, women like Rehana Akhter Jhuma will have to conceal their greatest achievements behind a veil of shame.

The graduate of BRAC Institute of Skills Development works as a housekeeper at Amari Dhaka, one of the most posh hotels in the capital and part of an international hotel chain.

Her employer praises her performance. But her family has no idea what she is capable of.



► Jhuma explains her situation in her own words:

“I have to lie every single day. I leave home early so that I have time to change my clothes before I get to work, and I leave late so that I can change and hide my uniform. My job brings in enough money to support everyone in my family, but I cannot tell the truth about what I do to people who matter the most to me.”

Jhuma’s story exemplifies how women are pushing boundaries every day.

Her experience will resonate with many others working in

occupations still considered inappropriate for women.

This is the context in which the BRAC Skills Development Programme works. And it is for this reason that the programme has been quick to advocate for the changing of perceptions about skills training and occupations.

Unless mindsets change, the youth, and especially female learners, will forsake opportunities to improve their livelihoods.

This is particularly true for trades where the economic benefits are greater but which are generally male-dominated.

Housekeeping, food and beverage service in hospitality and tourism sectors, and retail sales all offer potential for work that is not taken up.

BRAC has taken small initiatives to promote skills training across all sectors in order to improve the image of skills training and subsequent employment options. Women

have been especially reached out to.

But a larger campaign is needed to promote the skills development sector if Bangladesh is to realise the full potential of its demographic dividend.

The skills development programme has recently initiated a new project dedicated solely to changing the perception of youth, the larger community and employers on skills training, especially for disadvantaged women.

This is an attempt to break stereotypes by raising awareness of relevant stakeholders in the skills development ecosystem.

The project is unique and first of its kind because although many development projects operate in the skills development space in Bangladesh, most of these focus on offering skills training and subsequent employment to youth.

Little focus is given on creating and improving the enabling environment and

negative image of skills training for youth to pursue a career through technical skills training, especially for women.

The National Skills Development Policy (2011) includes conducting social marketing and awareness-raising, particularly for women, on the benefits of skills development.

The project is therefore relevant and timely in the arena of skills development. It aims to change the mindset of the young population, their families and communities, to motivate them and inform them about the benefits of skills training.



The project, a two-year pilot funded by the Embassy of Denmark, is primarily focused on changing perceptions around skills training.

The project aims to conduct awareness-raising campaigns to improve the perception of skills training among 100,000 people in the communities across 10 districts in Dhaka, Chattogram and Sylhet divisions.

Additionally, the project aims to train 1,000 youth, especially females, in traditionally male-dominated trades such as retail sales, food and beverage serving and housekeeping.

BRAC’s skills development programme has a special focus on bringing women into non-conventional trades.

talk to people of my age now, trying to convince them that sometimes society has damaging perceptions. I love to manage my life now, investing my salary in developing myself. I joined various IT courses and I have also enrolled in a graduation course at the Open University.”

There is a dire need to intervene to change the perception of youth regarding skills training.

There is a dearth of literature assessing the reasons behind such perceptions. While there have been numerous labour market surveys to understand the skills gaps, little has been done to understand why skills development is perceived negatively.

This project aims to undertake a baseline perception study to understand the context and existing perception of skills and identify possible avenues through which skills training can be made a preferred choice for targeted youth and their families.

Upon completion of the study, planned activities will be revisited so that the interventions are aligned with the findings of the study. This approach ensures that the project interventions are designed keeping the requirements of our clients at the heart of our operations.

Because the duration of the project is two years, it will be considered to be in the piloting phase. During this phase, the long-term impact of the

ideas being implemented in the field will be evaluated, in order to assess how interventions can be scaled.

There is a growing recognition of the importance of improving perceptions about skills training.

It is worth reflecting on educator Nisha Choksi’s remarks at TEDxCranbrook Schools:

“Some people believe that students go into vocational education if they’re troublemakers or low achievers, while others think that vocational education is for those individuals who don’t want to go to college or could never get in.

“And vocational education is also often thought to be the type of training that prepares individuals for manual labour, low-wage jobs, or jobs that somehow make one ‘dirty’ in some way.

“We’ve become so consumed by this notion that vocational education is not very beneficial for students that we’ve really come to disregard it. I think we need to take a second look at vocational education.”

So, let us inspire our youth to take a second look at vocational education.

Deeba Farah Haque is a senior manager of advocacy and social inclusion at BRAC Skills Development Programme.



Stories of dedication



Putting the law to work in remote Bangladesh

“What is the minimum age that your daughter can get married at?”

“18!” A group echoes in unison.

“If you marry off your daughter even a day before, what will it be?”

“Child marriage.” The group answers.

“Do we support child marriage?”

“No!”

“Say it out loud. We do not support child marriage,”

Sufia Begum tells the group.

A manager in the human rights and legal services programme in Nilphamari, Sufia is no stranger to the trauma of child marriage. She herself was married at 16.

There are more concerted efforts to prevent child marriage than ever before, but the battle is far from over, says Sufia. Two out of three women in Bangladesh are married as children.

Sufia went to a BRAC school, and her mother worked with BRAC as a village organiser. After finishing college, Sufia became a teacher at a BRAC school, and went on to become a programme secretary.

Sufia had to leave her 10-month-old son with her in-laws who did not support her work. Her husband, hearing impaired since birth, was unemployed. She could not simply quit her job. She had to take care of

her family. Eventually, however, the pressure was too much to cope with and Sufia left.

She wanted to continue though. She pursued a Master's degree, and five years later, armed with her certificate, she started working again, this time for BRAC's legal aid services in Nilphamari.

Today Sufia's son is in college, and her four-year-old daughter attends a BRAC school.

The primary responsibility she took on when she was a teacher was to educate people in her locality about child marriage. She talks ruefully about the many families in remote Bangladesh still unaware of its negative effects, or that it is illegal in the first place.

She says these are the communities where girls are most susceptible to

exploitation. It is in these communities that she is now conducting her campaigns against child marriage.

The legal division in Nilphamari which Sufia runs has six legal aid service centres that provide assistance against rape, acid attack, and other forms of violence towards women and children. Sufia and her team also hold counselling sessions to educate people about child marriage and encourage them to stand against all forms of abuse.

“The programme gave me a platform to support the people who are in most need,” Sufia says with conviction. “People from these marginalised communities would have nowhere to go without BRAC's support system. The counselling sessions serve a dual purpose. Not only do they teach about child marriage, but for many, they are the only places where women can find people who will listen to what they are facing.”

Sufia is proud of her work. “Without this programme, many voices would go unheard.”

In a world that can sometimes feel like



it was made purely for men, the mother of two's work has earned her the title of ‘Joyeeta’, the national platform that recognises women from all backgrounds for dedication towards social progress.

Steadfast in her fight for equality, Sufia says she wants to see a world free of violence and oppression. “And I will fight every single day until I see it.”



WISDOM BITS

‘Economic growth without investment in human development is unsustainable - and unethical’

– Amartya Sen

All growth depends upon activity. There is no development physically or intellectually without effort, and effort means work.

– Calvin Coolidge



How to provide shelter to a million people: Lessons from Cox's Bazar

Rifat Islam Esha

“I wanted to help the Rohingya people in any way that I could when they came to Bangladesh. I took this position as a way to do exactly that.”

Zulfikar Ali, Shelter Specialist

Fifty-two-year-old Zulfikar begins his day early, getting up soon after the sun rises to attend the morning briefing session in the camps. Zulfikar is no stranger to humanitarian work; in fact, with **28** years of experience under his belt, he is a veteran. “I worked in the field for many years; this is what I do,” said Zulfikar.

“The best part of our work is every one of us is on board with the same vision and aware of our role in achieving that. I have never seen such faith in one’s team anywhere else. I am not just saying that because I work here - I say it with utter conviction. Many of us have left our homes to be here. Our family members are also immensely understanding and

appreciative of the kind of work we do,” he said.

Zulfikar is a member of BRAC’s 2,500-strong staff providing services in a areas such as health and nutrition, water and sanitation, protection, shelter and infrastructure, in both the camps and the host communities. He joined the team in Cox’s Bazar in November 2017 as a shelter specialist.

“BRAC’s shelters are different. We have improved the basic model we started with in many ways, resulting in a design that has a range of unique features.”

These improvements are the result of the meticulous and constant experimentation which is very much part of the way BRAC approaches challenges. While building shelters, he was keeping notes of how the basic design could be adjusted to suit the conditions of the location. “I observed the direction of the wind, type of soil and quality of materials in each of the locations. When I approached my supervisor to test my first new design,

he immediately agreed. No questions were asked,” Zulfikar explained.

He built the first new ‘test’ shelter one rainy April day. It collapsed the next morning. “My heart skipped a beat when I heard the news. My supervisor just asked me when I was going to initiate the next attempt. We perfected the design on our third try,” said Zulfikar.

“You know how I know that no one has better quality shelters than ours? My [spoken] English is not good. I always had difficulty communicating in the cluster meetings. After seeing my design, my peers made an effort to learn my [version of] English so that they could learn how to build better shelters from me,” Zulfikar laughed.



According to him, supervisors at BRAC are not bosses, but leaders who listen to everyone and hold the whole team together. “They help us to do our best. We have now developed a model of new shelter which will be two storied and erected upon a variable height platform. That means there will be no need to cut into the hills or any fear of disrupting the fauna, and no fear of flood.”

Zulfikar has already presented the model to his supervisor and the shelter sector. “Everybody praised me - some, of course, said that it will not be going to be easy to build.” He simply thanked and told them, “Strong organisations can undertake difficult things.

Rifat Islam Esha is a deputy manager at Leadership Communications and Employee Engagement, BRAC Communications.

**?
DID YOU
KNOW**

Monaco is the world’s most densely populated country with a density of 26,105.37 per square kilometre. On the other hand, Bangladesh has a population density of 1,278.08 people per square kilometre, making it the 10th most densely populated country.

Inside Story



Tapping into the youth force the right way

Zeenath Sultana and Tanjilut Tasnuba

With thousands of students graduating every year from universities around the country, one would expect that Bangladesh's labour market would have no problems catering to employer's expectations. However, outdated syllabuses coupled with a lack of hands-on education or knowledge of workplaces along with mismatch of talent have employers scrambling to find what they need.

With millennials putting more priority on growth, purpose and empowerment when making career choices and sticking to them rather than salary or job security, finding changemakers has become a challenge.

The crisis was best put into words by Sir Fazle Hasan Abed during his address marking BRAC's 40th anniversary in 2012: "Unfortunately, public education systems in most developing countries are unfit and unsuited to prepare our youth for the 21st century knowledge society that we must aspire to."

"Outdated approaches to teaching must

give way to new techniques that teach our children not to memorise texts, but to think critically and solve problems creatively. We must give greater thought, and direct greater resources towards early childhood development, and social and emotional learning."

BRAC, with its 63,000 workforce, has found a unique way of making sure that the organisation never goes out of context, despite being nearly as old as Bangladesh.

BRAC's uniqueness lies in its rigorous culture of capacity development and empowerment of the people it works with and serves, which led to training of thousands of rural young women in Bangladesh with minimum education during the 80s and 90s. They became the organisation's frontliners - teachers, barefoot lawyers, health workers and community mobilisers. This large workforce had helped to bring about the massive structural transformation in service delivery that continued until recent years. BRAC also has been the

home to talented and passionate young people, who want a career with social impact.

BRAC had started its unique one-year-long young professionals (YP) programme and management trainee (MT) programme in 2008 with the aim to develop young leaders by equipping them with the right skills and nurturing their aspirations and ideas.

The expectation of these programmes is not only limited to building the leadership pipeline for BRAC but to create the next generation of future leaders who, going forward, would continue to contribute in the society - be it from his/her professional capacity at BRAC or from an individual space.

The YPs and MTs are chosen through a separate, rigorous recruitment process from thousands of applicants every year. The selected embark on a journey designed to give them a 360-degree learning experience through extensive on - the - job and classroom training and orientations.

During this period, the participants get an all-access to areas covered by BRAC in the form of field or programme attachments, role-playing positions, exposure trips etc. All these experiences enable them to build a practical knowledge base and gain adaptability to work in extremely demanding situations with a diverse range of people.

The young professionals and trainees spend a significant amount of time working alongside or shadowing veterans, irrespective of their position, who have been working in the organisation for many years at the field level. This is also the time when they

start building their network and personal rapport at various levels within the organisation.

At BRAC, both the young professionals and management trainee programmes are considered important outlets for shaping the organisational culture, change management and bridging the gap between the head office and field offices. The young professionals and management trainees find the opportunity to share their observations drawing from their experiences through presentations, projects and discussions at various forums.

Using these platforms, they bring to the attention of the management the problems on the ground along with possible solutions. All these opportunities and exchanges opens up a treasure trove of otherwise undocumented insights which can be highly valuable once they are deployed in a programme.

As a result, BRAC's initiatives continue to remain relevant as it strives to understand and identify with today's young people. Going forward, these young talents from BRAC are contributing to social transformation and growth by unleashing the force within through their energy, passion and innovative ideas.

My experiences as a young professional

Tanjilut Tasnuba

A warm welcome by 30 children carrying flowers in a well-lit classroom in the middle of a village was the day I fell in love with BRAC. The awe I felt lingered for the next seven days of my orientation trip in Sreemangal. For the first time, I understood what it meant to do something good for people who were born into less advantaged situations.

Together with 29 other colleagues, I joined BRAC as a young professional in 2012. The year-long training on various development areas and intensive programme attachments gave us hands-on experience through which we related theoretical knowledge with problems in practical life, and so found ourselves better prepared to

serve the organisation as well as the communities we work with.

I learned about the multi-faceted fronts of BRAC - one of the many reasons to be proud of being a part of this organisation. I could see the happy faces of little kids who love to come to BRAC schools every morning. I had the chance to talk to confident women in remote areas who had established their own businesses with loans taken from BRAC and kept contributing to their families. I was thrilled to witness how the lives of some ultra-poor men and women had transformed with support from BRAC. I have seen groups of women talking about their rights and vulnerabilities and getting support through BRAC's legal aid services.

There is more to it. From travelling alone to walking through long, muddy roads, chatting with our clients in their backyards to understand their problems, to learning to give moral support to those vulnerable, and finally visiting historical places I had only seen in photos until then - all these experiences groomed me into a more confident person.

I can remember the days during the management trainee programme when I used to shadow our programme organisers to learn from them. This exchange of real-life problem-solving with our frontline staff inspired me to become a fighter for change. This would have never been possible if I were not exposed to life this way.

Zeenath Sultana is a partnership analyst for BRAC Advocacy for Social Change.

Tanjilut Tasnuba is an assistant general manager at Social Enterprise, BRAC Education Programme.



WISDOM
BITS

"The power of youth is the common wealth for the entire world. The faces of young people are the faces of our past, our present and our future. No segment in the society can match with the power, idealism, enthusiasm and courage of the young people."
- Kailash Satyarthi



Channelling the power of youth in low-income urban settlements

Mahira Khan

Taking a step away from conventional commemorations of International Youth Day, BRAC, this year, turned its focus on the youth working for the ready-made garment sector, the country's largest industrial employer.

For a country with 48 million people aged between 10 to 24 years - the United Nations' definition for youth - that accounts for nearly 30 per cent of the whole population, leaving behind the major segment was no longer an option.

The day has been commemorated annually around the world by



The aim is to give the youth a platform to voice their challenges, participate in peer-to-peer discussions and intergenerational dialogue and engage as partners in development.

This year's theme was to promote 'safe spaces for youth'. It reflected largely on the need and emphasis on public spaces for young people to realise their full potential as outlined in the New Urban Agenda (NUA).

civic and government organisations since 1985, to celebrate the role of young men and women as essential partners of change.

The World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY) - the UN framework for youth development - also prioritises the provision of 'leisure activities' as essential to the psychological, cognitive and physical development of young people.

The increased emphasis on safe spaces comes at a time when the youth, increasingly exposed to a technologically connected world, aspire to engage deeper in political, civic, and social matters.

The availability and accessibility of such spaces become even more crucial to make this a reality and, in the long run, aligns itself with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

► **The initiative to create awareness and engage the largely ignored youth living in low-income, urban settlements was taken under a project by BRAC's urban development programme titled 'Empowering the RMG workers living in urban slums of Dhaka'.**

The project, which has been in operation since 2017, targets major industrial centres of Tongi, Gazipur, and Savar, and focuses on the health and wellbeing of workers in the ready-made garment sector.

To mark the 2018 International Youth Day, BRAC took the initiative to organise three simultaneous day-long programmes in these areas.

The events targeted the ready-made garment youth workers and young people from the local community, and sought to increase awareness regarding safe spaces, youth rights, and entitlements.

It also aimed at expanding access to healthcare, legal support, financial services, and skills development for youth.

Awareness messages were given out through entertaining activities and in partnership with other representatives from the government, NGO, RMG factories, and media.

The efforts of these organisations also provided a common platform for these young people to share knowledge and expertise, all the while participating in development and promotion of safe livelihoods.

Over 450 people attended the programmes, including influential community members such as the mayor of Savar, representatives from local garment factories and local government officials including the director of the Department of Youth Development in Gazipur City Corporation.



The young participants engaged in activities such as rallies for raising awareness, open discussions on the importance of youth development, quizzes and essay competitions, performances and songs.

At the end of the events, education grants were given out and prizes were distributed to winners of the competitions.

The events, first of its kind to be organised by BRAC Urban Development Programme, also brought about a number of key lessons that are essential for future programming and activities.

Although youth day celebrations have been in practice in Bangladesh for quite some time now, the notion is relatively obscure in the peri-urban areas of Bangladesh.

On the day, confirming attendance of key stakeholders such as government officials and factory management required constant persuasion and correspondence. It was also a challenge to confirm participation of youth at the events as the celebration fell on a workday.

Ultimately, the participation of relevant stakeholders had to be ensured through strategic persuasion and promotion of the events.

The efforts of the organisers were successful. Key stakeholders like local representatives from the Department of Youth Development were also in attendance along with local government officials, including ward councillors and the mayor.

The event itself served as a platform for strengthening inter-department dialogue between different government agencies as well as the relationship between BRAC and the youth development unit.

It also provided a platform for BRAC Urban Development Programme to highlight its impact in youth development initiatives including the ongoing education and livelihood grants support.

The importance of vocational education and training was also stressed for the development of youth, especially in the industrial areas.

Overall, the events highlighted good practices and learning models for bringing together multi-stakeholders for collective focus on one particular issue which, in this case, was youth development.

Moving forward, the lessons learned from this event can help in the development of a countrywide 'youth action plan', which local governments and civic organisations can adopt and implement at the grassroots level.

It is the voices of the youth that we should be listening more to.

For that to happen, creating safe spaces is crucial so that young people can put forth their demands to elected officials in a bid to bring change.

Mahira Khan works in the knowledge management and communications team for BRAC Urban Development Programme.



We believe in the power of youth

Rakib Avi and Riffat Ashrafee

There are **1.8** billion young people - yes, I'm talking about one-fourth of the world's population. Leave out this population when making the next big decision in building a better world, and you will very likely end up missing it altogether.

Whenever, we hear discussions regarding the youth, they are reflected as the unruly and unmanageable population looking for instant gratification.

Now let me divert your attention to Bangladesh, a small country in South Asia with 164 million people. One-third of the population is, you guessed it right, the youth. In a nation that has a rich culture and history, it is the youth that have always led major socio-political transformations - from the language movement of 1952 to the Liberation War of 1971, and followed by a number of major uprisings - all spurring positive change.

However, there were dark times too that shook us to the core. 1 July 2016, the Holey Artisan attack. What started just like any other day ended in a way that left the entire country grappling with

countless questions. What could have led these youngsters from mostly privileged tiers of the society conduct such an act of inhumanity? What is going so wrong with the young generation? Are we failing them? If yes, how do we take action?

The reality is, the youth are not only underestimated and under-represented, but also widely misunderstood.

At BRAC, we believe in taking a deep dive into problems, extracting insights from what people are thinking, and co-creating solutions with communities. When the end goal came down to understanding young people, we decided to add another parametre: making their voices heard.

We listened

We formed groups within the organisation and spread out to different districts of Bangladesh. Our goal was to listen to the stories of young people and try to

understand what mattered to them. We also talked to school children, parents, teachers, and organisations working in the youth space to get a better understanding of the ecosystem. A wide range of issues cropped up: parental negligence and overprotectiveness, lack of a trusted platform to share mental health crises, involvement in drugs providing an easy escape from reality, tailored information gap to personal and professional development, lack of local role models and lack of opportunities to engage in passion-driven activities.

Helping the youth to help themselves

According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), an estimated two million young people enter the labour force every year. But youth unemployment in Bangladesh has been rising in the past 25 years, from

four per cent in 1991 to 10.4 per cent in 2016, according to the International Labour Organization (ILO). And the public and private sectors are able to provide jobs to not even one-fourth of this total potential workforce. So what happens to these young people? Knowing the uncertainty of their future, what mechanism do they adopt to prepare themselves from earlier years? Additionally, in a highly centralised development ecosystem, how do local youth foresee their future?

At BRAC we knew addressing these issues was not a one-time, quick solution. It's a complex environment with immense pressure of competition and the only way we could see light at the end of the tunnel was to create a platform where young people themselves can openly address their concerns and realities, relate to their areas of passion, and come up with a path to pave their journey forward. Our role, in this picture, was only to guide and mentor them to write and live their own story.

Hence in 2018, we started a pilot initiative with a group of 30 young people from diverse backgrounds in Khulna city with a lean model: capacity development sessions, community projects for idea implementation, and regional events to showcase their achievements.

Not just another skills development initiative

Amra Notun Network, a network for young changemakers, provides an



engagement and development platform for youth to drive positive change in their communities. The model focuses on equipping local changemakers with mentoring skills so they can influence and create future mentors in their localities. So, how are we making this happen?

We are giving young participants access to a unique blend of high-quality learning curriculum, which balances 21st century functional skills with awareness of social issues. Functional skills are

taught through the lens of social and emotional learning and human-centred design approach to help youth maximise their individual potential as citizens of tomorrow. Built on a strong foundation of open and collaborative culture, our model brings in a range of committed partners to support programme implementation through innovative learning mechanisms like storytelling, drama therapy, and mindfulness practices. The Amra Notun Network prioritises creation of scope for participants to showcase their unique strengths and skill sets through community engagement projects.

Local change depends on the power of communities, hence we are building one

Since July 2018, we have reached 98 young people located in Khulna city. They are now working in small groups on their ideas for change.

Fairooz reflecting on her experience said, "There was a point when I looked at problems and felt bad about the system. But now I believe in taking charge of my problems and focusing on execution."

Another participant, Ragib, shared, "Last year, I was going through an endless series of frustrations and I did not know who to talk to. After Amra Notun's engagement, my teammates and I have been working on a platform for many more like me in our universities. It is an open space to talk about mental health battles without fear of judgment. I want to help myself by helping others."

We acknowledge there is no silver bullet to end social problems and there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Hence, this platform is for creating diverse opportunities in the communities. Some participants are getting the scope to engage as training facilitators with us, some are discovering their entrepreneurial interests and others are preparing for the formal job sector. Our focus is to help them choose and work on their areas of interest with a lens of social responsibility. In future, we foresee this network taking off on its own, and be run and managed by the participants and alumni of the network themselves.

The youth not only carry a nation through a transformational process but they also decide the transformation. And these decision makers need our support and guidance to achieve their goals for a future that works for them. We need to stop looking at them as problems that need solution or tools to achieve predefined agendas. They need us to believe in them, they need mentors to look up to, and most importantly, they need an ecosystem. But we do not want to do this alone. So, if you believe in the power of youth, join us on this journey - it can only mean progress for all!

Rakib Avi leads BRAC Social Innovation Lab – a knowledge and experimentation hub within BRAC. He manages a portfolio of projects including mobile financial systems for women, digital tools for development, youth inclusion and incubating emerging social enterprises.

Riffat Ashrafee is a deputy manager at BRAC Social Innovation Lab. She leads the youth incubation team. Her team drives the youth pilot intervention called Amra Notun Network, a platform designed to foster and promote positive youth engagement in Bangladesh.



DID YOU KNOW

- More than 64 million unemployed youth worldwide and 145 million young workers living in poverty: youth employment remains a global challenge and a top policy concern.
- The definition of youth differs from country to country. According to the United Nations, "youth" are the people who are from the age of 15 to 24. However, in Bangladesh youth are termed to be people between ages 18 and 35. In India, according to the National Youth Policy 2014, the people aged 15-29 are youth.

Next issue of dBRIEF

The next issue of dBRIEF will be on 'Gender'. We expect to cover interesting stories, national/international/organisational level initiatives/events, ground-breaking researches, and other relevant topics around the topic.

Moreover, we are planning to introduce a new section "Dear editor" from the next issue. The section will contain readers' reviews and constructive feedbacks on the current issue. In this regard, we are calling for your thoughtful insights, reviews and comments on this issue. Please submit your suggestions to dbrief@brac.net before 30 April 2019.

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