

# Next Generation 2015 and beyond



Analysis and report





# Next Generation 2015 and beyond

Jointly initiated by



Research and analysis



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# Acronyms

BANBEIS	Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics
BBS	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics
CME	Continuing Medical Education
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DNC	Department of Narcotics Control
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FMCG	Fast-Moving Consumer Goods
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GoB	Government of Bangladesh
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IDSN	International Dalit Solidarity Network
IID	Institute of Informatics and Development
IRI	International Republican Institute
LIS	Library and Information Services
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RDI	Rural Development Institute
RMG	Readymade Garment
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
STD	Sexually Transmitted Diseases
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infections
ULAB	University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
VAW	Violence Against Women
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association

# Message

With over 50 million young people between the age of 18 and 35 years across the country, Bangladesh has a diverse youth population who are uniquely poised to engage through their energy, creativity and participation in the social and economic progress in reaching the national development priorities.

Young people are a powerful force and transforming their communities through active participation in processes and forums that enable their voices to be heard and address key concerns. Similar to young people in developing countries, young women and men in Bangladesh prioritise quality education, skills development, decent work, gender equality, adapting to climate change and providing spaces for their engagement at local, national and regional forums.

We commissioned the Next Generation Bangladesh: 2015 and beyond report realising that the opportunity to engage with young people is now! The dialogues and consultations with young people in different divisions of the country provided valuable information regarding the importance of bringing them along on the journey of Bangladesh's social and economic progress and also ensuring their priorities are addressed.

The implementation and achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and targets requires the effective and meaningful participation and engagement of young women and men in Bangladesh and across the world. This will pave the way for the achievement of stronger and resilient societies.

This report provides concise findings on key concerns for young people, their engagement in the different sectors as well as opportunity for scaling initiatives by different stakeholders. The report is complimented by a Policy Brief.

We hope that the readers will be able to use the findings to strengthen and target interventions for young people in Bangladesh.



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Photo: G.M.B. Akash/ActionAid



# Introduction

Across the world, governments, development partners and civil society came together to actively engage in consultations and dialogues to analyse the progress of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and address the areas for renewed commitments for the Post-2015 Development Agenda. Since 2012, countries have held consultations with governments, development partners and civil society at local, national, regional and international levels where civil society, especially young women and men, had the opportunity to voice their concerns.

Eighty-nine per cent of young women and men currently reside in less developed countries which is 9 out of 10 young people (UNFPA, 2014).<sup>1</sup> With nearly 2 billion strong, there is more young people now than at any point in history, providing all countries with a fast growing constituency who also bring forward a coherent agenda calling for more equality, greater well-being and the protection of human rights (UNFPA, 2014).

Different online and offline tools were used to identify the key priorities of civil society across the world. The MyWorld Survey<sup>2</sup> is one such online tool which was widely used by young people across the world including those from Bangladesh, where

individuals voted the top six priorities based on the 16 priorities listed.

Young women and men constitute over one-third of the 160 million population of Bangladesh (BBS, 2011b). Based on the data analytics of the MyWorld Survey as well as consultations and dialogues with young women and men across the country, education, decent work, governance, healthcare, gender equality and climate change have been listed as key youth concerns. Young people from around the world have echoed similar concerns.

2015 was a year when the world came together to sign agreements to ensure the social, economic and environmental aspects of development that set targets for all countries. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent an opportunity for not only addressing young people as a constituency but also addressing issues that are of particular concern to young people (OECD Development Center, 2015). The endorsement and agreement on the SDGs at the United Nations General Assembly (September 2015), Finance for Development Conference (July 2015), Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (March 2015), and the Paris Agreement on Climate

1 Some organisations use 15-24 as a useful starting point for youth engagement and analysis. ActionAid, however, works with youth into their very early 30s, recognising that the social markers of adulthood (i.e. securing employment, marriage, starting a family, etc.) nowadays often occur at later points in the life cycle. A similar definition is also used by the European Commission and for the purpose this study has used the 15-30 age category.

2 MyWorld Survey 2015. Available at: <http://data.myworld2015.org>

## Box 01 Sustainable development goals and perceptions of the next generation

	<p>SDG goal <b>3</b> Good health &amp; well-being</p>	<p>Good health care service is important to 99% of the youth</p>
	<p>SDG goal <b>4</b> Quality education</p>	<p>Quality education is important to 99% of the youth. Most of the youth agreed that education has get them ready for jobs They prioritised teachers training, setting up of more institutions, and efficient and transparent management</p>
	<p>SDG goal <b>5</b> Gender equality</p>	<p>81% think girls should receive more scholarships than boys to reduce gender inequalities in education</p>
	<p>SDG goal <b>7</b> Affordable &amp; clean energy</p>	<p>39% of youth see electricity crisis as a problem for Bangladesh</p>
	<p>SDG goal <b>8</b> Decent work &amp; economic growth</p>	<p>Unemployment is high among youth, particularly for females They usually have late entry into the job market They believe experience is vital for job</p>
	<p>SDG goal <b>11</b> Sustainable cities &amp; communities</p>	<p>Safety and security is important to 99% youth</p>
	<p>SDG goal <b>13</b> Climate action</p>	<p>Concerns about the environment vary from region to region, which is higher in coastal areas Rural youth are greatly affected by changes in environment</p>
	<p>SDG goal <b>16</b> Peace, justice &amp; strong institution</p>	<p>Youth perception about key institutions of Bangladesh reveals their positivity about religious centres, army and media, and negativity about police and political parties</p>

Change (December 2015) brings together countries across the world to address issues of inequality, poverty, as well as inter and intra generational engagement on inclusive development and sustainability.

Young focused goals and indicators are represented across all 17 goals and 169 indicators of the SDGs. Eight of these 17 goals (see Box 1) are in close alignment with the key findings of this report.

## Scope

The research focused on young women and men's participation in local and national development processes against the backdrop of the conversations around the finalisation of the SDGs and also contextualisation by countries. Within this context, this report looks into five important areas affecting young people's lives - governance, law and order, education and employability, environment, and health.

## The key objectives

- To capture and assess the attitudes of young people in Bangladesh toward the economic, social, cultural and political development of Bangladesh;
- To ascertain young people's key priorities over the next 15-year period that facilitates national development;
- To provide key stakeholders (GoB, civil society, international development agencies, NGO sector, etc.) with up-to-date information on youth initiatives at the local and national levels and how to ensure their participation in the local and national development priorities tied to the localising of the SDGs.

## The Partnership

Next Generation Bangladesh: 2015 and Beyond is a follow-up to the 2010 first Next Generation Report and is placed in the context of the new SDGs. ActionAid Bangladesh, British Council and the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh joined together to take forward the research and ensure its relevancy to both national and global events and processes. The research was conducted by the Nielsen Company (Bangladesh) and the Institute of Informatics and Development (IID) formulated the full report and a policy brief with technical oversight of the three organisations.

However, this particular study is unique in a number of ways. While a number of other similar studies have collected youth voices as a part of public opinion and many of those studies have particularly focused on different issues, there remains a knowledge gap regarding specific needs and perceptions of the young people, suggestions on ways to overcome obstacles and opinion about future direction for development. The Next Generation report provides unique and in-depth insights into the different challenges that young people face in Bangladesh. It digs deeper into the problems identified by young people and connects those issues with their optimistic vision for a prosperous Bangladesh through exploring possible solutions.



Photo: Chris Kousouros/IID

# Methodology

*The Next Generation: 2015 and beyond* focuses on status and views of young people - between the ages of 15 and 30 years - across the country.

To capture the diverse and sensitive issues of youth perception, a multifaceted research approach was used. This includes both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The study used desk research and conducted focus group discussions (FGDs), in-depth interviews and surveys to cover both qualitative and quantitative

aspects.

The research involved a nationwide survey of the youth population (see the infographics given below for details). Major issues that the next generation want to prioritise for the country in the coming years were explored through FGDs while in-depth interviews were administered to explore their specific concerns.

## Sources of data



15

In-depth  
interviews



5000

Young people  
(15-30 yrs)  
surveyed

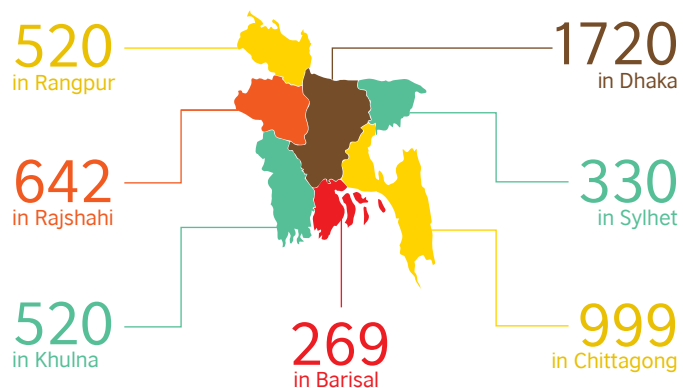


18

Focus group  
discussions

## Geographic distribution of survey respondents

The survey covered all 7 divisions and 64 districts of Bangladesh



## Urban-rural distribution of survey respondents



20%

Urban



4%

Semi-urban



76%

Rural

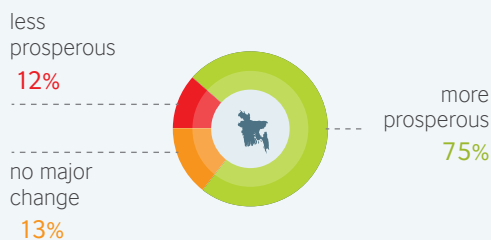


Photo: Amiruzzaman/ActionAid

## Youth are optimistic about the country's economic growth

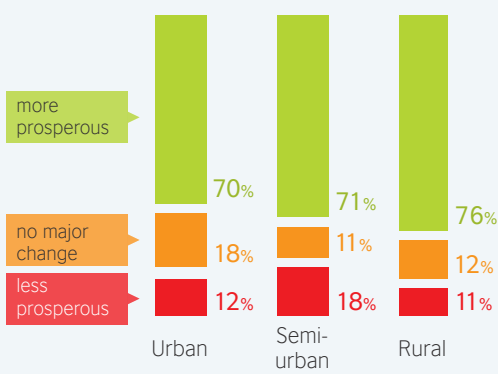
Most young people surveyed under this study were found to be optimistic regarding the future progress of the country. About 75 per cent of the respondents feel that Bangladesh will be more prosperous in the near future.

Figure 01 : Youth visualisation about Bangladesh in the next 15 years



Note : n = 5000 for total respondents, n = 1041 for Urban, n = 225 for Semi urban, n = 3733 for Rural respondents

Figure 02 : Youth visualisation from different regions about Bangladesh in the next 15 years



Note: n = 5,000 for total respondents, n = 1,041 for Urban, n = 225 for Semi urban, n = 3,733 for Rural respondents

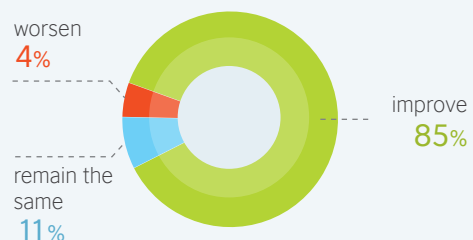
Optimism regarding Bangladesh stems from the country's rapid economic growth as well as improvements in human development. Between 1980 and 2014, the country's Human

Development Index increased from 0.338 in 1980 to 0.570 in 2014 which is an average annual increase of 1.6 per cent (UNDP, 2015). The study finds that youth seem to be optimistic as they believe that their economic condition will improve in the future. Majority of youth surveyed also believe that Bangladesh is heading towards the right direction, which further supports their optimism regarding the country's future. Each of these potential links is explored further in the following subsections.

## Youth's economic condition has improved in recent years

Youth optimism has been reflected in their outlook on their future economic condition. About 85 per cent youth in the study expect an improved personal income, while only 11 per cent expect no changes in their income level. This expectation is similar regardless of gender. However, geographical location has a small effect on the difference of expectation among urban (83 per cent) and rural (86 per cent) youth.

Figure 03 : Compared to past year, youth's own economic condition will -



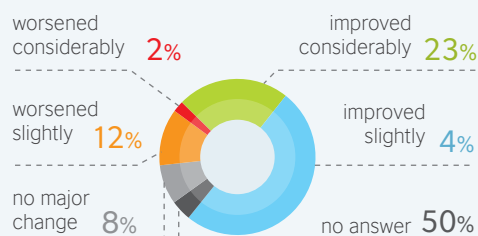
Note : n = 5,000 for total respondents

Optimism regarding personal economic situation may be related to overall burgeoning economic condition of the Bangladesh economy. Bangladesh has maintained a GDP growth rate of 6 per cent or above for the past five years, highlighting the country's improving economic situation (World Bank, 2016). Bangladesh has also moved up in the income bracket, graduating as a lower-middle income country.

In terms of job opportunities, the survey found that a majority of Bangladeshi youth believe that opportunities have improved in the last five years. About 23 per cent hold that job opportunities have improved considerably in the past five years and another 4 per cent believe that job opportunities have slightly improved. It is interesting to note that a slightly higher percentage of female respondents (74.9 per cent) than male respondents (72 per cent) believe that opportunities have improved, while 11.2 per cent of females compared to 16.9 per cent of males believe the situation has worsened. This could indicate that women's employment opportunities, relative to men's, have improved in the last five years, and if so, that is certainly something to be optimistic about.

About 74 per cent of the youth surveyed believe

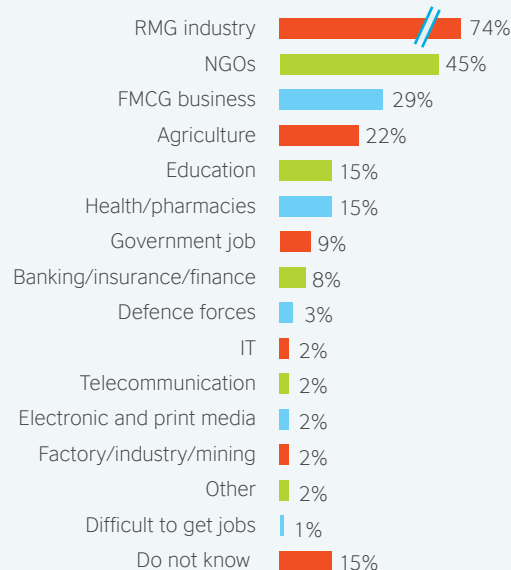
Figure 04 : Over the last 5 years, job opportunities for youth in Bangladesh have -



Note : n = 5,000 for total respondents

that the readymade garment (RMG) industry creates the largest number of jobs in the economy, followed by non-governmental organisations (NGOs). This is not surprising given that the RMG sector itself employs about 4.2 million workers and its labour-intensive production methods are perceived as a catalyst to creating new employment. However, some FGD participants

Figure 05 : Higher job opportunity sectors for youth in Bangladesh



Note : n = 5,000 for total respondents

perceived finding employment to be very difficult and felt that there has been little to no improvement in opportunities in the last five years. A major barrier to employment for them was the high level of corruption in the job market that they believe exist, especially in the public sector where, according to participants, one is unlikely to find a good job without resorting to lobbying or bribing the officials.



## Bangladesh is heading towards the right direction

Next, we wanted to gauge how the youth feel about the country's direction. "Right direction" is a perception indicator based on the state of democracy, governance, opportunities, MDG/SDG performance, economic growth, equity, and so on. The survey found that 60 per cent of the youth believe that things are headed in the right direction in Bangladesh. This figure supports findings from a nationwide opinion survey in Bangladesh by IRI (2015), where 62 per cent of respondents stated that Bangladesh was on the right track.



Note : n = 5,000 for total respondents

The study also found that older members of the cohort have a slightly reduced belief that the country is heading towards the right direction. People aged 15-20 years show a higher level of belief (61 per cent) than people aged 20-25 years (58 per cent) and 25-30 years (59 per cent).

However, a closer look reveals some interesting nuances. For instance, when the data is disaggregated into urban, semi-urban and rural, the split between "right direction" and "wrong direction" is almost even for urban youth. This points to a greater degree of cynicism among urban youth and could be tied to another finding from our survey that urban youth are more disgruntled with the political situation in the country. Perhaps the political violence they see around them is something that contributes to their cynicism about the country's future. Rural youth, on the other hand, appear to be much more optimistic about the direction of the country, with 63 per cent reporting that they believe Bangladesh is on the right track.

Among the 37 per cent of youth who believe that Bangladesh is on the wrong track, 54 per cent believe Bangladesh will be more prosperous by 2030; and among the 60 per cent youth who believe that the country is heading in the right direction, 88 per cent believe Bangladesh will become more prosperous by 2030. This tells us that while almost all respondents agree that Bangladesh will experience strong economic growth, it takes more than just GDP growth to be on the right track, and that a significant number of young people care about more than just overall material prosperity.

Overall optimism of the youth is evident irrespective of their perception of current situation of their country. Bangladesh can benefit from this youth optimism by harnessing it in a positive and effective manner. Youth are open to growth and change, and therefore empathy and understanding is required in order to show them how they can contribute to the country's future development.



Photo: Chris Kousouros/IID

## Concerns remain over key sectoral issues

Although Bangladeshi youth appears to be very optimistic, they are conscious of the prevailing challenges to attain their future goals for the country. The study identifies four main areas of concerns for the country's youth. First, the survey identifies political instability to be the greatest concern for the youth, followed by poor communication system in the country. Second, among key institutions, religious centres are the most popular and political parties are the least popular among youth. Third, sexual health awareness is lower among female youths compared to males. Fourth, drug abuse among Bangladeshi youth mainly rises out of peer pressure and recreational purposes.

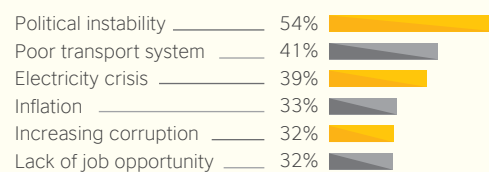
### Political instability and poor transport system are two of the biggest problems for youth

According to the young population, the biggest problem for the country is political instability (54 per cent). Given the prevailing political instability (ongoing strikes and hartals) during the survey, this issue came up as an obvious response. Poor communication system (41 per cent) and electricity crisis (39 per cent) were other major problems identified by the youth. Urban youth are more concerned with Political instability (65 per cent) and Corruption (42 per cent), whereas rural youth are more concerned with poor transport system (45 per cent) and electricity crisis (40 per cent).

This illustrates that urban areas suffer greater negative consequences in times of political unrest

than rural areas. It can be inferred that daily routines, such as attending universities or work places, are disrupted during hartals. As the political headquarters and offices are usually

Figure 07 : The Major problems faced by Bangladesh today



Urban youth are more concerned with -

Political instability (65%)  
Corruption (42%)

Rural youth are more concerned with -

Poor transport system (45%)  
Electricity crisis (40%)



Note : n = 5,000 for total respondents, n = 3,733 for rural, n = 1,041 for urban respondents (Multiple choice question)

situated in urban areas, such areas are also more prone to violence during times of political strife and this threatens the youth's safety and security. On the other hand, political conflict rarely ever results in violence in rural areas, so it is not viewed as a dire issue.

Bangladesh has seen rapid urban development but some rural areas are still lacking basic infrastructure. Although road networks have been improved in recent years, adequate resources were not dispatched for their maintenance. Another key issue for rural youth is the lack of electricity. It is hard for a generation that depends

heavily on technology to live without electricity that powers every day devices. Rural electrification is crucial for socio-economic progress in developing countries (Rahman, Paatero, Poudyal & Lahdelma, 2013). Addressing the electricity crisis in rural Bangladesh aligns with SDG 7 that urges nations to “Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.”

### Political parties have the most negative impression and religious centres have the most positive impression among youth

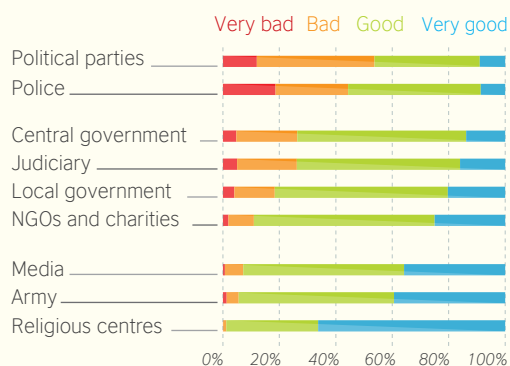
Among key institutions, political parties were found to be least popular among the youth. This can be related to political instability during the time when the study was conducted. Political groups may have lost some of their appeal following last year’s conflicts that left the nation in a critical situation. However, 45 per cent of the youth surveyed still view political parties as good institutions.

The central government, the judiciary and local governments are all perceived as good institutions

by the majority of the youth in the study. NGOs and charities are also seen in a positive light. This indicates that despite the shortcomings of the political parties, the youth have faith in Bangladesh’s governance system.

The youth tend to hold religious centres in high regard and majority deem them to be “very good”. About 90 per cent of the population of Bangladesh identify themselves as Muslims and 9.2 per cent as Hindus (BANBEIS, 2011). Given this social landscape, it is likely that people feel inclined to support Islamic centres such as mosques and madrasas which serve as a place of refuge and education. Madrasa are educational institutions that feature prominently throughout Bangladesh, where youth are mainly taught through the Islamic framework (Asadullah & Chaudhury, 2006). Ezzy and Halafoff (2014) have argued that religion provides youth with certainty in the face of unsettling and insecure times. Therefore, the faith in the “goodness” of religious centres may be explained by religious spirituality providing young people with a sense of direction during crisis periods.

Figure 08 : Perception about key institutions of Bangladesh



Note : n= 5,000 for total respondents.  
(Single choice question)

### Sexual health awareness is higher among males than females

About 66 per cent of male and 53 per cent of female youth stated that they are aware of sexual health issues. Young males mostly get information regarding adolescent or sexually transmitted diseases like AIDS from friends. Young females turn to their families for such information.

Insights from FGDs reveal that young women want greater sexual health awareness. Young men

usually never discuss their health concerns with other males or in a group. However, women can freely discuss their sexual and personal health with doctors and this is a significant improvement from the past. Female youth do not hesitate to contact medical experts whenever there are any concerns or any questions. Married females, on average, were found to be more aware than unmarried young women regarding sexual health issues. Female youth appear to believe that knowing about reproductive and sexual health is important mainly because being unaware about these issues puts them in an awkward situation in marital lives.

These realities show that an effort must be made to enhance sexual health awareness among youth in general with a particular focus on females. Shuma and Halder (2015) carried out a study on perceptions, awareness and knowledge about HIV/AIDS among private university students of Bangladesh; although they found high level of knowledge among the students, misconceptions are still prevalent. This study also found that senior male students with more mass media exposure were the most well-informed about HIV/Aids. This is testament to the fact that female awareness regarding sexual health issues is still lagging.

### Youth are led to drugs through peer pressure

Fun and curiosity for adventure were found to be common reasons behind drug abuse. A study regarding drug addiction among Bangladeshi undergraduate students in private universities has also found that the main reasons for using drugs are influence of friends and the thrill of trying something new (Sani, 2010). This indicates that the youth either do not know or simply disregard the

harmful effects of substance abuse, which means that the demand for drugs needs to be curbed. But the supply side also needs to be examined at the same time because ease of access is likely to play a role in youth's decision to try illegal drugs and other substances. The Department of Narcotics Control (DNC) firmly holds that drugs are smuggled through Bangladesh's porous borders and are produced in bordering regions in India and Myanmar (DNC, 2014). Nevertheless, the DNC conceded that drug usage and trafficking is no longer concentrated in densely populated urban areas as before, but is spreading to rural Bangladesh as well.

In FGDs, substance abuse was declared as a major concern for youth in Bangladesh. It is perceived to be one of the main reasons which steers youth into violent activities as well as a major health concern for young people. Both Male and female participants stated that substance abuse is increasing among the young community as it is easily accessible and advanced communication system made it easier to get it.

The present study also found that cigarette, betel leaf and alcohol intake is more common among males (35.6 per cent, 37.1 per cent and 3.2 per cent respectively) compared to females (5.4 per cent, 33 per cent and 0.1 per cent respectively) in the youth group. This might be due to social stigma associated with women smoking cigarettes openly (Sultana, Aktar, Rahman & Alam, 2015). Alcohol is prohibited due to the country's predominant Islamic faith; however, non-Muslims are allowed to consume alcohol. On the other hand, betel leaf consumption is very common in Bangladesh and a socially acceptable substance; therefore, its usage is rather high for both male and female youths.



Photo: Chris Kousouros/IID

## Social conflicts are linked to the economy and unemployment

Property or land disputes followed by domestic violence were identified as the most common grounds of social conflict. As a large part of the population lives in rural areas and relies on natural resources, land is of critical importance for their livelihoods. The youth also believe that unemployment is the driving factor behind violence among youth. The worst sufferers of violence are women and low-income people. Such conflicts are usually resolved by community leaders and elders without much involvement from the youth. Finally, youth still experience education and economic status based discrimination.

### Land disputes and domestic violence are the most common issues of conflict

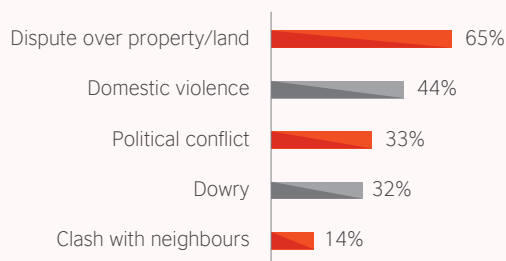
About 65 per cent of the youth surveyed identified land dispute as a main cause of conflict. Domestic violence came up as the second most common

cause of conflict. However, political conflict (33 per cent) and clash with neighbors (32 per cent) were identified as less common factors.

Property based dispute and domestic violence are more common in rural areas (70 per cent and 45 per cent respectively) compared to urban areas (47 per cent and 39 per cent). Political conflict is the second major issue in urban areas (46 per cent), which rural youth find as a relatively less prominent issue (29 per cent).

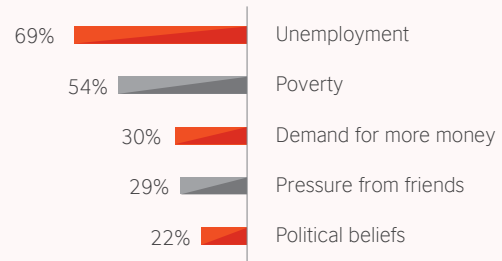
Property and land based disputes are deeply connected to effects of climate change. Climate change has accelerated the riverbank erosion process, which costs many families their land and homes. About 70 per cent of Bangladeshis depend on natural resources for their livelihoods and this dependency is under pressure from two sides. First, Bangladesh loses 1 per cent arable land each year due to degradation and natural disaster, and second this reduced land has to be distributed rapidly among the increasing population

Figure 09 : Five most common factors that cause conflict in the community



Note : n = 5,000 for total respondents.  
(Multiple choice question)

Figure 10 : Top five factors that cause young people to get involved in violent acts



Note : n = 5,000 for total respondents.  
(Multiple choice question)

(RDI, 2009). This explains why land disputes are a major source of conflict for many Bangladeshis. However, climate change is also not gender neutral and women tend to suffer more from climate change effects. Part of one's vulnerability to climate change depends on the gender role played by the individual. This makes rural women in developing countries the most vulnerable because they often depend on natural resources like arable land for their livelihoods (Terry, 2009). About 80 per cent of Bangladeshi women live in rural areas (Biodiversity International, 2015). Rural communities are dependent on agriculture and women make up about 65 per cent of labour force in this sector (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2010). Climate change affects these resources and as women already face social and cultural biases, they are forced to pay the heaviest price for this damage.

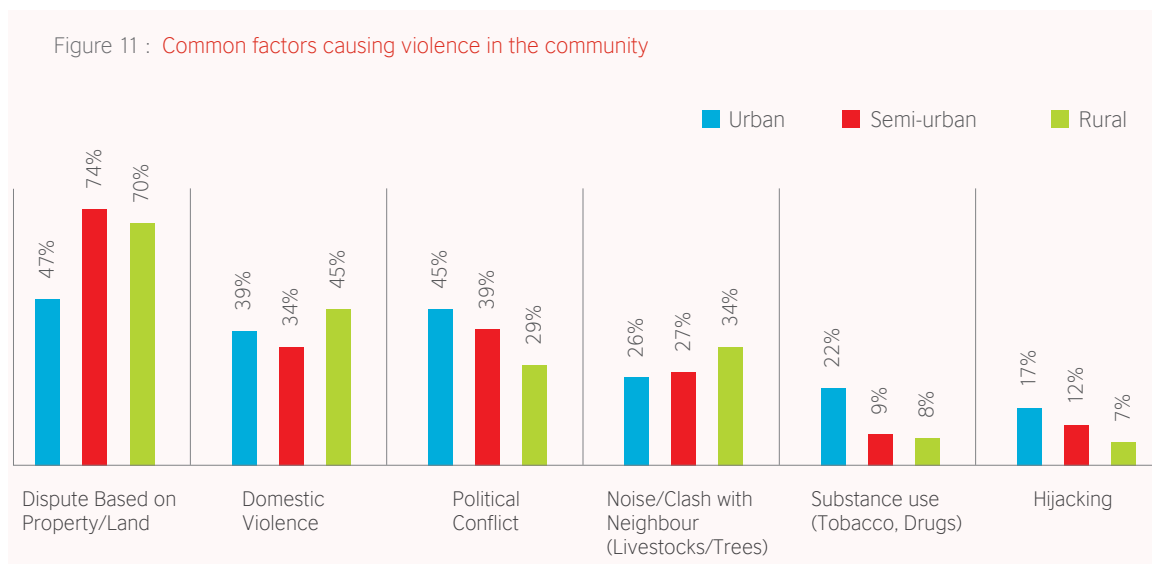
Domestic violence is still rampant in both urban and rural areas of Bangladesh. The Violence Against Women (VAW) Survey 2011 in Bangladesh

found that about 87 per cent of the women surveyed had suffered from some form of domestic violence.



Note : n = 5,000 for total respondents.  
(Multiple choice question)

Bangladesh's patriarchal social structure as well as a culture of acceptance helps perpetuate domestic violence in the country (Sarker & Yesmin, 2013). Domestic violence is a sensitive issue for government legislation. The current situation shows that there is a stark need to create public awareness, promote women's empowerment, and ensure the psychological well-being of the victims.



Note : n = 1,041 for Urban, n = 225 for Semi-urban, n = 3,733 for Rural respondents



## Unemployment can culminate into violence among the youth

Unemployment (69 per cent) and poverty (54 per cent) have been identified as the biggest contributors toward violence among youth. Other major issues causing violence among youths are their demand for money (30 per cent) and peer pressure (29 per cent).

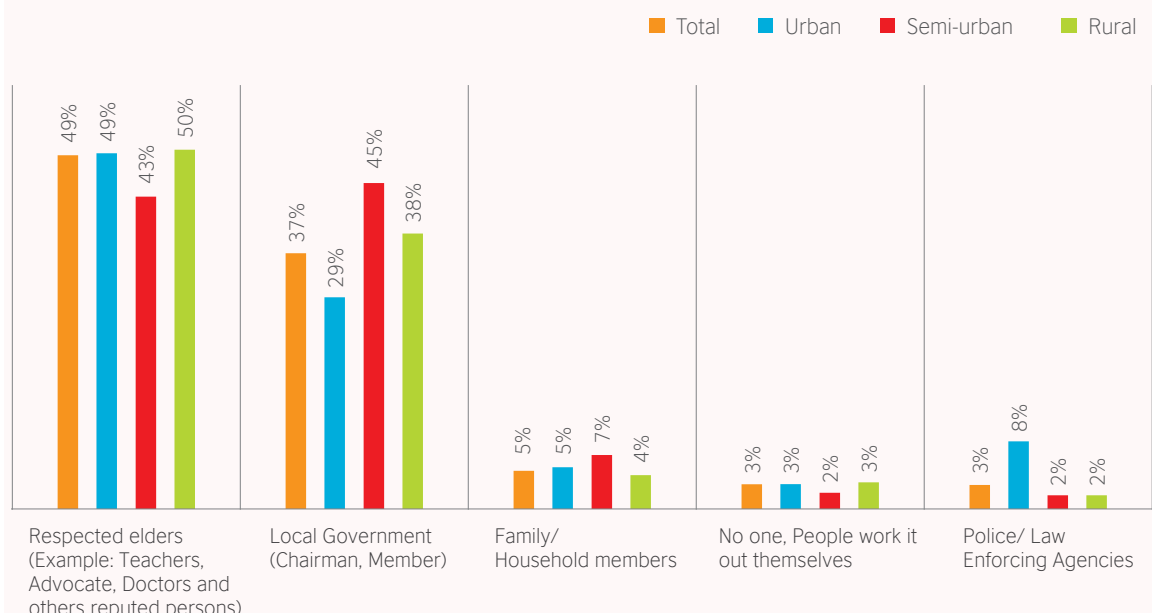
The unemployment-poverty-violence nexus has been long under scrutiny. A study based on youths from Afghanistan, Colombia and Somalia found that the root of violent behaviour is in experiences of injustice and discrimination (Mercy Corps, 2015). On the other hand, Ajimotokin, Haskins and Wade (2015) found a positive correlation between unemployment and crime rate. Bangladesh's youth unemployment rate has been increasing and currently holds at 9.1 per cent (World Bank, 2016). Therefore, policies need to address this situation to curb the effects of unemployment and poverty.

## Women and low-income people tend to be major victims of violence

The youth surveyed believe that women (73 per cent) and low income people (71 per cent) are common victims of violence. Children (41 per cent), students, youth and unemployed people (39 per cent) and political activists (21 per cent) are also vulnerable to violence.

As mentioned earlier, as part of the patriarchal social structure women emerge as major victims of violence. A study found that 40 per cent urban and 42 per cent rural women in the survey reported that they suffered physical abuse by their husbands (Naved, Azim, Bhuiya & Persson, 2006). Low income people are already vulnerable to various threats and social exclusion. Religious, ethnic and indigenous minorities often make up the extreme poor community of Bangladesh (Ali, 2014). For instance, in Bangladesh, Dalits are prohibited from entering non-Dalit religious events, and are also not

Figure 13 : Conflicts primarily resolved by

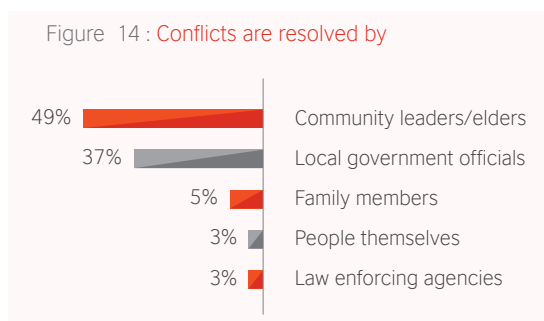


Note : n = 5,000 for total respondents, n = 1,041 for Urban, n = 225 for Semi-urban, n = 3,733 for Rural respondents

allowed to rent or build houses outside their designated localities (IDSN, 2015). Policies should be designed in a way that acknowledges special interest groups like women and low-income people who usually bear the brunt of being in a segregated society.

### Community leaders and respected elders primarily resolve the conflicts

In both urban and rural areas, community leaders and respected elders are usually the ones (49 per cent) who initiate any kind of conflict resolution. Local government officials are more active in semi-urban (45 per cent) and rural areas (38 per cent) compared to urban areas (29 per cent). Family members (5 per cent), law enforcing agencies (3 per cent) and people themselves (3 per cent) are rarely active in conflict resolution within the community.



Note : n= 5,000 for total respondents, n = 2,501 for male, n = 2,499 for female respondents

FGDs revealed that in the urban setting, conflict resolution in the local government is often deemed expensive and time consuming. People in urban areas have very little faith in local authorities because of corruption scandals. Local leaders or elders are more familiar and this personal aspect makes them more trustworthy in resolving various

community issues in both urban and rural areas. However, the youth are rarely ever invited to take part in their community conflict resolution. Yet, the youth seemed eager to be part of these sessions but insist that they are usually not given the opportunity.

As local leaders are looked up to in such instances, it might be worthwhile to encourage them to include young people in conflict resolution incidents or in any decision-making that relates to youth policies. This will enhance their decision making skills and make them more independent about making sound choices.

### Education and economic status are the main reasons for discrimination faced by youth

Most common reasons for discrimination were found to be educational background (29 per cent) and economic status (28 per cent). About 6 per cent of youth have personally experienced discrimination. Among them, males reported facing discrimination more (7 per cent) than female youth (5 per cent).

However, educational background is a more serious issue of discrimination for female (36 per cent) than male youths (24 per cent). Gender based discrimination was also found to be significantly higher for females (28 per cent) than males (7 per cent), whereas more males reported to have personally faced discrimination. On the other hand, political beliefs and religious discrimination are more common among males (23 per cent and 10 per cent respectively) compared to females (3 per cent and 5 per cent respectively).

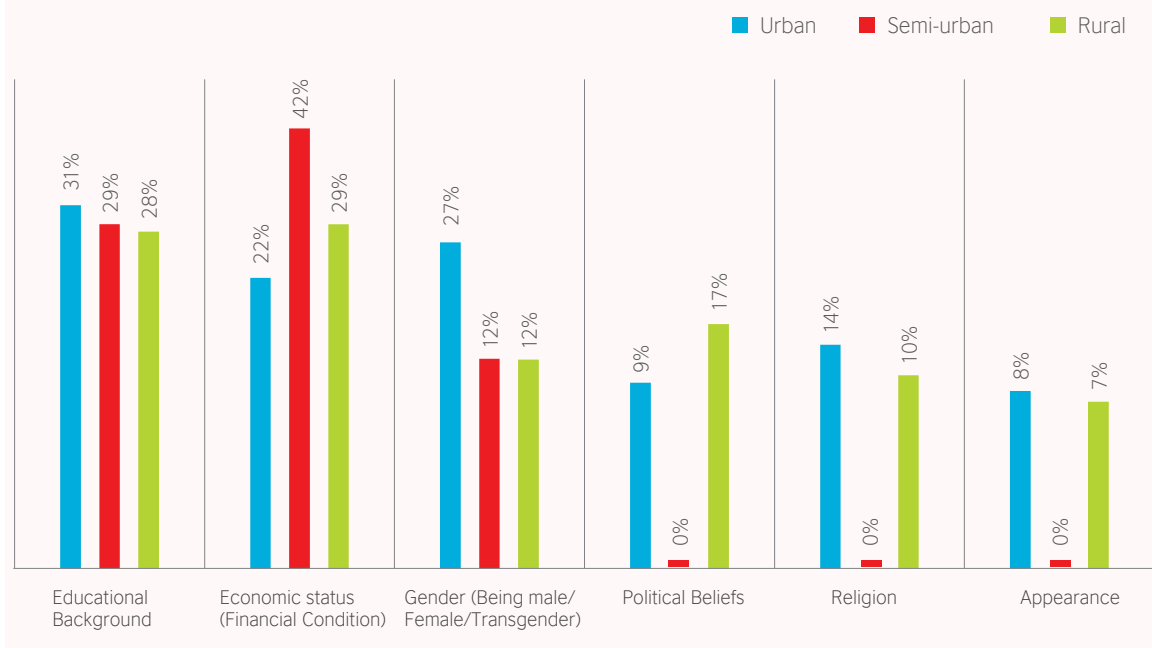
Discrimination based on educational background

for women have two aspects to it. First, women initially face challenges in their academic educational preferences. For instance, one female youth in the study states that she was discouraged from studying engineering because she will be married off soon and she will not look after her parents then. Whereas investing in her brother's education will be more worthwhile for her parents. This indicates that there is an entry level discrimination that women often face in higher education. Second, women report discrimination in the job market, emphasizing that they face discrimination despite having the same qualifications. However, FGDs observation from this study is, male workers are more proactive in

seeking out post-graduation training schemes which actually makes them more qualified. As a result, a small percentage of women feel that they are being discriminated against.

Economic status is perceived by youth to be the most common source of discrimination in semi-urban areas (42 per cent), which is significantly higher than urban (22 per cent) and rural areas (29 per cent). A possible explanation for this may be that semi-urban youth who move to urban areas for higher education feel like they have to compete with their more affluent urban counterparts.

Figure 15 : Areawise reasons for facing discrimination (in percentage) Multiple choice question, more than 1 answer



Note : n = 309 for total respondents, n = 70 for Urban, n = 12 for Semi-urban, n = 227 for Rural respondents



Photo: Amiruzzaman/ActionAid

## Education alone is not enough to fix high youth unemployment

Among the youth in the study, 62 per cent have not been involved in any sort of income generating activity in the past year. In this group, the proportion of females is twice that of male respondents, indicating that female youth are more likely to be unemployed than their male counterparts. A major barrier discussed during FGDs was the lack of information regarding job opportunities, especially part time jobs. For youth, part-time jobs are ideal because they are usually pursuing their education at the same time.

“I’m interested [in part time jobs] but I have no idea where to get one except [in] call centers.”

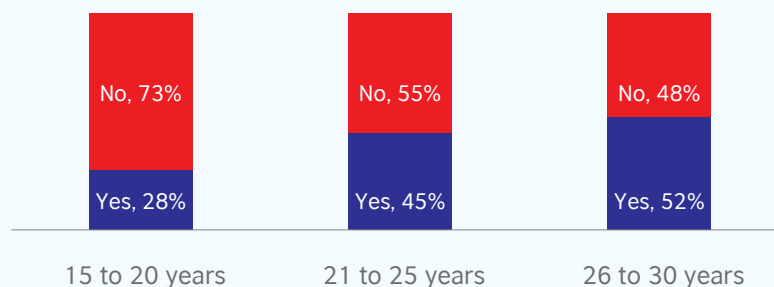
– Female, Dhaka

In the 25-30 age group, 48 per cent did not work to earn an income in the past year, which indicates that youth are making a late entry into the labour market. In the survey, 82 per cent of this group consisted of housewives. Due to predefined gender roles, women have to spend a lot more time in household activities, which acts as a barrier to entry in the job market. FGD findings also highlight geographical mobility issues for female youths arising from family problems, social stigma, and unwillingness to move to other areas, etc. Some participants reported that “beautiful”

women are more favoured in the job market, adding another layer of discrimination to women already facing various obstacles.

About 73 per cent of the 15-20 year-olds surveyed have not worked in the past year. This cohort is reasonably made up of students and housewives and therefore, such a high percentage is justified. FGDs revealed that private tutoring is the most common form of part-time jobs. However, young women still find it difficult to find part-time jobs because working in some sectors is not deemed

Figure 16 : Have you worked to earn an income in the last 12 months?



Note : Single answer question; n = 2,354 for age group “15 to 20”, 1,402 for age group “20+ to 25” and 1,244 for age group “25+ to 30”

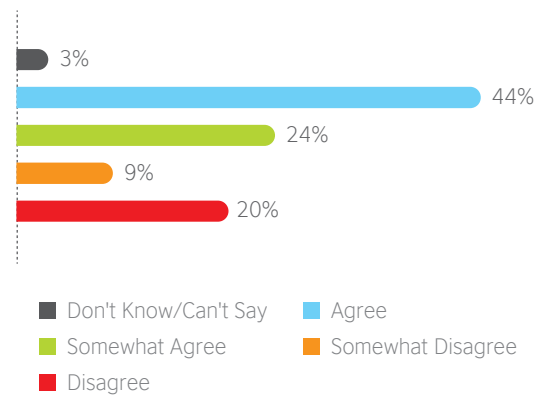
socially respectable. The youth most commonly identify quality education (85 per cent) and job experience (53 per cent) as factors for finding a job. However, in terms of importance in getting them employed the young generation finds job experience to be more vital than education.

A female FGD participant said, “My brother studied political science, and he’s now working in the agriculture sector... this is how it is. You just study for the certificate.” This raises the question of the role of higher education in finding employment. The subject of study is irrelevant as long as one gets a degree or certificate to show for. Job experience is also a determinant of one’s employment prospects. The youth believe that employers prefer experienced workers but as most Bangladeshi youth cannot avail relevant part-time job experience, it becomes difficult to find jobs. Thus, there should be focus on developing programmes where youth can get exposure to the work environment.

Nevertheless, majority of the youth are happy about the quality of education and strongly or moderately believe that education they received has prepared them for the job market. FGDs showed that education is strongly associated with gaining a certificate and getting good grades. The education system is designed to be a tool to get students into lucrative and prestigious positions. Youths also associate education with social status, which becomes more important than making long-term goals and career plans, and focusing on personal development. General perception is that the system is designed to churn out graduates with degrees

and certificates instead of educating the fundamentals to the young citizens – the future of the country.

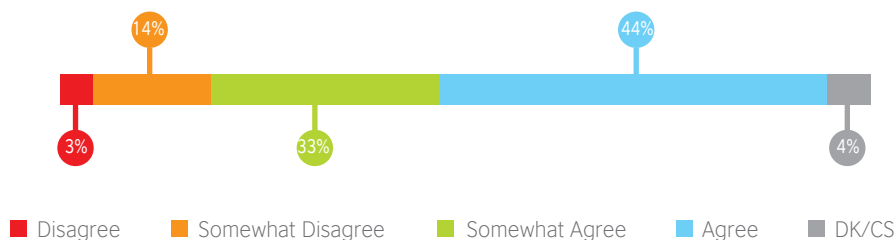
Figure 18 : Quality of education is satisfactory



Note : n = 5,000 for total respondents, n = 2,501 for male, n = 2,499 for female respondents

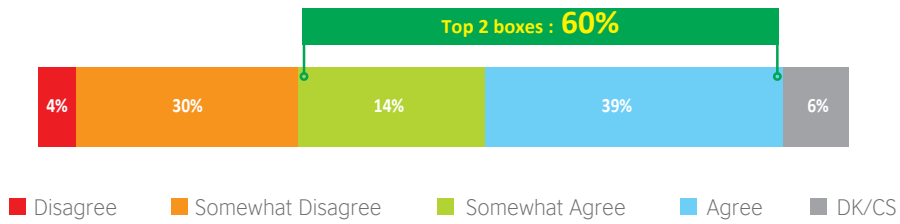
The youth have expressed concerns regarding some important courses which are vital in the workplace. About 75 per cent of the youth agree to varying degrees that ICT education is not properly emphasized in the country’s education system. As workplaces become more and more digitised, ICT education is gaining more importance. There is an urgent need for enhancing ICT training for students so that they can ease into different roles in the workforce. Furthermore, qualified and trained

Figure 17 : Work experience is more important than education to get a job



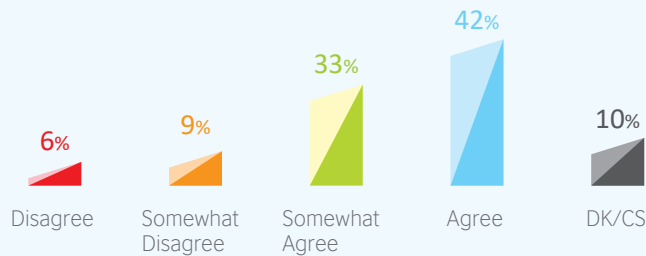
Note : n = 5,000 for total respondents (Single choice question)

Figure 19 : Education is preparing/has prepared you for the job market



Note : n = 5,000 for total respondents (Single choice question)

Figure 20 : ICT is overlooked in the education system of Bangladesh

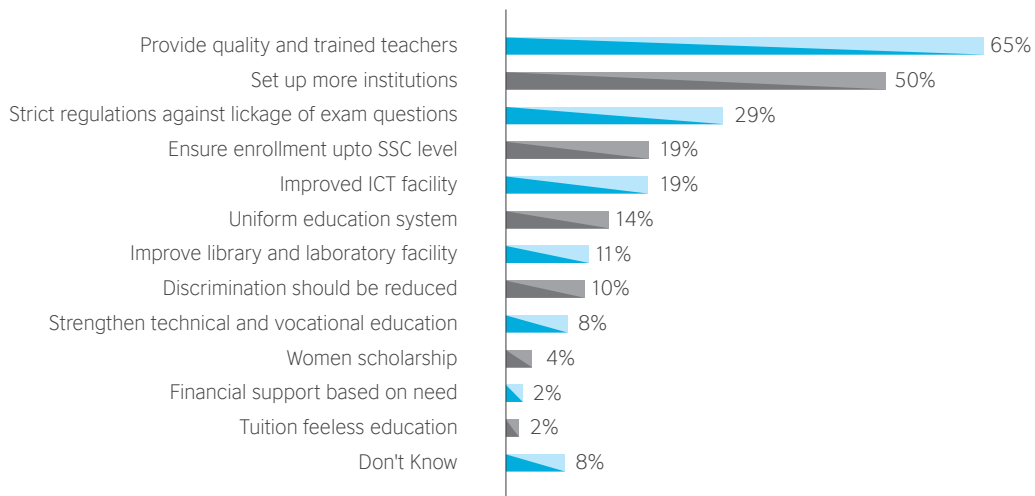


Note : n = 5000 for total respondents (Single choice question)

teachers and more educational institutions are their top education sector priorities. They are aware of the recent issues facing the education sector such

as leakage of exam questions prior to public exams and think that strict enforcement of regulations should be ensured.

Figure 21 : What should the government do to improve the current education system?



Note : n= 5,000 for total respondents (Multiple choice question)



Photo: Amiruzzaman/ActionAid



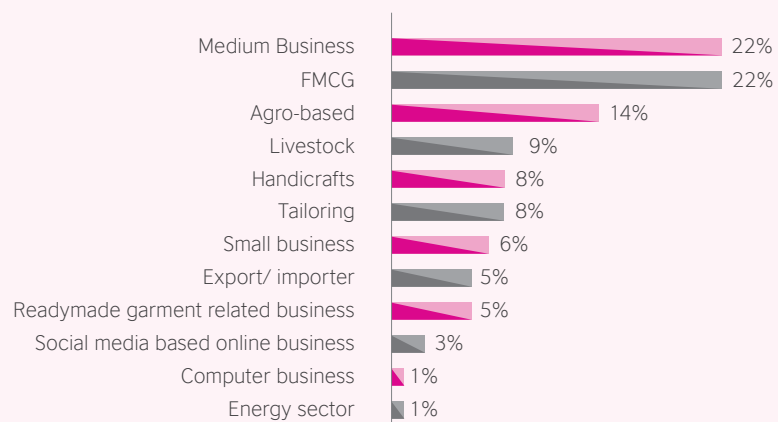
## Youth entrepreneurship and civic engagement are still low

Even though unemployment rate in Bangladesh stands at 4.5 per cent, the rate is 23 per cent among the youth demography (BBS, 2011a). Furthermore, findings from the current study revealed that most of them are unenthusiastic about starting their own businesses. They also seem to have developed a degree of apathy towards civic engagement.

Only 12 per cent of the respondents are currently engaged in or have, sometime in the past, run their own businesses. This could be a result of the perceived risks of personal ventures, as the youth feel more comfortable working as an employee. Those who are (or were) involved in business mostly preferred medium, informal businesses like salons,

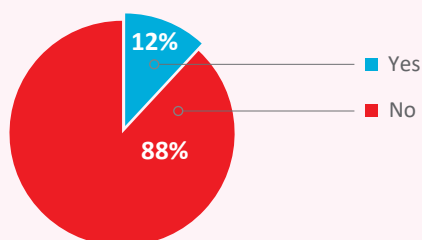
raw materials supplier, etc. Over 22 per cent are, or were, involved in such businesses, followed by another 22 per cent who started fast moving

Figure 23 : What kind of business did / do you run?



Note : n = 5,000 for total respondents (Multiple choice question)

Figure 22 : Do you run your own business? Or have you run your own business in the past?

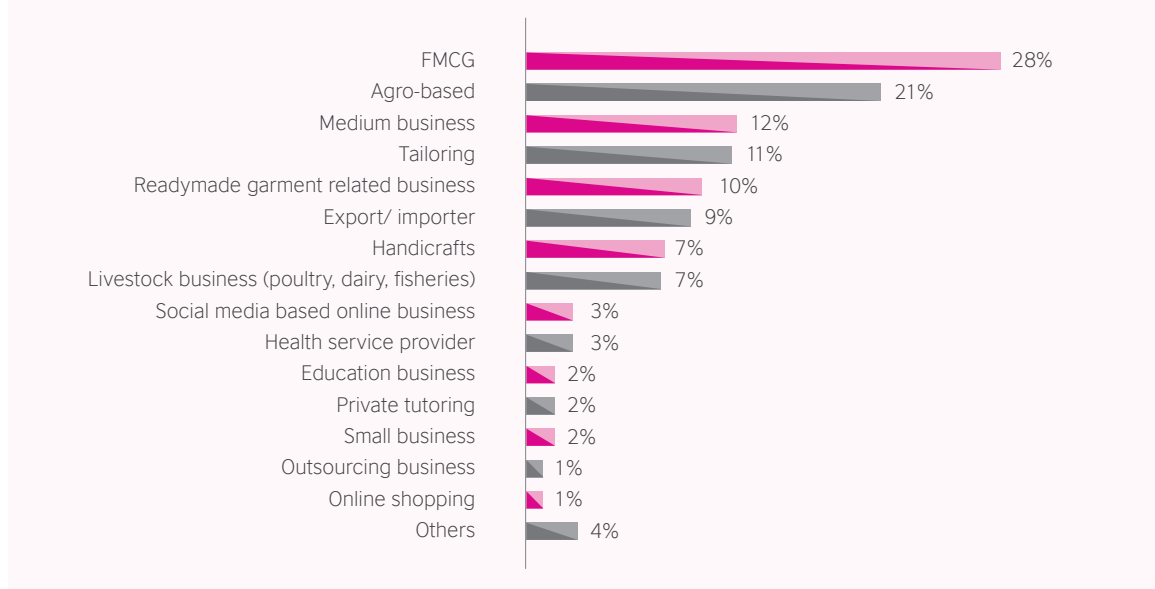


Note : n = 5,000 for total respondents (Single choice question)

consumer goods (FMCG) businesses. About 14 per cent also ventured into agro-based businesses.

Among those who plan to start a business in future, a similar preference on type of business is observed. Majority prefer FMCG (22 per cent), agro based (14 per cent) and medium businesses (22 per cent) for future business initiatives. Smaller initiatives are more popular because the risk is lower in such ventures. It also requires relatively small amount of capital to start up such businesses. However, the young generation identifies a number of factors holding them back from business ventures.

Figure 24 : What kind of business would you like to set up?



Note : n = 5,000 for total respondents (Multiple choice question)

In general, entrepreneurship is considered to be risky by 75 per cent of the youth. Furthermore, about 59 per cent think that securing credits or loans to invest in business is difficult, which restricts them from such ventures. The lack of information regarding funding seems to be a major barrier to entrepreneurship.

FGDs brought up the expensive and time-consuming issue of official paperwork related to setting up a business. Small scale potential entrepreneurs naturally feel that it is not worth the while to go through this tedious process. Those who have (or had) businesses also faced the challenges of market, skill, input price, infrastructure and security. Market uncertainties and lack of skilled human resources are the top difficulties they faced. The challenges in urban areas revolve more around risk aversion considering the higher cost of living. This drives most youth to seek consistent source of income through jobs instead of pursuing entrepreneurship.

## CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

As it appears, the youth seem to have developed a degree of apathy towards socio-political engagements. During the last one year, only around 10 per cent of the youth have worked to address any local issues in the community and only around 12 per cent of them actively engaged with community groups.

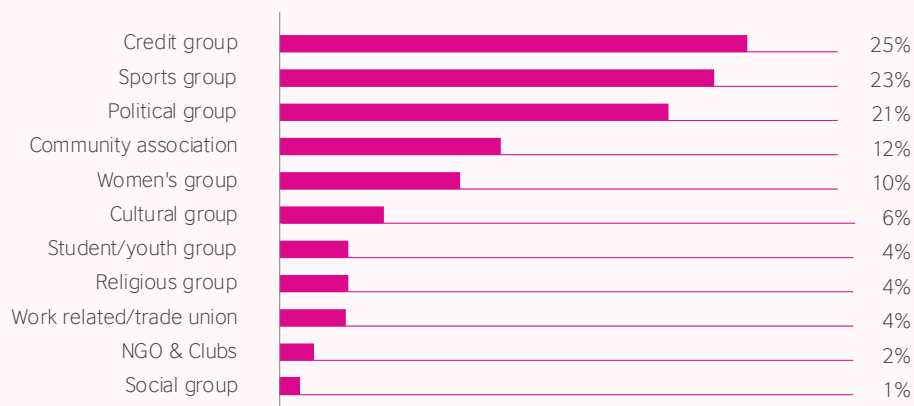
Among those who were engaged with community groups, majority of their engagement was with credit (25 per cent), sports (23 per cent) and political (21 per cent) groups. Barely 4 per cent were involved in any sort of student or youth group.

Youth's confidence in themselves is quite low, with less than 1 per cent agreeing that young people are capable of settling any dispute in the community. The youth had no faith in political leaders and only 3 per cent believe law enforcement agencies can actually help solve crisis at times of dispute.

The youth must be encouraged to be part of the community decision making process. Therefore,

steps must be taken to address this gap in civic engagement.

Figure 25 : What type of community group (s) did you participate in?



Note : n = 648 for total respondents (Multiple choice question)

Table 01 : What difficulties did/do you face in running your own business?

Difficulties facing in running business	Total	Male	Female	Urban	Semi Urban	Rural
Unsettled market	20.7	22.4	13.6	20.5	42.8	18.9
Skilled human resources	19.0	18.3	21.8	22.8	13.4	18.1
Import cost is high	13.6	14.3	10.8	11.3	21.4	13.7
Lack of proper infrastructure	10.9	10.6	12.2	14.0	16.0	9.4
Lack of security	10.6	11.8	5.8	16.9	6.8	8.6
Law- enforcement situation	8.8	9.1	7.7	13.0	0.0	8.0
No moral support from family	8.7	6.2	18.7	9.9	11.5	8.0
Forceful donation	8.5	8.8	7.2	14.6	8.5	6.3
No social support	6.4	6.0	8.3	6.3	0.0	7.0
Availability of business loan for youth	5.8	6.8	1.6	11.9	2.4	3.9
Shortage of transport	4.3	5.2	0.7	2.2	9.9	4.6
Financial problem	4.1	4.4	3.1	5.9	8.5	3.1
Government's initiatives	3.9	4.1	3.2	3.6	8.5	3.6
Lack of capital	2.9	2.6	4.3	1.2	0.0	3.8
Lack of courage	2.8	2.5	3.6	3.7	0.0	2.6
No problem	24.1	22.5	30.7	15.5	11.3	28.3
Base (Weighted): All Respondents	593	474	119	148	35	410

Note : n=590, n= 474 for male, n=119 for female, n=148 for Urban, n=35 Semi-urban, n=410 rural respondents (Multiple answer question)



Photo: Biplab Das/ActionAid

## Climate change remains a regional concern

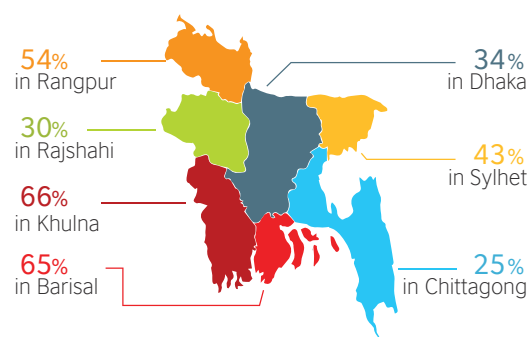
According to Climate Change Vulnerability Index 2015, Bangladesh has been identified as the country most vulnerable to climate change (Maplecroft, 2015). The country is expected to feel the brunt of climate change in the coming years through the aggravation of monsoon floods, rising temperature, droughts, erratic storms and many other adverse effects. Hence, the study tried to dive into the youth's views and concerns towards climate change as they can play a key role in tackling adverse climatic issues. Youth are concerned about the environment, but the degree and area of concern varies according to regional characteristics.

According to FGDs, opinions about climate change appear to revolve around erratic and unusual weather changes. This response is common among youth from both urban and rural segments. Urban youth focused on how the seasons have changed. They feel that the traditional six seasons of Bangladesh have turned into more compact three-season year. However, rural youth emphasize more on the direct effects such as river bank erosion, whereas urban youth are concerned about carbon emissions and sustainable business alternatives.

The survey found that 39 per cent of the youth have noticed environmental changes in their communities over the past five years. Majority of these youth groups observed changes in temperature level (38 per cent) and seasonal patterns (37 per cent) and higher intensity and frequency of floods (37 per cent), droughts (30 per cent) and cyclones (18 per cent). The proportion of the youth with such observations was largest in Khulna (66 per cent), followed by Barisal (65 per cent) and Rangpur (54 per cent).

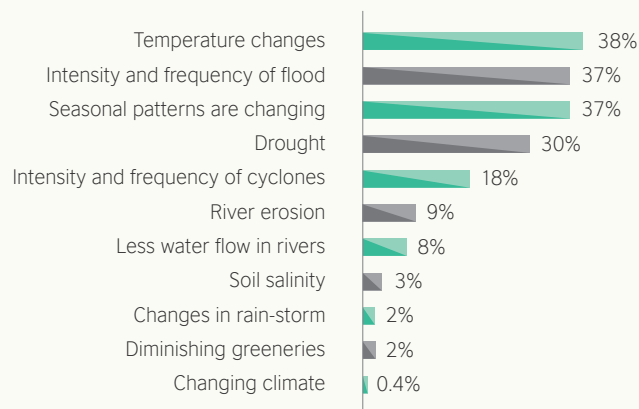
Smaller proportion of the youth from Dhaka and eastern regions reported to have noticed such changes. Khulna and Barisal divisions are situated in coastal belt, which makes them more susceptible to natural disaster. Therefore, awareness level on climate change is higher in these two regions. Another disaster prone region is Rangpur division due to flood, extreme temperature during winter and summer or low water level in river, which impact on agriculture and livelihoods of the people.

Figure 26 : Youth who noticed changes in environment (by division)



Note : n = 5,000; 1,720 for Dhaka, 999 for Chittagong, 642 for Rajshahi, 520 for Khulna, 269 for Barisal, 330 for Sylhet and 520 for Rangpur

Figure 27 : Youth who noticed changes in environment

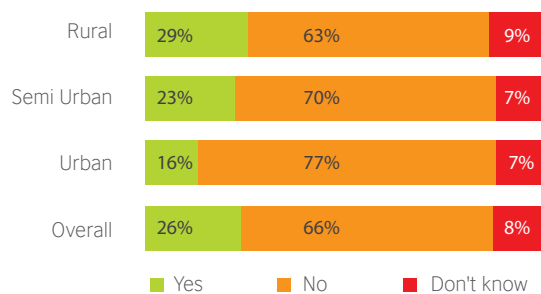


Note : n = 5,000 for total respondents (Multiple choice question)

About 26 per cent of the youth reported to have been directly affected by environmental changes. This intensity is higher in rural areas (29 per cent) than in urban areas (16 per cent). Rural people's livelihood depends on agriculture and fishing. Heavy rain or no rain, flash flood, drought, salinity of soil and cyclone have drastic impact on livelihood of agrarian society or fishermen as is the case Bangladesh.

Health related problems, seasonal work loss and water logging are the common major impacts that the rural and urban youth faced. Other major

Figure 28 : Youth affected by environmental changes (by region)



Note : n = 5,000 for total respondents,  
n = 1,041 for urban respondents,  
n = 225 for semi-urban, n = 3,733 for rural respondents

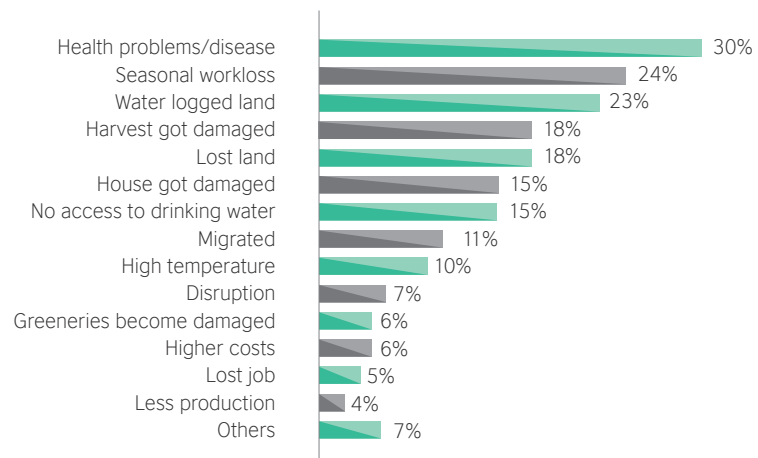
impacts relate to crop damage and loss of land for the rural youth and migration and lack of drinking water for the urban youth.

FGD females shared personal experiences and snippets of stories when it comes to price hikes due to flash floods and rise of diseases among children. Meanwhile, the indigenous youth appear to have more personal feelings towards environmental degradation than in other parts of the country.

Indigenous regions are directly experiencing the effects of climate change such as dissolving hills and deforestation. They feel that the local authorities are doing very little to curb these effects. The youth from the ethnic communities believe in more practical and proactive solutions as opposed to awareness based activities. They passionately talk about the need for river dredging, more dams in strategic locations to counteract rising water levels and stockpiling of food for emergency situations.

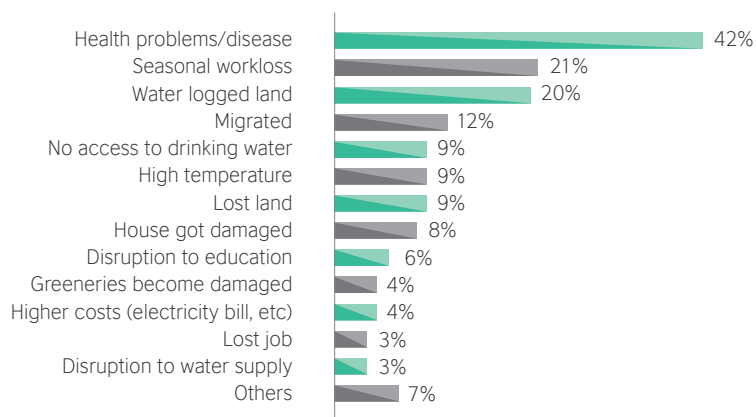
In both rural and urban areas, the youth identify that local government bodies are the major actors in conserving the environment, followed by civil society groups. Individual initiatives in conserving the environment are perceived to be higher in rural areas than in urban areas. According to FGDs, urban males seem to think that there is very little room for individual action in climate protection. Urban females claimed that activism and field-level engagement is discouraged from family and society. Urban lives are also not directly affected yet through climate change; therefore, people are less inclined to take immediate action and have opted for a passive stance. Due to better access to infrastructure and utilities and less dependency on

Figure 29 : Cause of being affected by environmental changes (Rural)



Note : n = 3,733 for rural respondents (Multiple choice question)

Figure 30 : Cause of being affected by environmental changes (Urban)



Note : n = 1,041 for urban respondents (Multiple choice question)

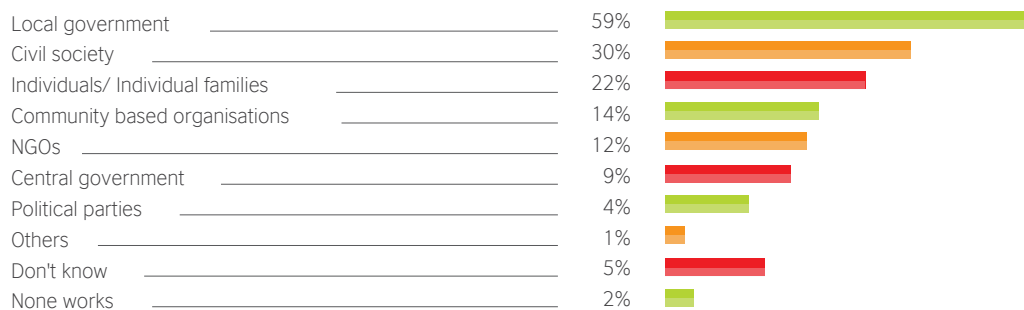
agriculture for livelihood, urban youth are probably less concerned about individual involvement. For instance, cases of flooding are rare in Dhaka city even though frequent water-logging is

observable during monsoons. However, this does not have a long-term impact on their livelihood, whereas floods leave a lasting mark on rural livelihood dependent on agriculture and livestock.

However, an interesting point to be noted is that most youth believe that the government and non-government organisations have a larger role to play instead of individuals. This perception appears to stem from a lack of individual empowerment among the country's youth. Some FGD participants do

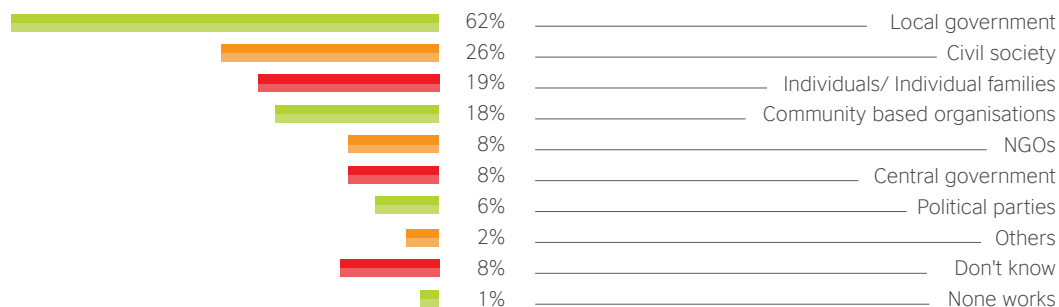
believe that adopting specific practices in individual lives could go a long way in making a difference in the grander scale. With greater awareness and empowerment, this generation could make huge strides in environmental

Figure 31 : Engagement in conservation of the local environment ( Rural)



Note : n = 3,733 for rural respondents (Multiple choice question)

Figure 32 : Engagement in conservation of the local environment (Urban)



Note : n = 1,041 for urban respondents (Multiple choice question)



Photo: Chris Kousouros/IID



## Young people want to lead Bangladesh towards prosperity

Although about 85 per cent of respondents believe that effective youth leadership can make a positive difference in the country, very few actually expressed any desire to actively participate in politics. Most of them expressed an aversion to the current political system and, on that basis, expressed little to no interest to have anything to do with politics. In other words, there is a strong desire for a youth leader but few are willing to step up to the plate. They need someone to look up to and someone to inspire them.

Political party with a strong youth policy is a major issue for young people. About 87 per cent surveyed youth said they will support the political party that has a good policy for youth.

About 24 per cent of respondents said they voted in the last national parliamentary election held in January 2015, but this low turnout could be due to the political unrest at the time. However, 87 per cent of respondents stated that they plan to vote in the next national election. Thus, it appears that young people are willing to vote but are not willing to engage in other political activities.

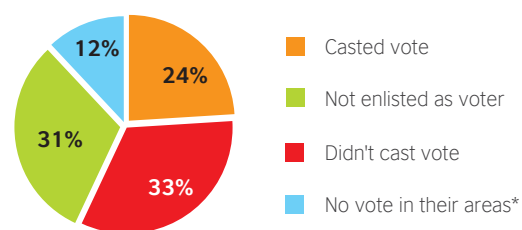
It was found that fewer females than males showed any interest in politics and this finding deserves more consideration. More research may help to identify the underlying causes for this, and ways in which politics can better represent the interests of women.

This lack of engagement in the political sphere as well as lack of participation in community initiatives is in stark contrast with their optimism in youth leadership. This phenomenon can be explained in two parts. First, there is a strong association between “politics” and “corruption”, which, in turn, dissuades most young people from engaging in the political process. Most of the respondents expressed disillusionment with politics because of how unsafe, dangerous, and corrupt the current

political climate is. Political engagement is perceived to be risky due to political violence and it can be inferred that youth are not politically apathetic but rather isolated from governance (Tamanna, 2015). Therefore, the lack of political engagement may be the result of several factors such as inadequate knowledge about politics, security, and lack of opportunities for effective engagement. Second, the lack of engagement in community issues may be attributable to the current social structure that fails to create a platform for youth to hone their leadership skills. For instance, community conflict resolution is undertaken by the elders and community leaders with no involvement from the youth. However, some respondents shared positive stories where political leaders did something good for the community, like encourage junior members of the party to donate blood. Such examples of admirable behaviour from political leaders appear to have a highly positive effect on youth.

There is a general impression that young people from lower socio-economic background and lower levels of education are more likely to join a political party compared to young people from more well-off families and higher levels of education. At the same time, rural youth are more likely to have a political affiliation than urban youth. Further research and analysis are needed to understand the situation.

Figure 33 : Participation in 2014 election



Note : n =5,000. \* Candidates won uncontested (Single choice question)



Photo: Chris Kousouros/IID

## Youth Vision: A democratic, green and equal Bangladesh

Quality education and healthcare are two of the highest priorities for young Bangladeshis, closely followed by 'honest and responsive government', 'safety and security', and 'finding employment'. The youth surveyed identified several key areas where healthcare services can be improved. Enhanced

ICT services and more qualified teachers were suggested as improvements to the education sector of Bangladesh. Finally, the youth expressed that they valued a democratic political system more than economic growth, which is noteworthy to policymakers.

### Issues that are of key importance to young people -



**Healthcare**

99%

Access to good healthcare service

99%

Getting a quality education



**Quality education**



**Safety**

96%

Safety and security

98%

Having an honest and responsive government



**Governance**



**Employment**

95%

Finding employment

82%

believe democracy is more important than economic growth for Bangladesh



**Democracy**



**Environment**

87%

believe healthy environment is more important than economic growth for Bangladesh

81%

think girls should receive more scholarships than boys to reduce gender inequalities in education



**Equality**

Note : n = 5,000

## Healthcare

While access to and availability of healthcare options have improved, respondents reported that the quality of service provided to regular patients is deplorable. Those who are able to afford it can get very high quality healthcare from the private sector but for the majority of Bangladeshis who use the public healthcare system, the quality is very poor. Respondents complained about exceedingly low standards of hygiene at hospitals. Another complaint respondents had regarding healthcare providers was that private hospitals ask patients to do unnecessary tests so as to make more money. But, at the same time, patients are forced to go to private hospitals because of the low quality of public alternatives.

The limited number of hospital beds also affects the overall access to and quality of healthcare. And on top of that, nepotism and political pressure makes access to healthcare and quality of service even more difficult for the average citizen. FGD respondents shared personal stories where patients (either themselves or family members) were neglected by doctors and medical staff who were instead attending to their own relatives or someone with political connections.

There is also a lack of skilled doctors in hospitals, according to FGD respondents. They said that patients are mostly seen by medical interns. One of them said that health professionals often rely on the internet to diagnose and treat patients, due to lack of competence and/or experience. The lack of skills is more visible in rural areas according to FGDs. Many youth participants point out that hospital and healthcare centres in rural areas have a tendency to refer patients to district level hospitals, and in many cases to Dhaka, for better treatment, as these healthcare centres are ill

equipped to tackle complex health problems. Indigenous youth also observed the same pattern. On a different note, women's health issues are more salient now than before and access and availability have improved as a result. This improvement in awareness and access is most likely due to national and international campaigns and NGO initiatives, to educate women about reproductive health. Still, a lot more needs to be done. For example, our female respondents claimed that women are more likely to take the pill than men are to use condoms, thus placing the burden of protection on women.

FGD participants said that there is now more information than before regarding sexual and reproductive health, but that it is still not adequate. Parents rarely provide any guidance or advice, so most young people learn from their peers and through the media. The problem with this is that information obtained through peers is not always reliable and, consequently, there is a prevalence of misconceptions regarding sexual health. A possible measure to counter this problem could be to start a youth mentorship programme with a focus on sexual health and awareness; this is discussed further in the Recommendations section.

**Sexual Health Awareness programmes:** This could be spearheaded by NGOs, the government, or both. The State has an advantage of a national audience so the message can be most widely disseminated. Earlier national ads and campaigns for raising AIDS awareness have been fairly successful, so the same format could be used but with more content on various other sexual issues. A big brother/big sister type of mentoring programme could be designed for middle to high

school students (pair them with a college student, must receive some training and orientation first), part of which can address sexual education. Young Bangladeshis feel uncomfortable and even afraid to ask their parents for advice on sexual health, so to have a mentor who is much closer to their age is a great way to help young kids learn about such issues. The better informed the youth are, the better decisions they can make in their sex lives and take steps to prevent unwanted pregnancies, STDs, STIs, and even sexual abuse.

### Getting a quality education is of highest importance for youth

About 99 per cent of survey respondents feel that getting a quality education is of utmost importance to them. One of their major concerns was a lack of qualified and competent teachers. The participants felt that the government should provide trained and qualified teachers, set up more institutions, and strictly maintain regulations along with ensuring confidentiality of exam questions. The youth also emphasized that the government should also ensure enrolment up to SSC level and improve ICT facilities to enhance the education system. Currently, ICT facilities are more visible in some urban institutions rather than rural or semi-urban ones. Majority of the participants in the FGDs are not aware about national context of ICT facilities in the education system. They stated their opinion on the basis of local context or based on others shared experience. The participants think that urban high quality institutions are well equipped with computer labs, whereas other schools have one or two computers for the entire school. In rural institutions, ICT facilities are rarely found.

Gender inequalities in the education system are also a point of concern for youths. It can be

addressed, for instance, with more scholarships for girls. The survey found that 81 per cent believed that girls should receive more scholarships in order to reduce the gender gap in education. About 62 per cent among this 81 per cent have fully agreed and the rest have somewhat agreed to address gender inequality. However, more females (85 per cent) are supportive of this action in favour of gender equality in education compared to 77 per cent of the male youths.

### Democracy and healthy environment are more important than economic growth for youth

With respect to governance and the economy, Bangladeshi youth feel that the country should focus on a fairer and more democratic political system rather than economic growth. About 87 per cent youth prefer better governance and a safe political climate to material prosperity. Moreover, 82 per cent of the youth believe that having democracy is more important than economic growth for the country. This shows that Bangladeshi youth are concerned about overall development of the country and not simply growth in the GDP.



Photo: Amiruzzaman/ActionAid

## Policy Implications and Recommendations

Quality education and healthcare are two of the highest priorities for young Bangladeshis, closely followed by ‘honest and responsive government’, ‘safety and security’, and ‘finding employment’. The youth surveyed identified several key areas where healthcare services can be improved. Enhanced ICT services and more qualified teachers were suggested as improvements to the education sector of Bangladesh. Finally, the youth expressed that they valued a democratic political system more than economic growth, which is noteworthy to policymakers.

### Policy Implications

Bangladesh’s public policy must focus on encouraging and fostering youth participation in a democratic, representative and responsive government. Policymakers will need to experiment with different programmes, economic incentives and disincentives to find out what works for Bangladeshi youth. In a modern democracy and capitalist society, coercion cannot work and the most effective and sustainable way to influence citizen behaviour is through the economic tools of fiscal and monetary policy. We have described ideas for a number of potential strategies and programmes that the State could implement to encourage young Bangladeshis to be conscious citizens of a well-functioning democracy.

Recommendations of possible strategies for the following problems are as follows:

**1. Key Issues:** As discussed earlier, the concerns that fall under this grouping include political instability and corruption, poor

transportation system, electricity crisis, inflation and lack of job opportunities. These problems essentially act as a detriment to civic and political engagement of youth and saps youth morale, which boils down to the problem that should concern policymakers and citizens alike – low levels of political awareness and participation.

a. UNDP’s Good Practice Guide. A UNDP publication titled “Enhancing Youth Political Participation Throughout the Electoral Cycle” gives excellent examples of practical strategies that have worked in countries around the world. This Good Practice Guide is a fantastic resource for policymakers, CSOs and young people themselves, who are looking for innovative and practical solutions that work in the real world. The Guide sorts strategies and measures (all ideas taken from actual examples) into four areas: (1) legal framework, (2) pre-electoral period, (3) electoral period, and (4) post-electoral period. Strategies under “legal framework” involve making legislative changes that are more conducive to youth participation in the political process, like lowering the eligibility age for Parliament. In Egypt and in Tunisia, for example, youth-led CSOs have successfully lowered the eligibility age from 30 to 25. It would go beyond the scope of this report to describe all the ideas mentioned in the guide, so the examples that are most relevant and suitable in the Bangladeshi context are described as follows:

i. Introduce youth quotas in electoral laws. In other words, this is an affirmative action measure for youth. Examples from around the world: In Uganda, 5 seats in Parliament are reserved for youth representatives; in Peru, 10 per cent of local government must comprise youth representatives.

ii. Invite youth groups to visit national Parliaments. UNDP tried this experiment in Cambodia.

iii. Internship schemes for students in Parliaments.

iv. Parliament Watch. In Germany they have a political watchdog body called Parliament Watch, started in 2004, which tracks voting records and auxiliary incomes of members of Parliament, and provides a politically neutral web platform where citizens can send questions on any issue to MPs and the answers are published online. Similar tracking/watchdog bodies exist in the United States, such as “opensecrets.org” and “followthemoney.org”, which focus on tracking campaign finance.

v. Inter-party youth forums and training courses to promote peaceful dialogue. These programmes help to reduce conflicts between parties and teach young citizens important skills of non-violent conflict resolution and negotiation.

b. Political parties themselves should consider the young population as a valuable resource and take steps to engage this constituency into their political framework. About 87 per cent of youth surveyed stated that they would be more likely to support the political party that has a good policy for youth. This statistics alone is an incentive for political parties to start thinking about youth.

c. Apolitical student government in schools and colleges: Providing scholarships and grants to students, who participate in student government at schools and colleges, is a great way to do that. The problem with student government in Bangladesh is that students get involved in state politics. They should first get experience through the running of small democratic systems of government such as the school board, which will decide such things as the curriculum, school sports, and activity clubs. Cross-country comparison can be a useful measure for assessing the effectiveness of these

programmes.-- this model is already extremely prevalent in western democracies, such as the United States. Thus, this could be a potential strategy for us to adopt.

## 2. Poor Quality of Healthcare

a. More regulation and supervision of urban health centres. Urban health centres are notorious for their unsafe and unethical practices that potentially put patients’ lives in danger. This seriously compromises the overall quality of healthcare services and therefore needs to be addressed by urban authorities.

b. Require Continuing Medical Education (CME) for all doctors: A good number of survey and FGD respondents have complained about doctors who rely on the internet to diagnose and treat patient’s medical problems. One could argue that doctors are simply double checking and keep up-to-date with the latest research available online, but it was a concern that was raised by participants. However, anecdotal evidence from FGD respondents suggests that many practicing doctors lack knowledge of up-to-date medical research and sometimes use treatments and diagnoses that have long lost credibility in the medical community. Further studies are imperative in this regard to correctly determine whether or not doctors really are competent and keeping up with the latest medical knowledge. Nevertheless, Continuing Medical Education, which requires doctors to regularly take courses and tests to retain their license to practice, is mandated in advanced countries like the United States because it helps to keep all practitioners abreast of the latest best practices, latest research and treatment. A similar approach could be implemented in Bangladesh to ensure that doctors have a responsibility of providing the best possible services to their patients.

c. Invest in hospital capacity: Most respondents complained about lack of beds at hospitals, which seriously compromises quality of healthcare in terms of access, and is therefore a violation of citizens’ basic rights. The government must invest



in increasing hospital capacity so that no patient in need of medical care is refused that care.

d. Regulations for proper hygiene and hygiene training for hospital staff: Another common complaint from respondents was the state of hygiene at hospitals and clinics. Hospital administration needs to be made aware of this and policymakers may need to take regulatory measures to ensure that proper hygiene is maintained. Hygiene training should also be made compulsory for hospital staff.

e. Patients' rights: Every hospital/medical facility should be required to provide patients with a written copy of their rights pertaining to medical care. Doctors will be required to address patient's questions and concerns regarding medical treatment and medication.

f. Sexual health awareness programmes: This could be spearheaded by NGOs, the government, or both. The State has an advantage of a national audience so the message can be most widely disseminated. Earlier national ads and campaigns for raising AIDS awareness have been fairly successful, so the same format could be used but with more content on various other sexual issues. A big brother/big sister type of mentoring programme, where an older youth mentors a younger youth, could be designed for middle to high school students (pair then with a college student, must receive some training and orientation first), part of which can address sexual health and education. Young Bangladeshis feel uncomfortable and even afraid to ask their parents for advice on sexual health, so to have a mentor who is much closer to their age is a great way to help the younger generations learn about such issues. The better informed the youth are, the better decisions they can make in their sex lives and take steps to prevent unwanted pregnancies, STDs, STIs, and even sexual abuse.

### 3. Poor Quality of Education

a. Better pay and training for teachers: Countries

with the best education systems in the world pay their teachers very well, provide extensive training, and take educator recruitment very seriously. The Ministry of Education should therefore take steps to train teachers and reward them with better pay and perks.

b. Incorporate ICT into the standard curriculum: About 42 per cent of survey respondents agree with the statement "ICT is not emphasized in the education system", and another 33 per cent somewhat agree with the statement. Technology can be a powerful tool for learning and our Education Ministry should evaluate ways in which it can incorporate the use of ICT to enhance the educational experience for all.

c. Other projects: The following are ideas for potential projects that could be rolled out (by the government, NGOs, CSOs) in a pilot programme and scaled up if successful:

i. Foreign exchange: Step up (more funding for) foreign exchange programmes. Boost student morale, students will learn about leadership, critical thinking, etc.

ii. Support public libraries: A recent LIS study revealed a deficiency of well-run and well-stocked libraries in Bangladesh, partly due to lack of use or interest from the public (British Council, 2015). A nationwide campaign could help to rekindle the public's interest in reading, and the government should consider allocating a larger budget to public libraries.

iii. More scholarships for girls in higher education: A majority of our survey and FGD participants felt that there should be more scholarships for girls, given the disadvantages and barriers to education that girls face in the country. These scholarships will be a way to level the playing field for boys and girls. Scholarship programmes for girls have significantly raised female enrolment in primary and secondary schools, thus, presumably, expanding this programme into higher education will also significantly raise female enrolment in

colleges and universities.

d. Student representation in college/university administration: This will not only empower students, teach them leadership skills, how to negotiate, etc, but will also greatly improve education outcomes as administrators and educators get more in tune with the students' needs and concerns.

#### **4. Low Levels of Civic Engagements among Youth**

In a study on Youth Participation around the world, Silvia Golombek writes, "Active citizenship cannot be expected to happen overnight when a person reaches voting age: it must be learned "by doing" through everyday experiences: opportunities to participate in shared decision-making, listening to different opinions, weighing options and consequences. These are individual skills that help build civil society and young people's commitment to the democratic process." The UNDP publication, discussed earlier, also emphasizes the assertion by youth development expert Rakesh Rajani, "that institutionalizing youth participation in settings and practices that young people experience on a regular basis is key to training youth to participate."

a. Support student councils: The Government of Bangladesh has taken a laudable initiative to revive and support student councils in public schools around the country. If carried out properly and with steady funding, this initiative can have far-reaching positive results for the country. The UNDP publication, discussed earlier, really emphasizes the importance of civics education and engagement at an early age and provides numerous examples and strategies designed to that end.

b. Support youth organisations: The government should support civic organisations exclusively for the youth, like boy/girl scouts, YMCA, etc. These will have after school activities for young kids where they can freely express themselves, learn about team work, leadership skills, etc. in a fun, friendly and safe environment.

#### **5. Social Conflicts and Unemployment**

Youth respondents attributed the source of most social conflicts to unemployment and other problems with the economy. In other words, young people in Bangladesh believe that the roots of most social conflict lie in economic issues. If there is indeed any truth to that claim, then addressing chronic and pervasive economic problems like unemployment may very well help to reduce social conflict in Bangladesh.

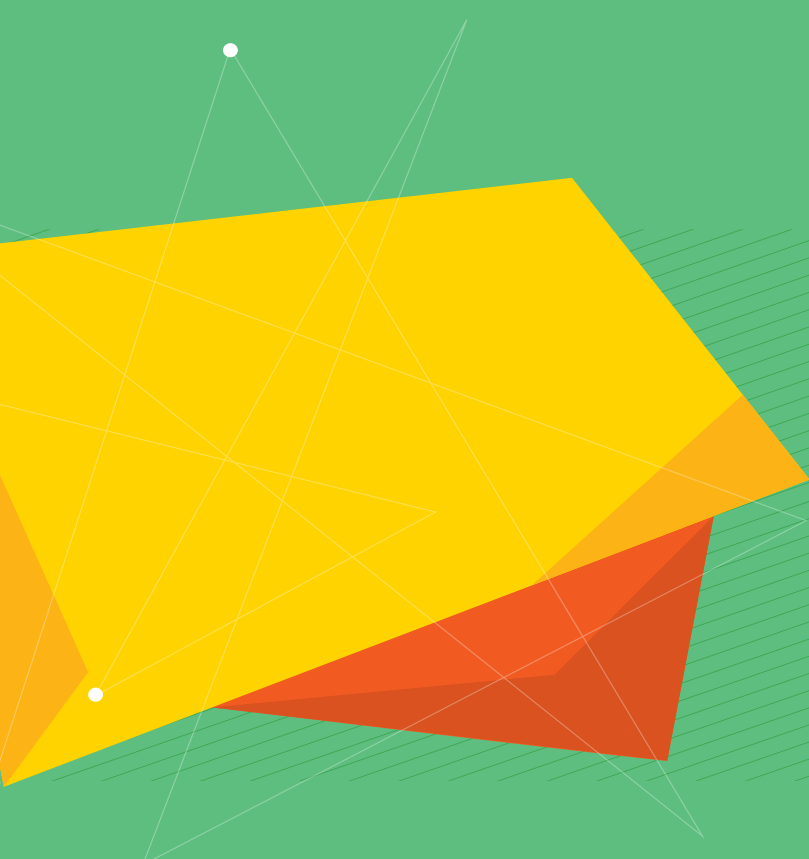
a. Managing unemployment: In order to effectively deal with unemployment, one must first identify the causes of unemployment. In Bangladesh, the causes are more complex than a simple oversupply of labour and lack of skills, for there are university graduates who are also unable to find work. One reason for this has been highlighted by our survey respondents as 34 per cent of them felt that the education system does not adequately prepare them for the job market. Therefore, strategies to curb unemployment must focus on aligning industry demand with the skills taught at educational institutions.

#### **6. Low Levels of Youth Entrepreneurship**

a. Youth entrepreneurship and self-employment promotion is required to promote youth participation. Access to credit and training programmes to run a micro-enterprise could encourage the youth to take up entrepreneurial roles. Furthermore, reforms are required that can reduce bureaucratic red tapes.

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