



CPD

Working Paper **119**

**Exploring the State of
Youth in the SDG Context**
How is Bangladesh Doing?

Debapriya Bhattacharya
Lumbini Barua
Shusmita Islam



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Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) was established in 1993 as a civil society initiative to promote an ongoing dialogue between the principle partners in the decision-making and implementing process. Over the past 25 years, the Centre has emerged as a globally reputed independent think tank, with local roots and global reach. A key area of CPD's activism is to organise dialogues to address developmental policy issues that are critical to national, regional and global interests, with a view to seeking constructive solutions from major stakeholders. The other key area of CPD's activities is to undertake research programmes on current and strategic issues.

CPD's dialogues are designed to address important policy issues and to seek constructive solutions to these problems. In doing so, CPD involves all important cross-sections of the society, including public representatives, government officials, business leaders, activists of grassroots organisations, academics, development partners and other relevant interest groups. CPD focuses on frontier issues which are critical to the development process of Bangladesh, South Asia and LDCs in the present context, and those that are expected to shape and influence the country's development prospects from the mid-term perspectives. CPD seeks to provide voice to the interests and concerns of the low-income economies in the global development discourse. With a view to influencing policies, CPD deploys both research and dialogue which draw synergy from one another.

CPD's research programmes are both serviced by and intended to serve, as inputs for particular dialogues organised by the Centre throughout the year. Major research themes are: macroeconomic performance analysis; poverty and inequality; agriculture; trade; regional cooperation and global integration; infrastructure; employment, and enterprise development; climate change and environment; development governance; policies and institutions, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

CPD also conducts periodic public perception surveys on policy issues and issues of developmental concerns. With a view to promoting vision and policy awareness amongst the young people of the country, CPD is also implementing a *Youth Leadership Programme*. CPD serves as the Secretariat of two global initiatives. *LDC IV Monitor* is an independent global partnership for monitoring the outcome of the Fourth UN Conference on the LDCs. *Southern Voice on Post-MDGs* is a network of 50 think tanks, which seeks to contribute to the ongoing global discourse on the SDGs. At the national level, CPD hosts the Secretariat of the *Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh*—a civil society initiative that include about 90 Partner organisations, founded with an objective to contribute to the delivery of the SDGs and enhance accountability in its implementation process. In recognition of its track record in research, dialogue and policy influencing, CPD has been selected as one of the awardees of the Think Tank Initiative (TTI) through a globally competitive selection process for two consecutive times.

Dissemination of information and knowledge on critical developmental issues continues to remain an important component of CPD's activities. Pursuant to this, CPD maintains an active publication programme, both in Bangla and in English. As part of its dissemination programme, CPD has been bringing out CPD Occasional Paper Series on a regular basis. It may be noted in this connection that since November 2011, the Series has been re-introduced as **CPD Working Paper Series**. Research work in progress, background papers of dialogues, investigative reports and results of perception surveys which relate to issues of high public interest are published under this series.

The present paper titled **Exploring the State of Youth in the SDG Context: How is Bangladesh Doing?** has been prepared by *Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya*, Distinguished Fellow, CPD <deb.bhattacharya@cpd.org.bd>; *Ms Lumbini Barua*, former Research Associate, CPD <lumbini11barua@gmail.com> and *Ms Shusmita Islam*, former Dialogue Associate (Development Communication), CPD <islam.shusmita@gmail.com>.

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The world is currently home to nearly 1.2 billion youth, and among them 27.4 million reside in Bangladesh. Recognising the immense potentials of this huge youth population, the Agenda 2030 strongly advocates for creating a safe and enabling environment for them, where they will fully enjoy their rights, and will grow as capable citizens to take on the responsibility of the future of this world. In this context, the present study seeks to portray an overview of the state of youth globally and in Bangladesh from the perspectives of SDG 8 (employment), SDG 4 (education) and SDG 3 (health), and also illustrate an analysis of the existing obstacles and possible pathways of youth development.

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Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
BANBEIS	Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics
BBS	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics
BCS	Bangladesh Civil Service
BDT	Bangladeshi Taka
BIPSS	Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies
CPI	Consumer Price Index
DNC	Department of Narcotics Control
DPHE	Department of Public Health and Engineering
EFA	Education For All
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GED	General Economics Division
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
HRD	Human Resource Department
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ILO	International Labour Organization
IRGDSL	IRG Development Services Limited
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
NGO	Non-Governmental organization
NSDP	National Skill Development Policy
O&M	Observation and Measurement
PRB	Population Reference Bureau
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
TIB	Transparency International Bangladesh
TSC	Teacher-Student Centre
VAT	Value Added Tax
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
WHO	World Health Organization
WSS	Water Supply and Sanitation

1. INTRODUCTION

Today, we are living with the largest youth cohort in human history, as they account for about 16 per cent of the world's population (with the number being around 1.2 billion) (UNDESA, 2017) and a large proportion of them live in developing countries. Considering the advances in human development that we have experienced in recent decades, progress has not been equal everywhere. Many young people across the world are still facing enormous challenges such as discrimination, limited political inclusion, extreme poverty and limited access to health systems, educational opportunities and decent jobs (UNDP, 2016). This scenario is true for Bangladesh, where 17 per cent (27.4 million) of the population belong to the youth cohort (BBS, 2018). Current public investment in education and health in the country is low at 2.09 per cent and 0.92 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP), respectively (CPD, 2018a), and the youth unemployment rate is high at 10.6 per cent (CPD, 2018b). So, the youth in Bangladesh belong to the most vulnerable groups.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has created a unique opportunity to enhance focus on the status of youth and advocate for their rights. Learning from the experiences of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the SDGs have taken a much more people-centred and inclusive approach to development. The SDGs call for ensuring healthy lives and well-being, promoting inclusive and equitable quality education, achieving gender equality and promoting decent work and sustainable economic growth for all among other things and the youth are explicitly embedded within them.

Young people, as torch bearers of the future, need to be engaged with the 2030 Agenda as development partners and agents of change. They can play a huge role in SDG implementation with their spirit, innovations, creativity and critical thinking. A global survey of 180,000 young people showed that about 68 per cent of them believe that the world will be a better place by 2030 (AIESEC, 2017). If this belief can be transformed into motivation with national development approaches, the success of the 2030 Agenda would be inevitable. In any case, it is imperative to assess the present state of youth in both Bangladesh and the global context and whether they can carry out a role in SDG implementation.

1.1 Objective

The objective of this paper is to explore the state of youth in the SDG context and measure overall progress in Bangladesh. The paper first evaluates the focus on youth in the 2030 Agenda and then provides an overview of the state of youth in Bangladesh, policy initiatives for youth and whether the country is extracting its 'demographic dividend'. The paper aligns Bangladesh's contextually relevant concerns for youth with the SDGs, prioritising SDGs 3, 4, 5 and 8 as key areas. Thus, it is intended to help policymakers align youth concerns with the SDGs and prioritise issues to address for the significant youth population in the country.

Most importantly, the paper urges policymakers to understand the significant opportunities of the present 'youth bulge' and transform it into a demographic dividend. It is also a think piece for a younger audience meant to create awareness of the importance of youth in Bangladesh and encourage action from the perspectives of the 2030 Agenda and national context. This paper includes possible pathways for youth to use the contextual application of the SDGs for their benefit. It also analyses policies specific to major concerns, such as employment, education and health and other issues expressed by youth, using literature and data.

1.2 Methodology

The paper includes two methods, namely a literature review and focus group discussion. Relevant national and international studies, journal articles, reports, plans, policies and other documents are studied for conceptualisation purposes. A focus group discussion was conducted with youth representatives to obtain insights on the state of youth in Bangladesh and collected views and suggestions are used to validate the paper's findings.

1.3 Structure

This paper includes six sections. The first section is an introduction that presents the background, objective and methodology. The second section presents the definition of youth, experiences of the previous development agenda and the connection between the SDGs and youth in both the global context and Bangladesh. The third section illustrates the state of global youth and current trends in the global south. The state of youth in Bangladesh from the perspectives of SDGs 3, 4, 5 and 8 and other relevant issues are presented in the fourth section. The existing policy and institutional approach towards youth in Bangladesh is analysed in the fifth section. The sixth section presents recommendations for the way forward based on the challenges identified from the experiences of Bangladesh and other countries.

2. FRAMEWORK ISSUES

2.1 Defining Youth

The most commonly acknowledged definition of youth considers age and is given by the United Nations, which identifies people aged 15–24 years as youth. On the basis of this age group, about 16 per cent of the world's population can be labelled as youth with the number of youth being approximately 1.2 billion, whereas the total population of the world is nearly 7.6 billion (UNDESA, 2017). In other words, one of every six people belongs to the youth group. Yet, various organisations and countries assert different age ranges for youth. For example, the International Labour Organization defines youth as the population belonging to the age group of 15–24 years which is similar to the United Nations' definition, while the Commonwealth considers the age group of 15–29 years. Similarly, the age groups considered to be youth by the African Union and European Union are 15–35 years and 15–29 years, respectively (The Commonwealth, 2016). In Bangladesh, according to National Youth Policy 2017, youth refers to the age group of 18–35 years (DYD, 2017), but the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics considers the age group of 15–29 years for its Labour Force Surveys (BBS, 2017).

Youth can also be defined as a stage in life during which a person experiences frequent transitions in education, health, employment, family, rights and responsibilities. Many of these transitions happen in parallel, depending on the individual and environmental conditions, making youth a very heterogeneous group (OECD, 2016). Another defining criterion is social category, which implies that youth are a group with common needs, interests and characteristics and affected by the same societal institutions and rules. While the life stage perspective focuses on people's young age as compared to the rest of their lives and other generations, social category focuses more on the societal conditions during this young age (The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs, 2010).

While these definitions consider age, life stage or social category, youth need to be characterised by their differences as well. Youth comprise a heterogeneous group who belong to the same age group, though have distinct lifestyles, live in diverse societies with varied geographical and environmental conditions, face various challenges and require different things or services. Besides age, population denominators for the youth population can include gender, geography, physical or mental disabilities, race, religion and many other factors (The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs, 2010). Evidently, there is no specific or unique point of view for the evaluation of the youth cohort. Therefore, youth should be recognised as a heterogeneous group with different interests, needs and conditions under various social, economic and political circumstances (Oktay *et al.*, 2009).

2.2 MDG Experiences and Issues Relevant to Youth

Introduced in the United Nations Millennium Declaration of 2000, the MDGs were the predecessors of the SDGs that were intended to be achieved by 2015, considering 1990 as the base year. While some profound achievements were recorded globally, specifically in extreme poverty eradication, increasing the universal enrolment rate in primary education and reducing child mortality, progress was acknowledged as uneven across regions and countries. The poorest and the most disadvantaged due to sex, age, disability, ethnicity or geographical location were left behind – they numbered in the millions (Guibou, 2017). This is mostly because the MDGs considered the national averages for determining success rates, rather than evaluating the success rates at the disaggregated level (Fukuda-Parr, Greenstein, & Stewart, 2013). Still, the youth population was benefited in several ways. In the context of MDG 2: ‘achieve universal primary education’, the literacy rate among youth aged 15–24 years globally increased from 83 per cent to 91 per cent between 1990 and 2015. Developing regions as a whole could achieve gender parity in primary, secondary and tertiary education (UN, 2015a).

In 2003, Bangladesh began a notable education initiative in the context of the second goal of the MDGs, to achieve universal primary education. The Education For All (EFA) (2000 – 2015) national action plan, of which a primary component was the Primary Education Development Programme II (2004 -2009), resulted in primary education becoming free for all children in Government schools and the establishment of the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education. The net enrolment ratio in primary education increased to 97.9 per cent from 85.5 per cent in 2000 and 60.5 per cent in 1990/91. The youth literacy rate in 2013 was 81.1 per cent, up from 63.6 per cent in 2001 and 44.7 per cent in 1990 (GED, 2016). In 2015, the Gender Parity Index for primary, secondary and tertiary education were 1.04, 1.14 and 0.65, respectively (GED, 2016). These figures indicate that girls were more advantaged than boys in learning opportunities at the primary and secondary level, but relatively less advantaged at the tertiary level.

Limited employment opportunities and unemployment were identified as a global issue for the youth. In 2015, only four in 10 youth aged 15–24 years were employed, compared with five in 10 in 1991. This estimation suggests that 74 million young people were looking for work in 2015. Globally, the youth unemployment rate was almost three times higher than the adult unemployment rate. This situation was most severe in Northern Africa and Western Asia (UN, 2015a). In Bangladesh, according to the Quarterly Labour Force Survey 2015–16, about 2.6 million people aged 15 years or older were unemployed. Among them, 1.2 million belonged to the youth cohort (aged 15–24 years), which indicates that 46.4 per cent of the unemployed were youth (BBS, 2017).

The adolescent birth rate was one of the indicators for MDG 5 on improving maternal health. Globally, the birth rate among adolescent girls aged 15–19 years declined from 59 births per 1,000 women in 1990 to 51 births per 1,000 women in 2015. This trend was visible in almost all regions between 1990 and 2015, with Eastern Asia, Oceania and Southern Asia seeing the most remarkable progress. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the adolescent birth rate remained high at 116 births per 1,000 women in 2015 (UN, 2015a). Bangladesh's performance in this area was also unsatisfactory. The *Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey 2014* stated that the adolescent birth rate was 113 (98 in urban areas; 120 in rural areas) per 1,000 young women (NIPORT; Mitra and Associates & ICF International, 2016).

MDG 6 concerned combatting HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases. HIV prevalence among youth and the proportion of youth with comprehensive correct knowledge about HIV/AIDS were two of the 10 indicators under this goal. Despite efforts during the MDG period, youth faced a high risk of HIV infection. In 2015, young men and women accounted for 14 per cent and 20 per cent, respectively, of people newly infected with HIV globally (UNAIDS, 2016). Regarding having knowledge about HIV/AIDS, national surveys between 2006 and 2012 in countries with generalised epidemics of HIV infection showed that less than half of adolescent boys and girls aged 15–19 years had a basic understanding of HIV (Idele et al., 2014). In Bangladesh, the prevalence of HIV/AIDS was less than 0.1 per cent in 2011, which is well below epidemic level. According to the National AIDS/STD Programmes, only 18 per cent of youth had comprehensive correct knowledge of HIV/AIDS (GED, 2015a), which is a very small share given the large youth population in the country.

2.3 Connecting SDGs and Youth

The 2030 Agenda recognises young men and women as 'critical agents of change' and recognises their capacities for the creation of a better world (UN, n.d.). Identifying youth unemployment as a major concern, it vows to empower youth by ensuring access to life-long opportunities to facilitate them in acquiring needed knowledge and skills and building sustainable and people-centred economies that will promote decent work for all.

Most importantly, it declares an endeavour to provide youth with a nurturing environment where they will get opportunities to realise their rights and capabilities fully and will help their countries to reap the benefits of demographic dividends. The SDGs include four targets and two means of implementation targets that specifically mention the terms 'youth' or 'young people'. These targets are found under SDGs 4, 8 and 13 (Box 1).

The Voluntary National Review report by Bangladesh documents progress on SDG implementation in the country. It states that the Government urges the engagement of young leaders in the implementation process. Initiatives have been taken to ensure youth participation through systematic consultation with high school and university students with the aim of addressing their ideas in policies, plans and implementation strategies for the SDGs. It presents some Government plans and initiatives regarding youth advancement, including plans for a multidimensional approach to address the specific health issues of the adolescent population and initiatives to provide stipends at the secondary education level for youth with disabilities. The report also promises to create 12.9 million additional jobs by 2020 and engage private sector participation to ensure employment, growth, education and other key deliverables of the SDGs (GED, 2017a).

Box 1: Youth in the Targets of the SDGs

SDG 4.4: By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship

SDG 4.6: By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy

SDG 8.5: By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value

SDG 8.6: By 2020, substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training

SDG 8.b: By 2020, develop and operationalize a global strategy for youth employment and implement the Global Jobs Pact of the International Labour Organization

SDG 13.b: Promote mechanisms for raising capacity for effective climate change-related planning and management in least developed countries and small island developing States, including focusing on women, youth and local and marginalized communities

Source: UN (n.d.).

The Government of Bangladesh took the initiative of forming a 16-member SDGs Implementation and Monitoring Committee with the aim of strengthening the overall SDG implementation process. This committee reviewed a mapping of the ministries in relation to their responsibilities in implementing the SDGs to ensure a whole-of-society approach to implementing the SDGs. This mapping distributes responsibilities to 40 ministries/divisions as 'lead', 34 ministries/divisions as 'co-lead' and 61 ministries/divisions/independent institutions as 'Associate' for the implementation of all 169 targets and 230 indicators under the 17 SDGs. The Ministry of Youth and Sports of Bangladesh is designated as 'lead' for only two indicators and as 'associate' for 20 indicators. Through these indicators, the ministry has been engaged in the implementation of SDGs 1, 3, 4, 8 and 11 (Table 1). Notably, it has not been associated with SDG 13 even though SDG 13.b specifically mentions 'youth' as a target group (GED, 2017b).

Table 1: Association of the Ministry of Youth and Sports with SDG Implementation

Goal	Indicator	Role	Status of Data Availability
SDG 1 End poverty in all its forms everywhere	1.1.1 Proportion of population below the international poverty line, by sex, age, employment status and geographical location (urban/rural)	Associate	Partially available
	1.2.1 Proportion of population living below the national poverty line, by sex and age	Associate	Readily available
	1.2.2 Proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions	Associate	Partially available
	1.3.1 Proportion of population covered by social protection floors/systems, by sex, distinguishing children, unemployed persons, older persons, persons with disabilities, pregnant women, new-borns, work-injury victims and the poor and the vulnerable	Associate	Partially available
	1.4.1 Proportion of population living in households with access to basic services	Associate	Partially available
	1.4.2 Proportion of total adult population with secure tenure rights to land, with legally recognized documentation and who perceive their rights to land as secure, by sex and by type of tenure	Associate	Not available

(Table 1 contd.)

(Table 1 contd.)

Goal	Indicator	Role	Status of Data Availability
SDG 3 Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages	3.3.1 Number of new HIV infections per 1,000 uninfected population, by sex, age and key populations	Associate	Readily available
	3.4.2 Suicide mortality rate	Associate	Partially available
	3.5.1 Coverage of treatment interventions (pharmacological, psychosocial and rehabilitation and aftercare services) for substance use disorders	Associate	Partially available
	3.5.2 Harmful use of alcohol, defined according to the national context as alcohol per capita consumption (aged 15 years and older) within a calendar year in litres of pure alcohol	Associate	Not available
SDG 4 Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all	4.1.1 Proportion of children and young people: (a) in grades 2/3; (b) at the end of primary; and (c) at the end of lower secondary achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in (i) reading and (ii) mathematics, by sex	Associate	Partially available
	4.3.1 Participation rate of youth and adults in formal and non-formal education and training in the previous 12 months, by sex	Associate	Partially available
	4.4.1 Proportion of youth and adults with information and communications technology (ICT) skills, by type of skill	Associate	Partially available
	4.5.1 Parity indices (female/male, rural/urban, bottom/top wealth quintile and others such as disability status, indigenous peoples and conflict-affected, as data become available) for all education indicators on this list that can be disaggregated	Associate	Partially available
	4.6.1 Percentage of population in a given age group achieving at least a fixed level of proficiency in functional (a) literacy and (b) numeracy skills, by sex	Associate	Readily available
SDG 8 Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all	8.3.1 Proportion of informal employment in non-agriculture employment, by sex	Associate	Readily available
	8.5.1 Average hourly earnings of female and male employees, by occupation, age and persons with disabilities	Associate	Partially available
	8.5.2 Unemployment rate, by sex, age and persons with disabilities	Associate	Partially available
	8.6.1 Proportion of youth (aged 15–24 years) not in education, employment or training	Lead	Partially available
	8.7.1 Proportion and number of children aged 5–17 years engaged in child labour, by sex and age	Associate	Partially available
	8.b.1 Total Government spending in social protection and employment programmes as a proportion of the national budgets and GDP	Lead	Readily available
SDG 11 Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable	11.4.1 Total expenditure (public and private) per capita spent on the preservation, protection and conservation of all cultural and natural heritage, by type of heritage (cultural, natural, mixed and World Heritage Centre designation), level of Government (national, regional and local/municipal), type of expenditure (operating expenditure/investment) and type of private funding (donations in kind, private non-profit sector and sponsorship)	Associate	Partially available

Source: GED (2017b).

In terms of data availability, out of the 22 indicators mentioned, data are readily available for only five indicators. Data are partially available for 15 indicators and data are not available at all for two indicators (Table 1). This scenario indicates that disaggregated data on youth are scarce in Bangladesh, which paves the way for further marginalisation of the youth population.

To summarise, there is a lack of understanding about the heterogeneity of the world's youth population. The MDGs triumphed in introducing a development approach in developing countries to help the underprivileged and vulnerable and were successful in many aspects. Yet, the MDGs failed to measure success at disaggregated levels, which meant that the needs of the left behind segments remained unmet. The distinguishing characteristic of the successor SDGs is that they advocate for those who have been left behind, including youth explicitly. As the future of the world depends on the youth of today, it is of immense significance to ensure that youth are provided with ample opportunities for growth and prosperity.

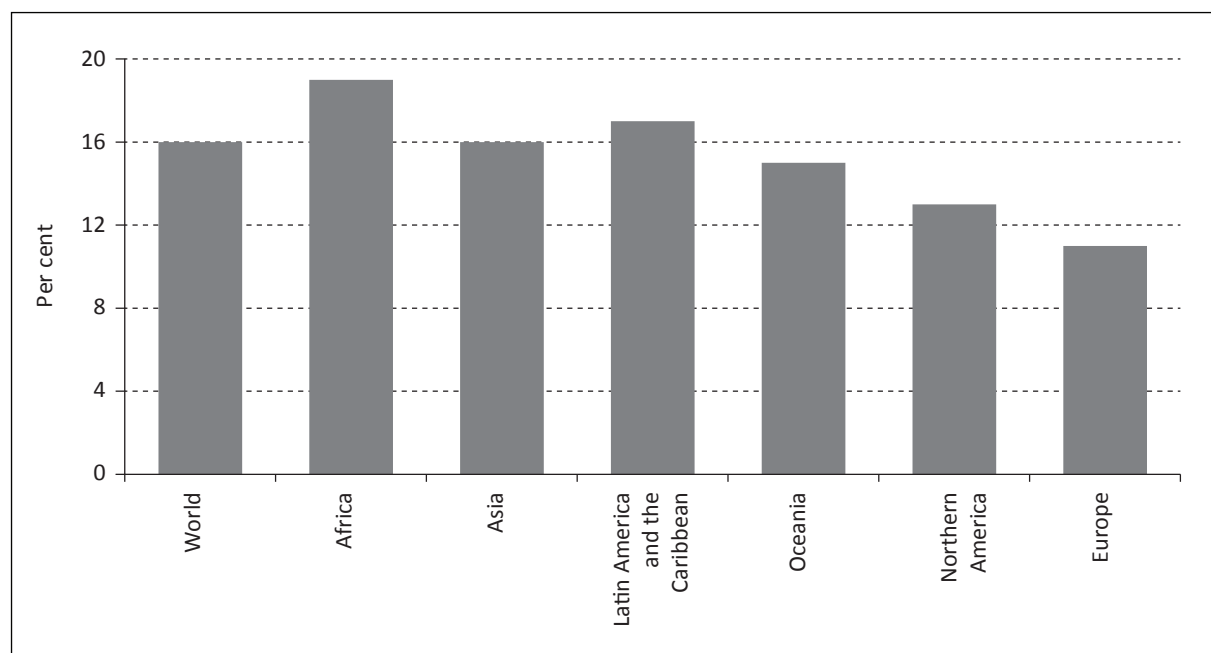
3. STATE OF YOUTH – GLOBAL AND REGIONAL TRENDS

3.1 Youth in the Global Scenario

Global youth population trends reveal that the youth bulge is a common experience in many developing countries, including the least developed ones. It often occurs when a country reaches a stage of development where success is achieved in reducing the infant mortality rate, but the fertility rate remains high. Thus, a large proportion of most developing countries' populations are comprised of youth and children. The region of Africa (19 per cent) possesses the largest youth population. Latin America and the Caribbean and Asia have experienced large declines in fertility and have similar percentages of youth (17 per cent and 16 per cent, respectively) (Figure 1). Together, these regions had about 1.1 billion youth in 2017 (UNDESA, 2017).

Asia has experienced fluctuating demographic growths with a significant decrease overall, indicating that the region is gradually transitioning out of its demographic dividend. Although the number of youth in Asia is projected to decline from approximately 718 million in 2015 to approximately 711 million in 2030, the region will have more youth than any other region until around 2080. Notably, the youth bulge in Africa is growing, with the number of youth in the region projected to increase by 42 per cent by 2030. Conversely, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, North America and Oceania

Figure 1: Share of the Youth Population (Aged 15–24 Years) in the World and by Region, 2017



Source: UNDESA (2017).

have not experienced increasing growth of their youth populations over the past six decades. The youth populations of North America and Oceania have each always remained below 100 million and the North American youth population is on a declining trend (UNDESA, 2015). Similarly, Europe is projected to experience a large decline in its youth population (UN, 2015b).

The Commonwealth (2016) published the *Global Youth Development Index and Report 2016* to provide a picture of youth progression across the world. The state of youth was measured in 183 countries, including 49 of the 53 Commonwealth countries, against five domains of youth development – education, health and well-being, employment and opportunity, political participation, and civic participation – using a total of 18 indicators. The overall development of youth has been improving in many parts of the world, though at a very slow pace. The regions of Asia-Pacific, Central America and the Caribbean and Sub-Saharan Africa experienced progress between 2010 and 2015, whereas youth development remained almost static in Eurasia and Russia, as well as the Middle East and North Africa. However, Sub-Saharan Africa had the lowest level of youth development in the world, while South Asia was also found near the bottom of the rankings. On the other hand, North America recorded the highest level of youth development, followed by Europe, Asia-Pacific, South America, Central America and the Caribbean, and Russia and Eurasia. Deep inequalities persist among countries, particularly in education and health and well-being. Youth development tends to be highest in countries with relatively small youth populations. Such trends should inspire serious concern about the futures of countries that have or will have a youth bulge.

3.1.1 Unemployment Rates

One of the major concerns regarding youth across the world is unemployment. According to International Labour Organization estimates, the youth labour force participation rate decreased by 9.3 percentage points from 55 per cent to 45.7 per cent between 1997 and 2017, whereas the adult rate decreased by only 2 percentage points. Over the same period, the youth population grew by 139 million and the youth labour force shrunk by 34.9 million. In other words, the engagement of youth (aged 15 years or older) in the labour market is declining. In 2017, the share of the youth population (aged 15–24 years) was less than one-sixth of the total labour force in spite of the existing youth bulge. Moreover, the gender gap in labour force participation narrowed by 0.7 percentage points between 1997 and 2017. In most cases, however, labour force participation rates are decreasing for both young and adult men, whereas for women, the rate is decreasing only for the youth cohort (ILO, 2017).

Furthermore, the International Labour Organization estimates that global youth unemployment will rise slightly to 13.1 per cent in 2017 and 2018 from 13 per cent in 2016. A declining trend in the number of unemployed youth has reversed since 2015 despite the fact that the number of unemployed youth was the lowest (70.3 million) that year compared to numbers across more than two decades. This number reached its peak (76.7 million) during the global financial crisis in 2009. In 2017, the estimated number of unemployed youth was 70.9 million and it is expected to rise by 134,000 to reach 71.1 million in 2018 (ILO, 2017).

3.1.2 NEET Rates among Youth

The numbers of young men and women who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) are much higher compared to the adult population. This phenomenon is true for most countries, except

for the ones with the highest incomes (PRB, 2017). Statistics show that young women often do not get access to education, jobs or training and tend to engage in non-labour market activities like caregiving and household work. In 2017, the global NEET rate for youth was 21.8 per cent and the female share of this group was 76.9 per cent, which accounts for three of four NEET youth (ILO, 2017; PRB, 2017).

3.1.3 Youth and Education

In 2015, around 37.1 per cent of youth of upper secondary school age (15–17 years) across the world were not in school. In numbers, 141 million youth belonged to this group, of which 72.3 million were male (UNESCO, 2017a). Over the 2010–15 period, global completion rates for upper secondary education were merely 45 per cent on average (UNESCO, 2017b). In 2016, the global literacy rate for youth was 91 per cent – 102 million youth were identified as illiterate across the world, of which 58 million were female (UNESCO, 2017a). Further, 213 million students were enrolled in tertiary education in 2015. Since 2000, the gross enrolment ratio in tertiary education has risen by 29 percentage points in upper-middle-income countries, but that scenario is uncommon across the world. For low-income and lower-middle-income countries, the gross enrolment ratio in tertiary education in 2015 was only 8 per cent and 23 per cent, respectively (UNESCO, 2017b).

3.1.4 Reproductive Health of Young Women

Over the last two decades, increasing numbers of young married women (aged 15–24 years) in many low- and middle-income countries have met their family planning needs to delay or limit childbearing by using modern methods of contraception. Still, challenges and barriers that are unique to younger women have slowed progress in several countries. Age-restrictive policies, social pressures and provider bias limit knowledge about available options and access to appropriate methods, leading to higher rates of contraceptive failure and discontinuation after short periods. Addressing these challenges and barriers would improve maternal and child health, increase educational attainment and improve economic opportunities for young women. In 2015, about 14.5 million births were estimated for adolescent girls in 156 developing countries (UNFPA, 2016).

3.1.5 HIV Infection among Youth

Youth remain vulnerable to HIV/AIDS. In 2015, about 250,000 youth (aged 15–29 years) across the world were newly infected with HIV. Among them, two out of three youth lived in Sub-Saharan Africa. For young women, the scenario is worse: they accounted for two-thirds of newly infected youth globally and three-quarters in Sub-Saharan Africa. Gender-based violence and less access to education, economic opportunities and health services make young women more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS than young men (PRB, 2017).

3.2 Trends in the Global South

Among youth, economic, social, educational and other trends vary widely across regions of the world. Variations can also be identified by categorising regions by levels of development. The regions that belong to the global south are usually recognised as less developed, with various economic, social, political and environmental challenges. Thus, youth in these regions face comparatively larger risks from unemployment, gender inequality and access to basic services and rights. Participation in the informal economy and NEET rates are growing crises. Success in increasing enrolment rates

is diminished by high dropout rates. Moreover, general health, HIV infection, lack of reproductive health knowledge and unmet need for family planning are challenges faced by a large proportion of youth in the global south (ROVERNET, 2014).

In 2017, youth labour force participation rates ranged from 30.6 per cent in Arab States to 54.3 per cent in Sub-Saharan Africa. They remained over 45 per cent in Eastern Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, Northern America, and South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific. From a gender perspective, they have increased among female adults generally, except in Northern America, Eastern Asia and Southern Asia. Sub-Saharan Africa is the only region where rates for both female youth and adults have positive trends. Education among young women is boosting female labour force participation (ILO, 2017).

However, narrowing the gender gap in labour force participation does not necessarily ensure equal opportunity for decent work for women. Statistics show that the unemployment rate was higher for young women than men in seven of 11 regions¹ in 2017. The unemployment rate was lower in Northern America; Northern, Southern and Western Europe and the region of Eastern Asia, while unemployment rates were equal in the region of South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific (ILO, 2017) (Table 2).

Table 2: Youth Labour Force Participation Rates and Gender Gaps by Region, 2017

Region	Sub-Region	Labour Force Participation Rate (%)	Gender Gap (Percentage Points)
Africa	Northern Africa	31.9	30.0
	Sub-Saharan Africa	54.3	5.3
America	Latin America and the Caribbean	49.8	19.2
	Northern America	52.3	2.2
Arab States		30.6	32.7
Asia and the Pacific	Eastern Asia	51.4	2.6
	South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific	51.3	14.6
	Southern Asia	37.2	32.8
Europe and Central Asia	Northern, Southern and Western Europe	44.4	4.8
	Eastern Europe	35.6	9.0
	Central and Western Asia	43.3	21.2
World		45.7	16.6

Source: ILO (2017).

Middle-income and particularly lower-middle-income countries have the highest NEET rates along with the largest gender disparities. Low-income countries are less likely to have data on NEET rates, though when they do, the rates are usually pretty low because generally a large proportion of youth are engaged in informal agriculture, urban livelihood activities or other employment with low productivity. In 2016, the share of youth in informal employment was 76.7 per cent, whereas the share of adults in informal employment was 57.9 per cent (ILO, 2017) (Table 3).

¹Northern Africa; Sub-Saharan Africa; Latin America and the Caribbean; Northern America; Arab States; Eastern Asia; South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific; Southern Asia; Northern, Southern and Western Europe; Eastern Europe; Central and Western Asia.

Table 3: Share of Youth and Adults in Formal and Informal Employment, 2016

	Formal Employment		Informal Employment	
	Adult	Youth	Adult	Youth
World	42.1%	23.3%	57.9%	76.7%
Developing Countries	9.8%	3.2%	90.2%	96.8%
Emerging Countries	34.49%	16.97%	65.50%	83.03%
Developed Countries	83.14%	80.76%	16.86%	19.24%

Source: ILO (2017).

According to the latest available data in 2017, ILO suggests that that the region with the largest NEET youth population is Southern Asia (28.6 per cent). Interestingly, the region with the smallest NEET youth population is Eastern Asia (3.7 per cent). Other regions with comparatively high NEET rates are Northern Africa (26.1 per cent), Central and Western Asia (23.4 per cent) and Latin America and the Caribbean (19.4 per cent). In all regions, NEET rates are driven mostly by female shares, especially in Southern Asia where the female share of the NEET youth population is 89.5 per cent (ILO, 2017).

Studying different regions shows that Sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia had the largest number of out-of-school youth of upper secondary school age. The rates for these two regions were 58 per cent and 48 per cent, respectively. Northern America and Europe had the most positive scenarios, with only 8 per cent of youth having similar status (UNESCO, 2018).

Further, youth health trends across the global south are not promising. Among the regions of the world over the 2010–15 period, the adolescent birth rate was highest in Africa at 99 births per 1,000 adolescent girls (aged 15–19 years), followed by Latin America and the Caribbean at 67 births per 1,000 women. The ratio of adolescent to total fertility was highest in Latin America and the Caribbean, where the birth rate at 15–19 years of age contributed 16 per cent to total fertility (UNDESA, 2017).

Among youth newly infected with HIV in 2015, two out of three lived in Sub-Saharan Africa, while among women; three-quarters were from Sub-Saharan Africa (PRB, 2017). Young people are also experiencing growing risks from non-communicable diseases. Cardiovascular diseases, chronic lung diseases, diabetes and cancers have been identified as a mounting crisis among youth, especially in low- and middle-income countries (PRB, 2017).

To sum up this section, the present young generation is facing multi-dimensional challenges and crises. Youth unemployment rates are alarming and predicted to rise in the future. A huge of proportion of youth is deprived of higher education and training and thus the NEET rates among youth are quite alarming. Furthermore, the gender gap in both employment and education remains to various extents. Major concerns regarding the well-being of youth are high adolescent birth rates, lack of comprehensive knowledge about HIV/AIDS and lack of access to sexual and reproductive health rights. The overarching consequence is vulnerability of youth from an SDG perspective.

4. YOUTH ISSUES IN BANGLADESH

Bangladesh has a very young population structure, with half of the country's population comprising children and youth. As mentioned, youth (aged 15–24 years) make up 17 per cent of the total population (BBS, 2018). Currently, the youth population is experiencing growth, which indicates that the country has an opportunity of a demographic dividend. The youth population (aged 18–35

years), according to the definition in National Youth Policy 2017, is more than 33 per cent of the total population (BBS, 2015a). To reap the benefits, Bangladesh has to invest in human capital. This is not only a question of resources, but also the quality of human assets that are being produced. Current low public investment in education, health and other human development sectors is closing the window of opportunity that could lead to increased savings, larger investments and higher productivity alongside economic growth. Given this context, an overview of the current state of the youth population in Bangladesh from the perspectives of SDGs 8, 4 and 3 is presented in this section. Some recent movements led by the youth demanding their rights to employment, education and well-being are presented as well.

4.1 Employment

The SDGs emphasise sustainable economic growth, which needs to be inclusive and promote decent work. Keeping the significance of youth employment in mind, SDG targets endorse a youth-focused approach through advocating for the substantial reduction of NEET rates among youth (SDG 8.6), development and operationalisation of a global strategy for youth employment (SDG 8.b) and achieving full and productive employment for young people and equal pay for work of equal value (SDG 8.5).

In Bangladesh, the youth labour force participation rate was 40.3 per cent in FY17. For the male youth population, the labour force participation rate was 54.4 per cent, while for the female youth population; the rate was only 26.3 per cent, less than half of the rate for men (BBS, 2018). Furthermore, the youth unemployment rate increased from 8.7 per cent in FY16 to 10.6 per cent in FY17, which is significantly higher than the national average of 4.2 per cent. Estimations by the Centre for Policy Dialogue assessing current trends and statistics show that the possibility of remaining unemployed increases with higher levels of education. More than one-third of the total youth labour force with tertiary education (34.3 per cent) remained unemployed in 2016–17. The corresponding figure for the female cohort was even higher (42.5 per cent). In addition, the unemployment rate was higher in rural areas in comparison to urban areas (CPD, 2018b) (Table 4).

Table 4: Unemployment Rate by Education Level, Gender and Location

(% of Total Youth Labour Force Aged 15–29 Years in Bangladesh)

Educational Attainment	Rural			Urban			Bangladesh		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
2015–16									
None	6.7	8.7	7.6	4.8	4.6	4.7	6.1	7.4	6.7
Primary	6.4	14.5	9.0	6.2	10.7	7.9	6.4	13.4	8.7
Secondary	7.5	18.9	10.7	8.6	14.7	10.7	7.8	17.6	10.7
Higher Secondary	6.2	5.0	5.7	6.0	8.2	6.8	6.1	5.8	6.0
Tertiary	9.9	12.7	10.7	12.6	18.6	14.7	10.8	15.0	12.1
Others	1.1	1.0	1.1	0.6	0.0	0.3	0.9	0.4	0.7
Total	7.3	11.2	8.6	7.6	11.5	8.9	7.4	11.3	8.7
2016–17									
None	2.6	11.4	5.3	1.3	6.4	3.4	2.3	10.0	4.8
Primary	3.6	10.4	5.4	3.7	7.4	4.9	3.7	9.3	5.3

(Table 4 contd.)

(Table 4 contd.)

Educational Attainment	Rural			Urban			Bangladesh		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Secondary	7.1	11.2	8.8	5.9	13.2	8.6	6.7	11.7	8.7
Higher Secondary	23.0	33.7	26.4	22.2	37.0	28.1	22.7	35.1	27.0
Tertiary	32.1	45.6	36.2	27.6	39.8	32.2	30.1	42.5	34.3
Others	7.9	0.0	7.5	8.5	0.0	8.1	8.0	0.0	7.6
Total	8.1	14.3	10.2	8.7	16.7	11.6	8.2	15.0	10.6

Source: BBS (2017, 2018).

In FY17, a large share of youth (aged 15–24 years) was considered NEET as 26.8 per cent youth belonged to this group. The NEET rate was relatively higher for the female youth population, as 43.9 per cent fell into this category, whereas for male youth the rate was 9.2 per cent (BBS, 2018). The share of youth in informal employment was 91.4 per cent, while the share of the total working population in informal employment was 85.1 per cent (BBS, 2018).

Bangladesh has achieved exponential growth in GDP in recent years. Yet, statistics show that 28.9 per cent of the working-age population are not getting gainfully engaged in economic activities (BBS, 2016). This situation stimulates the threat of ‘jobless growth’. Moreover, the decline in average real monthly income has been identified as an emerging challenge. Between 2015–16 and 2016–17, average income declined by 2.5 per cent. The decline was even steeper for female workers at 3.8 per cent. Trends have been worsening since 2013 (CPD, 2018b). Thus, the unemployment crisis in the country is accompanied by the problem of jobs becoming less remunerative (Table 5).

Table 5: Average Real Monthly Income (in BDT, Adjusted with Consumer Price Index, CPI)

	2015–16	2016–17	Change (%)
National			
Male	13,844	13,583	-1.9
Female	12,732	12,254	-3.8
Total	13,602	13,258	-2.5
Urban			
Male	16,957	17,106	0.9
Female	13,847	13,321	-3.8
Total	16,022	15,912	-0.7
Rural			
Male	12,211	11,708	-4.1
Female	11,532	11,206	-2.8
Total	12,098	11,608	-4.0

Source: CPD (2018b).

Quota Reform Movement

The quota system is a scheme for safeguarding equitable access to education, employment and livelihood facilities for less privileged segments of the population. For instance, there is a quota of 56 per cent for Government jobs: 30 per cent of seats are reserved for the descendants of freedom

fighters, 10 per cent for women, 10 per cent for underprivileged districts, five per cent for national minority groups and one per cent for the physically challenged. This system leaves only 44 per cent of seats for candidates who do not belong to any of these groups. Moreover, if candidates from these groups fail recruitment tests, reserved seats remain vacant. Vacancies in Government jobs due to such occurrences were found to be as high as 811 in the 31st Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) and 723 in the BCS examination (Mahmud & Shovon, 2018).

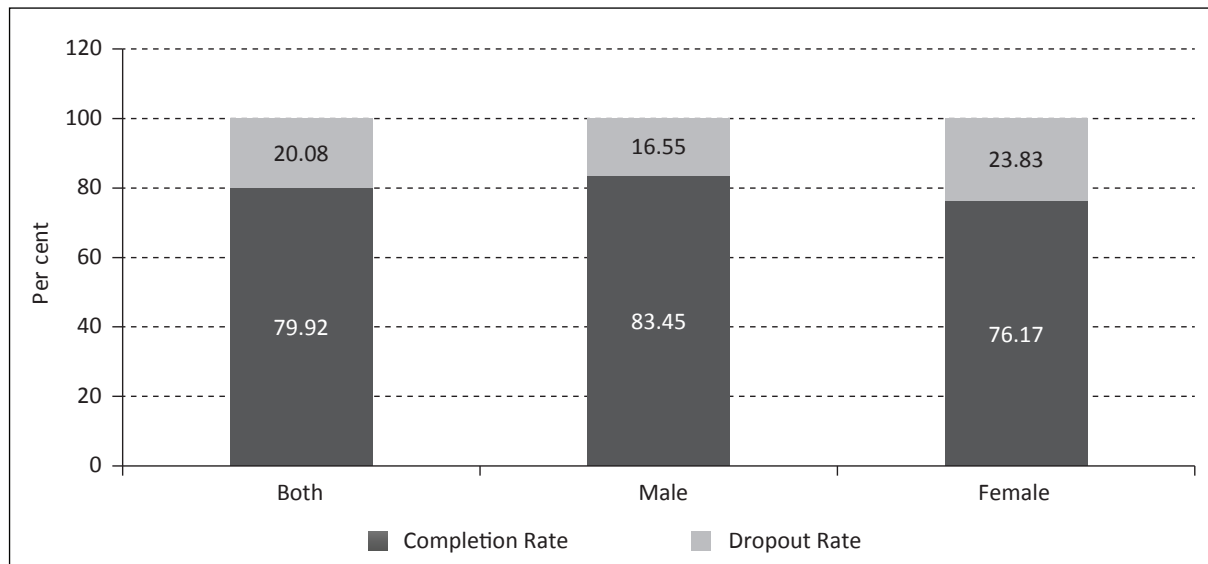
In this context, students from a number of universities joined together in a protest in July 2018 demanding reform of the existing quota system. Several thousand students gathered in TSC (Teacher-Student Centre) arena, Shahbag and nearby areas while others from different universities (University of Dhaka, North South University, BRAC University and several more) gathered on their respective campuses. The students demanded decreasing the shares of reserved seats from 56 per cent to 10 per cent, filling vacancies under quotas according to merit and introducing a uniform age limit in Government jobs. After an unexpected turn of events, the movement turned violent when police forces and students engaged in a series of clashes that left at least 100 people injured and many arrested (Mahmud & Shovon, 2018). Finally, on October 4, 2018 the public administration ministry has published a gazette notification declaring official abolishment of the quota system in Class-I and II government jobs (The Independent, 2018).

4.2 Education

The education focus of the SDGs is more far-reaching than that of the MDGs. SDG 4 includes targets on pre-primary education (4.2) and primary education (4.1), but also extends into addressing the need for 'lifelong learning opportunities' through its focus on technical and vocational training and tertiary education (4.3) and specifically targets youth to increase the number with relevant skills for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship (4.4). It acknowledges existing barriers to education for certain groups who are likely to be left behind, emphasising the gender gap (4.3, 4.5, 4.6) and vulnerable groups (4.5, 4.7, 4.a).

In Bangladesh, the gross enrolment rate at the higher secondary level was only 39.8 per cent, of which only 38.0 per cent were girls, in 2016. However, improvement was visible in the net enrolment rate at that level, which was 36.5 per cent, an increase from 25.0 per cent in 2008. The completion rate for both boys and girls was 79.9 per cent – 83.4 per cent for boys and 76.2 per cent for girls. A large proportion of enrolled students failed to complete higher secondary education and dropped out (BANBEIS, 2017) (Figure 2).

In the case of technical and vocational education, total enrolment in all 5,897 institutions was 875,270, with an average of 148 students per institution, in 2016. The female share of total enrolment was only 23.95 per cent. Thus, the gender parity index was 32 per cent, much lower than the national target of 100 per cent. A similar scenario was observed at the tertiary level. Among all students enrolled in universities, only 31.43 per cent were female; the share was 35.26 per cent at public universities and 26.76 per cent at private universities (BANBEIS, 2017). In 2016, the teacher-student ratio at the secondary level was 1:42 and the average number of teachers per institution was only 12. The distribution of educational institutions at the secondary level is not equal for all divisions. For example, regarding the enrolment rate, the share of Sylhet was 6.51 per cent, while the share of Dhaka was 31.28 per cent (BANBEIS, 2017).

Figure 2: Completion and Dropout Rates at Higher Secondary Level, 2016

Source: BANBEIS (2017).

The consensus among youth surveyed for the Next Generation Survey by British Council was that, there is a lack of trained and committed teachers at educational institutions. Notably, 50 per cent of youth agreed that there is a need to set up more educational institutions. The quality of institutions was also questioned; with 29 per cent of youth not being satisfied and adding that institutions have lax regulations for education and testing standards. Also, 65 per cent suggested providing quality trained teachers to improve the education system (British Council, 2015). Apart from those concerns, there is a noticeable gap in information and communications technology (ICT) training within the educational system.

Quality education is a priority for youth under SDG 4. Indicators monitor the proportion of youth and adults with ICT skills and other skills, in addition to the participation of youth and adults in formal and non-formal education and training. Among youth, 42 per cent of survey respondents believed that ICT is not emphasised in their education (British Council, 2015). A blog poll by the Asian Development Bank prior to World Youth Skills Day showed that youth in Asia and the Pacific should learn communications and languages, technical skills, leadership and ICT skills to get them ready for the labour market. Leadership and ICT skills were identified by 20 per cent of blog readers as necessary cross-cutting skills for youth as industries are becoming increasingly digitized and new markets are emerging' (ADB, 2016). The identified deficiency in ICT skills among youth in Bangladesh means that they may not be prepared to take on jobs in the near future, when these skills will be in higher demand. Furthermore, according to the Bangladesh Youth Survey 2011 (Graner, Yasmin, & Aziz, 2012) 30 per cent of youth felt that the education they received did not prepare them for the job market (Graner, Yasmin, & Aziz, 2012). In addition, Transparency International Bangladesh's 2015 survey showed youth believed that education and employment in Bangladesh are marred by corruption and bureaucracy (TIB, 2015).

'No VAT on Education' Movement

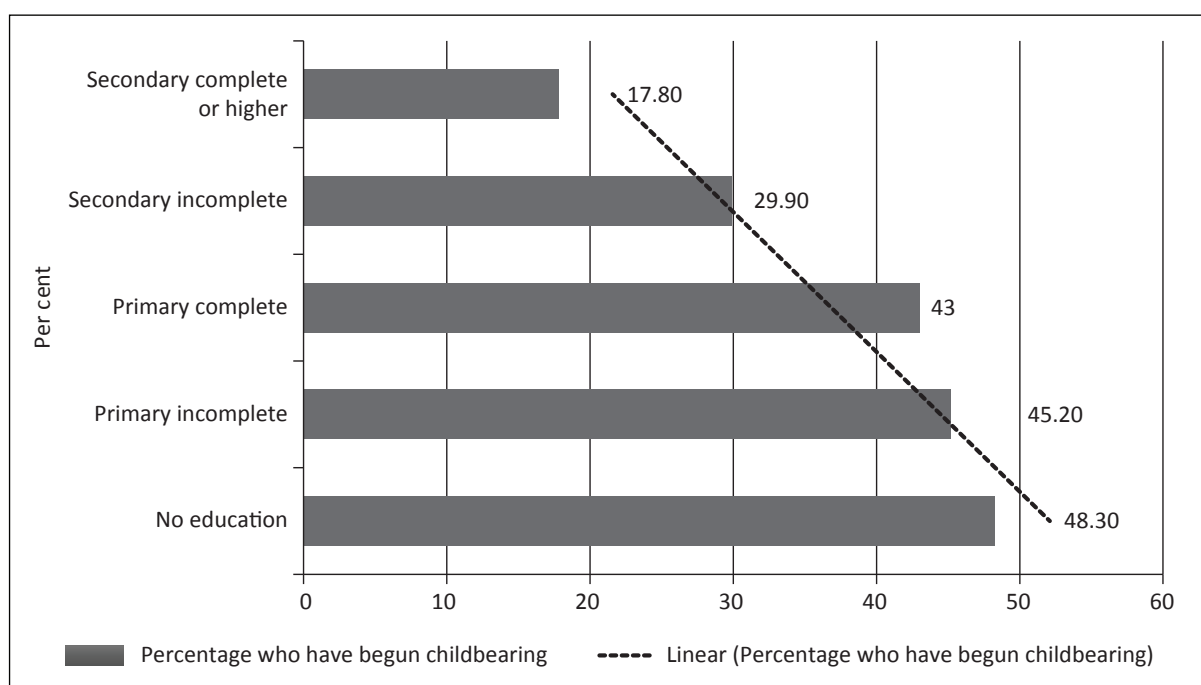
The 'No VAT on Education' movement led by university students asserted that youth in Bangladesh are fully aware of their rights. In June 2015, the then finance minister proposed a value added tax

(VAT) of 10 per cent on education in private universities and medical and engineering colleges in the draft budget for FY16. In the face of protest, the prime minister suggested reducing the proposed VAT to 7.5 per cent. Then in July 2015, the National Board of Revenue issued a notification imposing the 7.5 per cent VAT on tuition fees for the aforementioned institutions. Students from several private universities (e.g., University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh, Stamford University Bangladesh, Daffodil International University, State University of Bangladesh and East West University) engaged in strong protests that included road blockage, human chain formation, signature collection and marching. Social media, the most frequent mode of communication, was used for awareness building. The turmoil continued until September 15, when the Government declared a withdrawal of the VAT on tuition fees (Rahman, 2017).

4.3 Health and Well-being

SDG 3 covers the health of youth through several targets and indicators. A specific focus on youth can be observed in the target on ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive healthcare services (3.7), for which adolescent birth rate (aged 15–19 years) per 1,000 women is an indicator among two (UN, n.d.). According to the *Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey 2014*, about 31 per cent of adolescent women (aged 15–19 years) began childbearing. Such early childbearing is more common in rural (32 per cent) than in urban (27 per cent) areas. As can be seen from the Figure 3, the survey reveals that education has a strong relationship with the timing of childbearing. Specifically, 18 per cent of adolescent women who completed secondary or higher education and 48 per cent of young women with no education were found to have started childbearing. In addition, the contraceptive prevalence rate among married adolescent girls was found to be only 46.7 per cent (NIPORT; Mitra and Associates & ICF International, 2016).

Figure 3: Share of Adolescent Girls (Aged 15–19 Years) who have Begun Childbearing, by Education Level



Source: NIPORT; Mitra and Associates & ICF International (2016).

In South Asia, Bangladesh has the highest adolescent fertility rate, where one girl in 10 has a child before the age of 15 and one in three adolescent girls becomes a mother or pregnant by the age of 19. This relatively high rate may be connected with a high rate of child marriage (Islam, Islam, Hasan, & Hossain, 2017). Importantly, neonatal mortality was found to be higher among mothers aged 15–19 years compared to those aged 20–24 years, which was also true for post-neonatal and infant mortality (BBS, 2015a). Furthermore, according to the latest available data, physicians available per 1,000 people in Bangladesh were 0.4 per cent, while the availability for nurses and midwives was 0.2 per cent (WHO, 2015). This scenario testifies to the inadequate access to healthcare for the young generation.

According to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare of Bangladesh, some critical issues experienced by adolescent girls are gender-based discrimination, child marriage, high adolescent fertility rates, high prevalence of domestic violence, increasing incidence of sexual abuse, and high dropout rates from secondary education on (which can be related to patriarchal norms in Bangladesh). Societal or peer pressure to comply with the prevailing norms of masculinity eventually leads a large proportion of adolescent boys towards precarious behaviour like unsafe sex, violence and substance use, which directly or indirectly influence health and well-being. Another significant issue is that nationally representative data on knowledge of sexual and reproductive health and rights among adolescent girls and boys are not available in the country (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, 2016).

Road Safety Movement

The young generation in Bangladesh is becoming increasingly vocal not only about their health and well-being, but also that of the whole country. The latest uprising led by youth named the 'Road Safety Movement' testifies to this statement. It was sparked by an unfortunate accident in July 2018, in which two unlicensed buses collided, killing two students and injuring several people. Another incident that influenced rage was the unsympathetic reaction of the minister of shipping. Students from schools, colleges and universities started peaceful protests in Dhaka and other cities demanding safe roads for all and justice for their fellow students. They gathered on roads and highways and some performed the duties of the traffic police, namely checking whether vehicles have papers and drivers have licenses (Rahman, 2018). The movement ran peacefully for a few days, but ended in causing injuries to several students when police forces and weapon-wielding goons fired tear gas and rubber bullets at students, injuring a large number of them (Sobhan, 2018). Some students were arrested as well. Even after such eye-opening incidents, roads and highways have continued to be death traps since drivers have chosen to remain as reckless as before. However, the Government of Bangladesh declared that this movement has raised concerns like never before and drafted the Road Transport Act 2018, which is currently awaiting approval by the Cabinet (Aowsaf, 2018).

4.4 Drug Addiction among Youth

Surveys conducted around the world show that peak levels of drug use (for most drug types) are observed among youth aged 18–25 years in countries from most regions (UNODC, 2018). The state of youth in Bangladesh is no exception. According to a baseline study on drug addiction in the country that was submitted to the Department of Narcotics Control, drug abusers are typically young, their average age was 28.7 years and seven out of 10 drug abusers were found to be less than 30 years old. Yaba, cannabis and Phensidyl were found to be the most frequently abused drugs. Cox's Bazar and Chittagong Metropolitan Area were found to have the highest prevalence of yaba and almost all 32

border districts were found to be vulnerable to drug trafficking (DNC, 2017). Notably, about 70.0 per cent of drug abusers possessed a Secondary School Certificate or had higher educational attainment and slightly more than half of users were found to be students and unemployed youth. In 2015, 41.8 per cent of abusers were unemployed (DNC, 2016). In terms of household income and expenditure, most abusers were either poor or part of the middle class. Based on an analysis of the causes of drug abuse, the most prominent were peer pressure, curiosity, availability of drugs, family turmoil, disappointment and unemployment (IRGDSL, 2017). Alarming, about 33.0 per cent of abusers were aged 16–25 years in 2015 (DNC, 2016) and within one year, the figure increased by 6.53 percentage points to reach 39.62 per cent (DNC, 2017).

4.5 Youth and Militancy

Religious radicalisation leading to militancy has become a major concern in Bangladesh since the series bomb blast incident in August 17, 2005 in 63 out of 64 districts injuring many (The Daily Star, 2005). The most devastating incident was in July 2016 in Gulshan, a neighbourhood of Dhaka, where 29 people were killed including 18 foreigners. According to studies, influxes of radicalised groups, like returning veterans of the war in Afghanistan and migrant workers returning from abroad, have contributed to influencing public opinion. Certain events across the world, especially interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan by the United States and its allies as well as developments in Palestine, have been observed to stimulate radicalisation and anti-Western sentiment among Islamist political groups and others (BIPSS, 2017).

An estimated 20 per cent of suicide bombers and terrorist groups belong to the youth cohort (aged 15–18 years). Terrorist groups especially target youth because youth with no prior police record allow for more operational freedom and they can be manipulated easier than adults. There are allegations that some education institutions, particularly universities and other tertiary educational institutions are being used as ‘recruitment pools’ for terrorists (BIPSS, 2017). Such recruitment has led to vastly diverse recruits, ranging from madrasah students to upper-middle-class youth at private universities (International Crisis Group, 2018). The attack in Gulshan was carried out by five young militants, of which two were undergraduate students and one was a college student from Dhaka, while the other two came from rural areas with madrasah education backgrounds – the youngest among them was 17 years old (Bashar, 2017). Youth can be the targets of radicalisation irrespective of their education, social background and economic status (MJF, 2018). As for reasons behind radicalisation of youth, poverty, illiteracy, the unfocused national education policy on madrasahs, the unemployment crisis, unregulated money flows, lack of freedom along with democracy and political space, widespread corruption, ignorance about religious matters among youth, poor governance and the politicisation of Islam have been identified (Rahman, 2016).

In sum, several concerning issues affect the state of youth in Bangladesh. The current youth unemployment rate being substantially higher than the adult unemployment rate is a major predicament. Quality education remains problematic with respect to several measurement criteria like higher education enrolment rate, teacher-student ratio and completion rate. Moreover, increasing uncertainty of decent employment despite higher levels of education makes the situation worse. In terms of health, female youth are experiencing a high adolescent birth rate and poor access to health and reproductive health facilities. Apart from these drawbacks, drug addiction and militancy have emerged as serious threats.

5. POLICY AND INSTITUTIONAL APPROACH TOWARDS YOUTH IN BANGLADESH

This paper focuses on the core investment needs of youth as human capital to deliver a demographic dividend. In the case of a youth bulge, '[w]hether or not this potential is captured depends on the policy environment' (Chandrasekhar, Ghosh, & Roychowdhury, 2006). Thus, it is important to analyse the existing policy and institutional approach towards youth in Bangladesh to comprehend what the Government of Bangladesh is doing to realise a demographic dividend.

5.1 Current Policies and Strategies on Youth in Bangladesh

5.1.1 Analysis of the National Youth Policy 2017

National Youth Policy 2017 defines youth as people aged 18–35 years (DYD, 2017). However, in most policy documents of the Government of Bangladesh, those aged 15–24 years are considered youth, while the National Sustainable Development Strategy 2013 states that those aged 15–29 are youth (GED, 2013). There seem to be inconsistencies among policy documents beginning with their definitions, which may create confusion when designing initiatives that focus on youth.

National Youth Policy 2017 includes 16 categories of youth for whom special measures will be taken. Yet, no criteria are specified for the selection of these categories. In order to define categories, criteria like geographical location, social status, education or skill level should have been followed. Instead, the policy document seems to have provided all possible categories of youth. Such an approach creates the possibility for categories to overlap with each other. For instance, any young person who falls into the category of 'youth dropped out of school' may also belong to 'rural youth' and at the same time 'youth entrepreneurs'. The approach may lead to confusion when category-specific interventions for a target group of youth are formulated. Another example is that although the policy document addresses the special needs of transgender youth, only in one instance of promoting sports is the inclusion of transgender youth mentioned – measures for skills development and employment opportunities are not outlined.

For all the priority areas mentioned in the document, the policy recommendations given are more generic than specific. At the end of the document, preparing an action plan for formulating national youth policy is mentioned, yet no specific guidelines for the process of action plan formulation are mentioned. Further, policy and strategy documents from other Government institutions provide policy recommendations that are specific to youth as well. The recommendations in National Youth Policy 2017 do not seem to be in line with existing youth-focused policy recommendations from other institutions. This lack of coordination among institutions may lead to inconsistencies that prevent proper implementation.

5.1.2 Youth in Different Policies and Strategies

Other than National Youth Policy 2017, 16 documents were introduced over the past decade in which several youth-related aspects are addressed. Table 6 presents the details.

Table 6: Youth Focus in Policies

Document	Youth Focus Points
Strategic Priorities of Digital Bangladesh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasises the need to adopt measures that capitalise its growing share in the global outsourcing business, which is becoming the largest employer of educated youth • Aims to harness the potential of youth through the creation of good quality employment for them in the [information technology] sector and stresses the need to link ICT and education • Aims to attain increase enrolment in vocation stream to 20 per cent of the entire student population in Bangladesh and launch of employment generation schemes for rural youth
National Skill Development Policy - 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth, women and low-skilled people are identified as a key target group, to whom access to education, training and lifelong learning will be promoted • Aims to incorporate apprenticeships for youth among state-owned enterprises and to better skills working adolescents by providing accessible and flexible quality skills training • To meet the legal obligations, the working adolescent or the youth will be provided with new systems which will include formal technical and vocational education and training courses, focusing to gain meaningful employment, flexibility in schedule for delivering courses, industrial work placement for practical experience and counselling services • Addresses a concern that many young people leave school before class VIII of general education and therefore fail admission in formal skill development programmes • NSDP stresses on making skills based education and training an important option for students and workers, in order to make the occupation of skills trainer or skilled worker a valued career path • States an oversupply of university-trained graduated and a shortage of workers with skills and qualifications required by industry
Seventh Five Year Plan FY2016 – FY2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priority has been given to provide quality education and facilitate youth empowerment • Through strengthening sports and physical education programme at the school stage in all districts, the target is to transform the disorganised and unproductive youth into a disciplined and productive workforce • Participations of youth living in lagging regions can be promoted to increase the positive impact of international migration on socio-economic development of Bangladesh • DPHE will carry out the WSS Human Resources Development (HRD) activities for capacity building of personnel involved in the development and O&M of WSS system which includes unemployed youth • Preventive and promotional health education services will be ensured to reduce health threat caused by lifestyle choices, especially for urban youth • Non-formal education especially literacy and continuing education for adults and youth including life skills & livelihood skills development, is considered as the process of empowerment that contributes to human resource development and poverty reduction • Facilities for displaying scientific exhibits will be constructed to popularise science among youth • For national skill development initiatives, youth have been identified as the key target group • Government is committed to transform the unemployed youth into skilled manpower by providing quality technical and vocational training at minimum cost and by ensuring equal access • Skill and capacity development in ICT sector for the youth leading to build skilled national workforce • To bring sustained long-term development for the youth an organised network to distribute centralised information on various development sectors to local levels that can be spearheaded by youth will be developed • Re-branding the vocational stream by making the curriculum market ready, linking graduates to the job market and making appropriate use of ICT for training purposes to attract youth • The goal for sports is to provide adequate modern training facilities through Bangladesh Krira Shikkha Protisthan (BKSP) so that the participants can bring accolades for the country • The goal of youth development has been stated as to mobilise youth in socio-economic and voluntary activities to grow a sense of social responsibility among them, and to enhance their skill in such level to prepare them as a skilled workforce, and to provide adequate employment opportunities

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Document	Youth Focus Points
Bangladesh Population Policy 2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on adopting different strategies and activities for achieving the success, where youth-friendly service provision was highlighted • The policy suggested arranging sports and cultural programmes spreading messages related to family planning, maternal and child health
National Strategy for the Development of Statistics (NSDS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health and Morbidity Status survey is carried out on an irregular interval by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics where a various range of health and demographic information are extracted for different age groups, including youth and adolescents • The inclusion of statistics education at primary and secondary education is available, but not yet present in most of the university curriculum • Youth is mentioned as a cross-cutting issue in several statistical arenas, such as education, health, industrial and gender statistics • No recommendation for the Ministry of Youth and Sports is available for capacity development in terms of statistical data collection, rather focus on youth has been imposed for data collection activities of other ministries
National Integrity Strategy of Bangladesh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The strategy suggests to bridge the youth leadership with a high sense of integrity and dedication to fight corruption • Suggestion to encourage the children and youth to participate in voluntary, patriotic and welfare activities to build a sense of integrity among them • The strategy's goal in relation to the educational institutions is to make educational and religion based institutions effective agents for the promotion of morality • Providing support for community-based child and youth care centres on the educational and professional development • Mainstreaming the educational institutes into the process of national integrity building and fighting corruption involve rigorous civic and parental education, community awareness, teaching civic virtue at school and media campaign programmes • Initiatives for effective anti-corruption movements with regard to media and education or faith-based institution and engagement with civil society participation has to be taken • Curriculum on ethics and morality in general education and establishment of the appropriate education system have to be incorporated
Health, Population and Nutrition sector Development Program (2011-2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priority has been given to produce skilled health worker and also to motivate them to station at remote locations • Motivate and mobilise youth for disseminating awareness messages on family planning and HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases • Provision for adolescent-friendly health services, knowledge and awareness programmes has to be in place while special orientation to adolescent health service providers has to be provided as well • Health and nutrition service recommendation for different age groups have been provided, but no special focus on Youth Health was given • Provision of e-health will be given and promoted so that the young generation can be incorporated in the service • School level health programmes have to be initiated
National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) of Bangladesh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The strategy is programme consolidation of life cycle risks, with programmes designed with a special focus to youth • It suggests expanding coverage of core schemes for the extreme/hard-core poor and most vulnerable people of the society, focusing on mother and child, adolescent and youth, working age, the elderly and people with disabilities • Strengthening education and training programmes to motivate the adolescents and youth to complete education and to enable the working youth and the older workforce to acquire required skills • Provision of introducing and scaling up new innovative programmes for the Youth target groups • Youth is considered as one of the key areas for life risk cycles • As the youth age group is increasing by number day by day, concerns have been raised for providing education and access to job markets. Efforts have to be undertaken to meet the challenges

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Document	Youth Focus Points
National Sustainable Development Strategy 2010-21 (NSDS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Government will make efforts to generate employment opportunities – both self- and wage employment as the youth labour force constitutes the highest portion, 37 per cent of the total workforce • Make arrangement to export the youth labour force to foreign countries where they will be able to send foreign remittance to the country • Skill development training has to be provided to the youth labour force, whereas more employment opportunities need to be created as well • Creating an enabling environment for employment generation for youth • Young women will be emphasised with education, small and medium employment opportunities • Creating venture capital fund for innovative/creative young information technology businessman and professionals • Ensuring access of young information technology graduates to Equity Entrepreneurship Fund without any collateral
Sector Development Plan for Water Supply and Sanitation Sector in Bangladesh (FY2011-25)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School sanitation was recognised as an effective means of hygiene promotion because children are more likely to change and schools are effective as an ideal communication channel • Investment in school sanitation and hygiene education has been suggested as access to sanitation facilities is a fundamental right, and early childhood is the right age to develop hygiene related appropriate behaviour
National Science and Technology Policy-2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One of the key objectives is to seek out and recognise high talents particularly among the younger generation in various areas of science and technology • Appropriate measures will be taken to find young talented scientists through talent hunting with state patronisation • Undertake and encourage innovative activities to popularise science and technology among general people, especially youth • Create research and development job opportunities for science graduates in appropriate industry • Enhance the level of doctoral research opportunities and provide adequate resources • Financial assistance will be provided for the development of science education at secondary and higher secondary level • Strengthening and development of capable manpower for science and technology at different levels-vocational (non-formal and formal), school, pre-university, university, formal post-graduate and non-formal postgraduate (continuing education and training) to meet the needs of research and production systems of different sectors
National Telecommunications Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate high-speed broadband services for all individuals, communities, educational institutions • Development of telecommunications and information technology devices and applications for educational purposes for the persons with disabilities and special needs • Creating and facilitating sustainable employment opportunities <p>Emphasised investment in maximising social benefits and eliminating gender inequalities</p>
National Education Policy 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appointing subject related teachers at the higher secondary level and subject-based training for the teachers of college and universities • Stipends for higher education based on the results in Higher Secondary examination • Restructuring the existing Directorate of Secondary and Higher Secondary Education into two separate directorates: Directorate of Secondary Education and Directorate of Higher Education and Research • Engaging the college or university students on vacation into short-term adult education programs • Establishing science laboratories and ensuring other facilities at the college and madrasahs • Introducing fine arts and crafts education, health and physical education at the secondary level or university levels as a strategy to resist drug addiction among youth • Promises to emphasise on vocational education to facilitate self-employment • Ensuring health services and medical facilities at every college and universities as a strategy to strengthen students' welfare and counselling • The inclusion of gender studies and issues of reproductive health in the secondary level curriculum of last two years

(Table 6 contd.)

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Document	Youth Focus Points
National Women Development Policy 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involving youth in building up mass awareness in the prevention of abuse of women. • Ensure equal rights in all the levels of quality education, employment, technical training, equal emoluments, workplace health and safety, social security and healthcare. • Stipends for female students for the continuation of education
Non-Formal Education Act 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young men and women have been enlisted as a target group • Second chance education for the illiterate and dropped out youth • Special education for the youth with disabilities
National Strategy for Adolescent Health 2017-2030	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a robust system for data collection/analysis on the sexual and reproductive health of adolescents (including unmarried adolescents), the prevalence of age and gender-based violence, mental health issues including substance use and other relevant issues to inform policy and programming. • Strengthen the capacity of service providers regarding nutrition counselling, child marriage and the nutritional needs of pregnant adolescent girls; • Conduct community-based awareness campaigns on the importance of good nutrition, healthy foods and the consequences of malnutrition, anaemia and obesity on the overall development and growth of adolescents; • Enable evidence-based advocacy for comprehensive programme development to promote physical and mental health among adolescents • Strengthen partnerships with all relevant actors at the highest level – both Government and non-Government – to deliver effective services which meet adolescent health needs; • Strengthen the Health Management Information System (HMIS) to collect age and gender disaggregated data on issues which pertain to adolescents

Source: A21 (2011); Ministry of Education (2011); GED (2015b); Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (2012); BBS (2015b); Cabinet Division (2012); Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (2011); GED (2015c); GED (2013); MoLGRD&C (2011); Ministry of Science and Technology (2011); Posts and Telecommunications Division (2015); Ministry of Education (2010); Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (2011); BNFE (2014); Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (2016).

Evidently, these documents indicate, more or less, that the Government of Bangladesh is focused on youth and its focus is well-intentioned in most cases. However, despite most documents naming youth as a target group, there is a lack of specific action plans or strategies based on the unique requirements of the youth cohort. Inconsistencies and the lack of a comprehensive understanding of current youth issues can be gleaned from the documents. According to studies identifying the perceptions of the young generation regarding existing policies, youth thought that most members of the police and judiciary were corrupt (Graner, Yasmin, & Aziz, 2012) and respondents strongly expected the Government to carry out improvements in law and order (JAAGO Foundation, 2015).

5.2 Role of NGOs in Youth Development

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in Bangladesh have a massive role to play in several sectors concerning youth development as the Government alone cannot ensure progression in the all the sectors of a country. Many international, national and local NGOs are engaged in providing basic services to citizens in both urban and rural areas. To a large extent, they contribute to reaching out-of-reach segments of the population who are vulnerable due to geographical, social, economic, religious, ethnic or other characteristics or living conditions. Some of the principal activities of NGOs are providing access to credit for the poor and people living in distant areas, ensuring social intermediation and empowerment of women and other vulnerable groups, and delivering social services like alternative education, health and sanitation (Zohir, 2004).

In the education sector, NGOs undertake non-formal education and training programmes for youth in the country. Some of the major beneficiaries of these programmes are youth who have dropped out

of school or underprivileged segments of the youth population without literacy skills. NGOs such as CAMPE, BRAC, DAM and FIVDB contribute through such education programmes or projects. To name a few, 'Researching Out of School Children' by BRAC, 'Second Chance Education' by the World Bank, 'HOPE' (Holistic approach towards promotion of inclusive education) by Save the Children, 'Life is Fun' by Agami Education Foundation and 'Quality Education for All' by JAAGO Foundation are successfully impacting the education sector for youth and children. In the health sector, their engagement includes providing health service delivery for youth, advocating for sexual and reproductive health and rights of youth, running awareness campaigns and trainings for addressing various youth health issues (e.g., drug addiction and HIV/AIDS).

Apart from these initiatives, several youth-focused NGOs, such as Bangladesh Youth Leadership Center (BYLC), Young Power in Social Action (YPSA), United Nations Youth and Students Association of Bangladesh (UNYSAB) and Youth Opportunities, are providing youth with leadership training and skills development in Bangladesh and at the same time advocating for their rights. NGOs like BRAC, ActionAid Bangladesh, The Hunger Project, Oxfam in Bangladesh and Transparency International Bangladesh have special youth wings or youth-focused programmes that serve similar purposes.

The Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh, a civil society initiative that currently has 87 NGOs and international NGOs as partners, has undertaken a joint initiative to organise 'Youth Conference 2018: Bangladesh and Agenda 2030 – Aspirations of the Youth' in 14 October 2018 in Dhaka. The purpose of this conference is to raise awareness among youth regarding their roles and responsibilities in implementing the SDGs as well as create a platform to showcase their aspirations and share their thoughts and concerns at the national level. The conference will have several outcomes including a 'Youth Declaration', a research paper on the youth unemployment crisis in Bangladesh, and an online repository of youth knowledge and research, which will be used to advocate for youth rights in policy debates.

To summarise, various shortcomings evidently exist in youth policies in Bangladesh including a lack of specific action plans or strategies, the absence of insufficient communication and collaboration among Government institutions regarding youth development. The Government is not capable of ensuring overall progress in this area alone, so NGOs and civil society have an enormous role to play in harnessing the huge potential of youth through delivering basic services and fostering suitable environments and skills for flourishing.

6. THE WAY FORWARD

A look at population structures globally shows that youth bulges do not happen simultaneously. The potential of a demographic dividend is an opportunity that presents itself due to progress in development. This potential must be harnessed preemptively within the right span of time through investment in youth as human capital. The female youth labour force remains an untapped resource due to engrained socially accepted gender roles and perceptions. Adolescent girls are marrying and childbearing during their teenage years, which prevents them from reaping the benefits of education such as better jobs. This is reflected in the low rate of female youth labour force participation compared to male youth labour participation.

Youth unemployment is strongly related to a lack of quality education. Skills gaps between students and employers are a common challenge in many regions. A large proportion of youth are forced

to take jobs that are not relevant to their fields of study, while employers are forced to deal with entry-level vacancies since they cannot find qualified employees for those positions. This problem could be mitigated if effective communication between educators, employers and students could be established (Hanna, 2014). Further emphasis should be placed on promoting technical and vocational education and training for both male and female youth. In addition, GDP growth must be accompanied by coordinated and monitored investments in higher education and training. Otherwise, the result is an inverse relationship between education and employment, as currently seen in Bangladesh.

Another significant issue that needs addressing is the promotion of inclusive education, which the SDGs advocate strongly. Education at all levels should ensure equal access to educational and employment opportunities for left behind groups among youth (e.g., LGBT, those with physical or mental disabilities, ethnic minorities, dalits and others). The promotion of sports, cultural activities and other constructive activities among students should be emphasised to prevent harmful habits like drug addiction and destructive mindsets like religious radicalisation during impressionable ages.

In the case of health among youth, several initiatives need to be emphasised like capacity development, sensitising health service providers in communities regarding sexual and reproductive health and rights of youth and sensitising policymakers about gender-based violence. In this regard, special attention should be given to youth from vulnerable communities who have the least access to public services, including healthcare.

Youth-led entrepreneurship has been recognised as a potential solution to the youth unemployment crisis. In the context of a developing economy, young people with enterprising mindsets can become economically self-sufficient and contribute to creating employment opportunities for unemployed youth (Holienska, Pilkova, & Jančovičová, 2016). To encourage youth-led entrepreneurship in Bangladesh and other developing countries, priorities should be creating opportunities and increasing scope, proper investments, training provision and acknowledgment of micro, small and medium enterprises.

A vital issue that must be acknowledged during policy making and planning any interventions or development programmes for youth is the heterogeneous nature of the youth population. Alongside policies, specific action plans and strategies should be developed for interventions aimed at youth development. Coordination among and integration of policies need to be ensured to eliminate inconsistencies and smoothen implementation. There is also a need to develop monitoring and evaluation strategies and a framework to ensure that interventions are able to produce desired outcomes.

To conclude, the SDGs present a momentous opportunity to increase the world's concern about the rights and needs of youth and their immense latent potential. The 2030 Agenda outlines how to nurture youth in order to tackle the challenges of education, employment, health and gender equality and carry out the responsibility of promoting their successful transition from adolescence to adulthood.

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