



## Engaging Young Women and Men in Decision-making Process



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বাংলাদেশ ও এজেন্ডা ২০৩০  
তারুণ্যের প্রত্যাশা

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### Context

Currently, about one-third of Bangladesh's total population is between 15–30 years. The potential for this demographic dividend depends on the extent of engagement of young women and men at all levels of the decision-making process. Without the meaningful engagement of young people in the decision-making process, particularly young women and men from marginalised communities, it may be assumed that the decisions made at various levels of the

government structure would not be inclusive and responsive towards the needs and demands of the young people.

Effective engagement is possible by creating spaces and opportunities for young women and men to be involved in designing, shaping, and contributing towards policy making so that the development and delivery of public services i.e. education and health, are responsive to the needs of this young population. These opportunities can be enhanced through formulating a policy, and a range of formal and informal mechanisms at local and national levels to operationalise it.

### Young People at ActionAid Bangladesh

Acknowledging the agency of young people, ActionAid Bangladesh (AAB) partners with young women and men in addressing social concerns. Core areas for AAB in engaging with young people and enabling them to access decision-making processes are:

- Capacitating young people with leadership and advocacy skills to articulate their needs, concerns and solutions;
- Support the young people and their agency to develop organisations that are responsive to the needs of their communities;
- Connect young people with respective service providing institutions and facilitate their engagement meaningfully so that the services are youth and gender responsive at the delivery end.

Through the strategic support facilitated by AAB, young women and men have identified key issues, organised themselves and taken actions to connect and engage decision-makers to

address those concerns, both at local and national levels. In addition, AAB encourages and facilitates youth networks and alliances to promote greater cohesion and provide leadership opportunities for young people.

### *Young People in Formal and Informal Decision-making Structures at the Local Level*

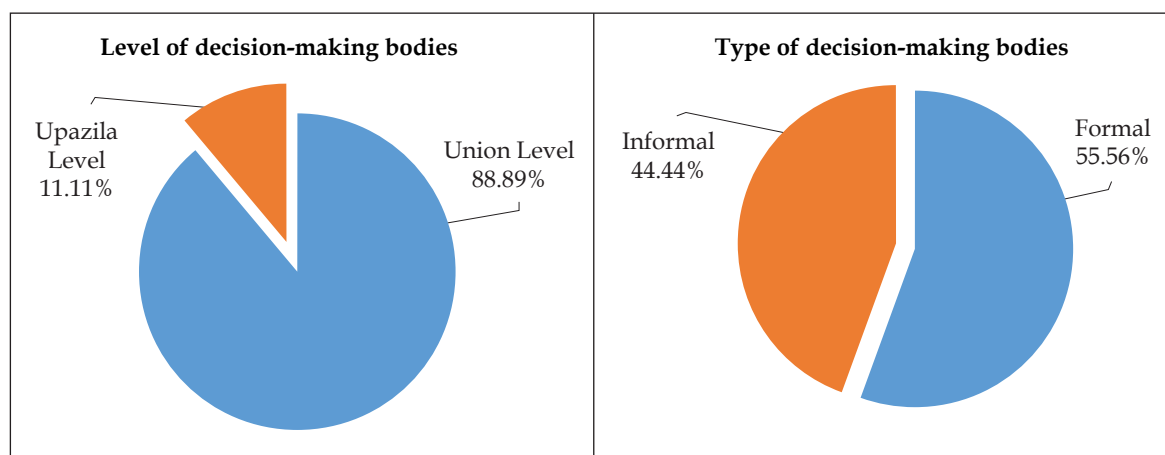
The number of young women and men at the local level involved in formal decision-making prouss is very low. Continued advocacy on engaging young people in this process has led to increased representation in Union Parishad (UP), UP Standing Committee, School Management Committee, Community Clinic Management Committee, Sub-District Council etc.

Similarly, informal structures i.e. religious, traditional and social bodies, also have low representation of youth leadership. Also, certain religious, traditional and social stereotypes continue to bar the number of young people, especially young women and minorities, from engaging themselves in these decision-making processes – thus excluding their voices.

In July 2018, AAB collected information about the engagement of young people in various formal and informal decision-making bodies from its working areas covering seven UPs, 11 wards of Chattogram, Kushtia, and Nilphamari districts.

The data shows that the overall percentage of young women and men who are participating in the various Union-level decision-making bodies are eight times higher than the percentage of young women and men participating at the Upazila level. Continued advocacy of AAB and its partners have resulted in more young people being engaged in various formal committees, including UP Standing Committee. But at the Upazila level, space is very limited, young people are systematically restricted and denied. The data also revealed that young people participate more in the formal sector (55.56 per cent) compared to the informal sector (44.44 per cent) (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Status of Young People in Decision-making Bodies in ActionAid Working Areas**



Source: Data of ActionAid Bangladesh, collected from selected working areas in Chattogram, Kushtia and Nilphamari.

### *Young People to Influence National Level Decisions and Policies*

The existing policies, structures and processes leading to national-level decisions are not designed to invite, involve and accommodate voices of citizens and young people – especially those with specific marginalisation due to ethnicity, disability and economic vulnerability.

AAB engages young people in various national-level platforms and organisations i.e. Ministry of Youth and Sports, NGO platforms and various UN bodies trying to create enabling

environment for young people. Such initiatives help enhance confidence among young people, which in turn, can ameliorate their effective participation in various discussions and make them voice their demands and needs. In addition, AAB is emphasising the need for engaging the youth in the decision-making bodies of the non-government development organisations, including within AAB and its partners.

### *Youth Leadership, Networks and Alliances*

Promoting youth leadership and their alliances has begun to result in sustainable networks among individuals who are able to continue to contribute to their communities in innovative ways. The urban networks have access to greater exposure and external linkages compared to grassroots networks, due to differences in infrastructure, level of knowledge on technology and linguistic expertise. More holistic approaches are required to bridge this gap between rural and urban skill levels.

Financial investment in young people and their organisation is miniscule in proportion to their needs. As far as the financial and technical support rendered to youth by relevant departments of the government and donor agencies, huge gaps exist. Sometimes the complex and lengthy procedural requirements of the government and donor agencies hold the young people back from tapping the opportunities to the fullest. The private sector is also lagging behind in its effort to fully utilise the potential of the youths of the country.

### **Recommendations**

The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) envision that young people will play a crucial role in achieving the 2030 Agenda globally. Therefore, more than one-third of the 169 targets and their indicators i.e. Zero Hunger, Quality Education, Gender Equality, Decent Work and Economic Growth, Reduced Inequalities, and Climate Action, as stated in the SDGs, have emphasised the role of young people, particularly in reference to youth empowerment, participation in decision-making processes, and well-being.



Considering the window of opportunity in supporting this young population to further the country's overall development goals, the existing structures must enable young women and men in stating their demands and voice their needs. For this, representation and meaningful participation of young people at all levels of decision-making process is essential. The following policy-level initiatives are therefore recommended:

### *Provision for Meaningful Representation and Participation of Young Women and Men across All Levels of Decision-making Processes*

Representation and participation of young women and men, especially young women, must be ensured across all formal and informal levels of decision-making processes such as UP, Upazila Parishads, and traditional and religious institutions, up to the National Parliament. Such provision is essential to ensure that the needs and demands of this generation are addressed and accommodated in the national policies.

### *Provision for Youth-led Public Service Monitoring*

Young people should be capacitated with the right tools and training, and empowered to monitor the effectiveness of existing public services i.e. quality of education, healthcare, thus sharpen their abilities to meet demands at all levels.

### *Skill Development for Young People and their Organisation*

Developing the capacity of young women and men with analytical and soft skills alongside technical skills, is essential in making sustainable livelihood interventions effective. Skill development programmes should, therefore, be designed more comprehensively by including practical know-hows of the technical skills. Investment in youth-led organisations is similarly important to build their capacity and prepare them for meeting due diligence requirements of government departments and donor agencies. Also, policy intervention is essential in stimulating public-private partnerships to ensure that young people are able to utilise their skills to access decent and sustainable livelihood options and opportunities.

### *Invest More on Young People*

The existing process of government and donor agencies for providing technical and financial support should be simplified for young people and their organisations. The government should increase budgetary allocation to work at the grassroots, with active participation of marginalised youth communities, particularly young women. Provision of incentives for the private sector to engage with the cause of young people and for their empowerment, are also important for strengthening the implementation process of the SDGs.

### *Implementation of National Youth Policy 2017*

In 2017, the Government of Bangladesh approved a youth policy that is comprehensive and inclusive in ensuring meaningful engagement of young people. A comprehensive action plan is, however, required in order to achieve the policy goals at the local level taking into consideration the local realities. The action plan must identify and articulate the specific responsibilities of the national and local government, as well as the supporting bodies for proper implementation of the plan, while provisioning space and mechanisms for including youth representation as stated above.



This Brief has been prepared by the ActionAid Bangladesh ([www.actionaid.org/bangladesh](http://www.actionaid.org/bangladesh)), a Partner organisation of the *Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh*.

*The views expressed in this Brief are of the ActionAid Bangladesh, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Platform or any of its other Partner organisations.*

The **Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh** is a civil society initiative, taken at the national front, to contribute to the implementation of globally adopted 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Platform was formally launched in June 2016, at the initiative of a group of individuals; the objective has been to track the delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Bangladesh and enhance accountability in its implementation process. The concept of the Platform was inspired by the participatory and multi-stakeholder approach promoted as a vital element for success in the attainment of all the SDGs. The Platform currently includes 88 Partner Organisations working on SDG issues across the country.



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