Youth, SDG Accountability & the Voluntary Local Review

Situating Bangladesh's Experience

Presented at the Virtual Dialogue on

এসডিজি বাস্তবায়নে জবাবদিহিতা: স্থানীয় প্রেক্ষিত ও যুব সমাজ

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Acknowledgement

1. Introduction

Looking back on the youth and SDGs

- The role of the youth has always been highly emphasized since the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) have been first conceived and Agenda 2030 has been adopted around the globe.

- In fact, a third of the 17 SDGs exclusively refer to the youth in view of their development, participation and their well-being.
- Indicators that do not directly refer to the youth also have serious implications for the youth.

- As a result, it has been assumed that the youth will play a crucial role in the Voluntary National Review and other SDG accountability processes.

Youth related SDG targets

Target 4.3: By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university.

Target 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

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

Target 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

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

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

Target 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

Target 16.2: End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children

1. Introduction (Contd.)

Globally, there is an estimated 1.2 billion youth (16% of global population) between the ages of 15 to 24 years. Of which majority is concentrated within developing nations in Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.
In fact, the population of youth is projected to rise to 62% in the poorest nations by 2050.

In Bangladesh, it is well-known that the youth make up more than a third of the national population.
Some of the issues they've faced include:
- Increasing youth unemployment rate, which has doubled from 6% in 1994 to 12% in 2018.
- The rising unemployment among the higher educated youths.
- Other issues would include eliminating child marriages, high adolescent fertility rates which were at 31% in 2018 and even completion of secondary schooling.

These issues faced by the youth in Bangladesh have only been exacerbated due to the pandemic

Despite the challenges, the **youth in Bangladesh have been not been involved or mentioned beyond perfunctory consultation meetings** in either of Bangladesh's latest five-year plan or in the VNRs, some of which were claimed to not have been conducted at all due to the pandemic.

However, within those consultation processes, there is both a **lack of representation in terms of youth participants** (Increased emphasis on urban youth) and **in terms of the issues discussed** (i.e. focus is concentrated within the education and employment realms)

1. Introduction (Contd.)

Overview of the Global Youth-led Initiatives

There have been numerous global approaches to youth participation in SDG accountability. Notably, the **Restless Development** agency that produced the framework for **"Youth-led Accountability for the SDGs"** in 2016.

In which, they've outlined a set of mechanisms to be used on a national level that prioritises youth participation:

Youth participation in review and accountability mechanisms:
A. Assess and strengthen spaces for institutionalising youth participation
B. Develop co-management structures for national and local accountability platforms
C. Implement regular dialogues and action planning with young constituents
D. Create official roles for youth at the national and regional levels

Data for monitoring and review:
E. Empower a generation of SDG infomediaries
F. Develop 'shadow' indicators grounded in lived experiences

Transparency and access to information:
G. Ensure open access to information for young people on the SDGs and state-led reviews

Emerging accountability approaches and practices:
H. Develop communities of practice on data-driven social accountability
I. Put ground level panels and platforms at the forefront of accountability
J. Embed review in everyday life and popular culture

Source: Restless Development , "Youth-Led Accountability for the SDGs," Commonwealth Secretariat, London, 2016

1. Introduction (Contd.)

Objectives

The objectives of today's discussion comprise the following:
1) To share the experiences of the youth-driven VLRs to promote youth relevant issues and create space for youth participation in development policy in Bangladesh.
2) To examine the experiences of intergenerational coalitions in the localisation of SDGs in Bangladesh.
3) To review the experiences of the youth-led accountability initiatives that hold local-level public institutions accountable for the implementation of SDGs while generating evidence from the grassroots for national level projection in Bangladesh.

The core issue to be analyzed is the scope of capacity **for involvement of youth in the SDG accountability process** in Bangladesh. There is a huge population of disengaged youth

If Bangladesh is going to take advantage of the demographic divide, youth related policies will need to be informed through active and diverse youth participation.

The analysis has been framed around **three main experiences**:
i. The Mobilization Experience
ii. The Accountability Experience
iii. The Localization Experience

2. Mobilization Experience

Global Perspective

Existing literature has found very few countries have actively participated in the involving youth in decision making processes. However, there are still stellar examples to set the precedent:

- The establishment of the **"Prime Minister's Youth Council" in Canada**. Comprised of 16–24-year-olds, the council aim to present objective perspectives regarding issues ranging from employment and education to climate change and clean growth.

- Appointment of an **"ombudsman for the youth"** who reports directly to the Prime Minister in **Burkina Faso** in order to raise awareness and embolden the youth in terms of voicing their concerns and participating in development policy discussions.

- **"Youth Multimedia Campaign Training program"** established by PACE across **Kenya, Nigeria, Pakistan, South Sudan and Uganda** to train youths to develop innovative digital campaigns using cell phones and social media to impact policy change. Directly resulted in the creation of another youth-led initiative "Bridge Connect Africa Initiative" that went on to influence the governor of Kano State to declare effort to end child marriages.

2. Mobilization Experience (Cont.)

Global Perspective

- Under **Act!2030**, an estimated 600 youths across the globe* have been mobilized through training in data collection and research to monitor barriers to their own sexual and reproductive health and rights by 2018.
- Establishment and implementation of **"CodePhil",** a youth-based initiative centred around empowering the youth in rural **Philippines** and other developing areas through training and strengthening of digital literacy skills. Additionally, CodePhil connects youth to mentors in the IT industry through **an annual Innovation Summit** to develop technological solutions for local issues.
- In 2019, students across Hawai'i formed and led a not-for-profit **Hawai'i Youth Climate Coalition** to raise awareness through organized strikes, workshops and civic and legislative engagement.

National Perspective

- The 2017 Bangladesh VNR outlines the importance of youth participation. However, it is only in the 2020 Bangladesh VNR that youth are mobilized to participate in the SDG accountability process through "consultation" meetings. Some of which were not conducted due to the pandemic.

*Includes youth from Algeria, Bulgraia, India, Jamaica, Kenya, Mexico, Nigeria, the Philippines, South Africa, Uganda, Zambia & Zimbabwe

2. Mobilization Experience

National Policies & Programs in Bangladesh

No.	Strategy	Core areas & Progress	No.	Strategy	Core areas & Progress
1	**National Youth Policy 2017**	Under auspices of Prime Minister's Office, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Youth and Sports and Ministry of Cultural Affairs, four workshops were held in Dhaka, in 2019 involving youths and youth organizations	6	**Skills and Training Enhancement Project (STEP) (July 2010-June 2016)**	a. Tk. 70 million has been allotted as an implementation grant to 33 selected public and private polytechnic institutions b. 93 diploma level polytechnic institutes (43 Public, 50 Private) were selected on a competitive basis as 'eligible' for stipend c. 68,843 students were provided a stipend of Tk. 800 per month d. 31,710 trainees received short course training and a stipend of Tk. 700 per month e. 8,000 trainees currently receiving training
2	**National Service Programme**	Youth Training and temporary employment up to 2 years in government and private organizations			
3	**National Skills Development Policy (NSDP) 2011**	Combination of the Education Policy 2010, the Non-Formal Education Policy of 2006, the Youth Policy, the National Training Policy of 2008, and the National Skills Development Council Action Plans of 2008 with the aim to bridge the academia and industry gap.	7	**Bangladesh Skills for Employment and Productivity (B-SEP) Project (January 2010 - December 2018)**	To improve the environment for industry skills development to enable increased employability of young and adult job seekers.
4	**National Skills Development Authority (NSDA)**	Created under the Prime Minister's Office to expedite the process of coordination among different stakeholders related to skills develops and needs.	8	**Global Jobs Pact of the International Labour Organization**	Aim to develop and operationalize a global strategy for youth employment by 2020. Allocated 74,367 crore taka (2.58% of GDP) in social protection programmes comprising employment generation and skill development programmes for the poorest.
5	**Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industries (FBCCI) & Ministry of Education**	Bridging of the academia-industry gap to further develop the education ecosystem through focused skill development.	9	**Skills for Employment Investment Programme (SEIP) - April 2014 to June 2023**	Purpose to assist government in upskilling training providers (public and private) to help new entrants meet industry standards. There are currently, 37 public training institutes and as of March 2020, 428,522 enrolled trainees. Of these trainees, over 65,000 poor and disadvantaged trainees were provided special stipends.

2. Mobilization Experience

Non-State Actor's Perspective in Bangladesh

- In relation to the Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh, there are **24 exclusively youth related platforms**, **9 youth-based programs initiated by NGOs** and **9 "other" platforms for the youth** (such as the Bangladesh Debating Council, Debate for Democracy and Aamrai Bangladesh).

Some of the examples of mobilising youth include:
- **United Nations Youth and Students Association of Bangladesh (UNYSAB)** - Introduced the national **Budget Olympiad** to raise awareness and increase youth participation in the national budget. Successfully engaged 3000 students from 35 universities/colleges across Bangladesh.

- **Youth Policy Forum-** Introduced **YPF Governance Apprenticeship** – 48 youths from around Bangladesh selected to shadow a mentor(business community leader, politician, MP, Civil servant or bureaucrat) in a specific field of their choice and to provide day to day policy support.

- **Ignite Youth Foundation -** Introduced **"Stop Youth Poverty"** – a program that provides free access to ccomputers, Internet, capacity building, coaching/counselling, event management, environmental training, leadership training, and career guidance.

- **Bangladesh Youth Environmental Initiative (BYEI)-** Introduced is a series of seminars, symposiums & conferences, bringing together promising young leaders and leading experts for intergenerational knowledge exchange. With the intent to develop ideas and solutions for ongoing and frontier environmental challenges.

3. Localization & Contextualization Experience (Contd.)
Global Experience

The global experience in terms of localizing youth participation in SDG implementation and accountability has been sparse and , for the most part, comprise addressing the youth through the education and employment lens. However, a few of the Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) go on to reveal some more information regarding youth and SDG accountability:

- **Turku, Finland** reports back in its VLR of the establishment of a Parliament of Children and Youth Council who actively participate in influencing on a city level.
- In **O'ahu, Hawaii**, city voters helped to establish an officially recognized O'ahu Youth Commission as a means of ensuring that views of the youth can and are incorporate into the city's long- term planning.

Additionally, some of the best practices comprise **participatory budgeting** as a means for involving youth in the process of financial allocation.

   Notable examples include but are not limited to:
   - Porto Alegre of Brazil utilizing this mechanism as a **means of reducing inequality**.
   - Boston in the US implemented the participatory budgeting as a means for involving youth in the process of financial allocation resulting in **heightened levels of civic awareness, awareness, empowerment to act and respective skills among the youth**.
   - Similarly, Phoenix, Arizona was also found to implement this process across 5 public schools to involve students in **allocating $26,000 school district funds.**

3. Localization & Contextualization Experience (Contd.)

National Experience

- In terms of youth empowerment through **general skills training**, there are government established **district-wise youth development offices** providing services ranging from technical skills training to self employment opportunities. However, the focus of these services centre around raising employability. The follow up information or the outcomes of these services provided are not formally reported on the respective online platforms.
- However, in terms of localising SDGs, there were **3 gazette notifications issued on the 16th May 2019** calling for the **formation of divisional, district and upazila level committees** to follow through on the implementation and coordination of SDGs on a local level.
- The GED has proposed that Upazila Nirbahi Officers (UNOs) and Deputy Commissioners (DCs) take on formulating a local SDG Action plan that involves the local government agencies and bodies on the upazila and district levels respectively.
- A crucial element of this process requires the Upazila level SDG implementation and Coordination Committee to monitor, review and report back their findings at the district level.
- While the Natore district's administration has taken an active stance in implementing a localised plan, an issue that has arisen is that **the roles of relevant stakeholders have not been explicitly outlined including the role of youths.**

3. Localization & Contextualization Experience (Contd.)

National Experience

- In review of the Voluntary National Reviews(VNR) published in 2017 and 2019 and the latest 8th Five-Year Plan, the bulk of national experience in terms of localizing programs targeting youth fell under the National Youth Policy 2017, wherein:

a) There had been establishment of **youth training centers across 11 districts**, strengthening training facilities at the upazilla levels for creation of employment and self-employment opportunities,

b) Enhancing the capacity of the Department of Youth Development for **training in information technology in 64 districts**.

c) Further focus on creating employment and self-employment **opportunities for unemployed youths in 7 districts** of North Bengal in two phases of the project.

d) Technological advancement initiatives for the youth were undertaken such as the **Technology Empowerment Centre on Wheels for Underprivileged Rural Young People** of Bangladesh project and Innovative Management of Resources for Poverty Alleviation through Comprehensive Technology (IMPACT) project.

3. Localization & Contextualization Experience (Contd.)

Non-State Actor Experience

- In terms of the efforts made by NSAs in localizing youth participation, there are numerous groups and societies.
- One such example would be the **Barisal Youth Society (BYS)** which is considered to be the largest youth-led organization in Barisal, Bangladesh. This local platform focuses on sheltering young underprivileged girls and protecting their rights. Other activities comprise providing educational sessions, skills development opportunities and even delivering necessities such as food to underprivileged families.
- However, in terms of SDG accountability and mobilizing youth participation on a local level, it is the **initiative undertaken by ActionAid Bangladesh** to jointly work with four local NGOs to conduct **four separate voluntary local reviews**.

3. Localization & Contextualization Experience (Contd.)

Non-State Actor Experience

- This **VLR initiative** resulted in the implementation of an accumulated total of 1636 Household Surveys, 24 Focus Group Discussions and 40 Key Informant Interviews across Bagerhat, Chattagram, Dhaka and Nilphamari districts.
- The study conducted spanned four months from August to November 2020 and the SDGs selected for review comprised those focused on the youth. **i.e., SDG-3, SDG-4, SDG-8, SDG-10 and SDG-16.**

- The focus of the study was the youth group (18 -29 years) who comprised nearly 56.6% of the total number of respondents, of which 53% were male and remaining female.

3. Localization & Contextualization Experience (Contd.)

The VLR Experience :

- In **Dhaka**, Nari Maitree (NM) had jointly conducted this study in the Sutrapur and Gabtoli areas. Where it was found that majority of the indicators were on target especially in the health sector, in terms of maternal, under-5 and child mortality rates. However, the report also revealed areas of contention such as the lack of equal pay for equal work, increasing local conflict and the lack of inclusivity of opportunities for participation in local or national level decision making.

- These findings are similarly echoed in the remaining three districts studied. Where Action Aid Bangladesh had gone on to jointly work with Badhon to conduct 435 HHQ, 6 FGD and 10 KII in Bagerhat Pourasava, Bagerhat Sadar and the Fakirhat Upazilla of the **Bagerhat district**.

- In **Nilphamari**, it was Udayankar Seba Sangstha (USS) that had jointly worked with Action Aid Bangladesh and conducted 402 HHQs, 6 FGDs and 10KIIs. Previously, they'd also been able to establish 15 youth organizations with 375 youths (206 females & 169 males) to receive various forms of training, such as the process of participatory budget monitoring, from Global Platform Bangladesh and USS.
- In **Chittagong**, Bangladesh Institute of Theatre Arts (BITA) took on conducting the 404 HHQs, 6 FGDs and 10 KIIs in wars 9 and 29 of the district

4. Accountability Experience

Global Perspective:

- In terms of over SDG accountability, there have been 19 officially reported VLRs till date published by 9 different countries.

However, in terms of youth-led SDG accountability:

- Japan's Youth Platform for Sustainability participated in producing a **"youth-led" informal shadow report** on SDG accountability to support Japan's own Voluntary National Review.
- The implementation of Act!2030 across the globe resulted in trained young researchers in Algeria recording evidence on the discrimination faced by youths due to stigma of sexual or reproductive health.
- Act!2030 empowered youths in Zimbabwe to directly assess clinics across 20 dsitricts based on their youth-friendly services. Information which has then been presented to the Ministry of Health and Childcare to advocate for improved services.

National Perspective:

- In terms of monitoring the progress of attaining SDGs, the Government of Bangladesh has published the Voluntary National Review (VNR) to present, primarily, to donors and development partners in a timely manner. As of date, there have been two VNRs presented at the High-Level Political Forum during 2017 and 2020.

4. Accountability Experience (Contd.)

National Perspective:
- For the 2017 VNR published, 'sharing of report' with the youth is mentioned briefly as part of the methodology and preparation process as a means of including diverse opinions.
- Similarly, the 2020 VNR includes youth consultation in the methodology and preparation process. Further detailing that letters were sent to youths sponsored by the Ministry of Youth & Sports and that some meetings had been postponed due to the pandemic.
- However, in terms of monitoring and evaluating efforts towards the youth in alignment with attaining SDGs, there is neither an operational strategy to implement the goals nor time-bound targets to measure progress with.

Non-State Actor Perspective:
- The initiative of the Voluntarily Local Review by Action Aid Bangladesh to map SDG accountability with a focus on marginalized and excluded young people has been one of the pioneering ways towards accountability.
- Collating the information obtained from the four district-wise dedicated voluntary local reviews, there has been a voluntary national review report that has also been created by Action Aid Bangladesh.

4. Accountability Experience (Contd.)

SDG	Findings from the VLR
SDG 3	**Inadequate healthcare facilities and low rates of income** were found to be just as important as raising awareness about maternal, child and neonatal mortality
	There is heightened awareness of family planning among the youth (approximately 77%) as well as sex health education (approximately 60%). However, **awareness is higher among females than male youth**
SDG 4	Of the 23.29% of respondents who claimed family members have acquired ICT skills, 23.29% of respondents reported that their family members had acquired ICT skills. While 59.29% were male youths, only 33.49% were female youths
	Worryingly, only **11.61% of primary schools** in the four areas studied were found to be **equipped with internet** and **21.82% with supportive infrastructure and materials for students with disabilities**
	Approximately **57.76% of secondary schools were found to have internet** but only 30.32% were adequately equipped to support students with disabilities
SDG 8	**25.73%** of the participants reported a young family member (aged 15-24) were **NEET**
SDG 16	41.75% respondents believe that family and local authority level decision making is inclusive in terms of age, gender, disability, and population group. But only 46.39% of respondents reported to participate in decision making meetings

5. Outlook

Experience	Good Practices	Progress in Bangladesh
Mobilisation Experience	• Creating official roles for youth representatives that report directly to the Prime Minister as was the case in Canada and Burkina Faso. • The empowerment of youths in terms of ICT skills and applying them to collect data for their own development and protection of rights.	• While youths are consulted with, there are no known official roles delegated to a youth member in the process of SDG implementation and follow-up. • Youth-led platforms and programs in BD are focused on teaching general skills with the outcome focused on increasing employability of the youths
Localisation & Contextualisation Experience	• Establishment of local level youth councils who are encouraged to actively participate in local decision-making processes. • Instilling civic awareness through educating in and participating in local levels of "participatory budgeting process"	• There are government established youth development offices and youth-led programs on both national and local levels. However, the services provided focus on raising awareness of youth issues and employability of the youth themselves.
Accountability Experience	• The publishing of a **"youth-led" informal shadow report** on SDG accountability to support Japan's own Voluntary National Review	• The recent youth-led VLR conducted by ActionAid Bangladesh in partnership with NGOs across four districts.

5. Outlook (Cont.)

Based on the progress made by Bangladesh compared to the international peers, the following recommendations include:

- Rather than solely focusing on skills for employability, youth-based skills training programs deployed by both government and non-state actors should also involve training to collect data, through modern ICT solutions, relevant to protection of youth's well being and rights.
- The youth should be involved beyond passive consultation processes and be encouraged to actively provide inputs to local and national SDG accountability mechanisms. Given the recent proposal brought forward by the GED to form divisional, district, and upazila level councils for SDG implementation and coordination, there needs to be an assurance of youth representation at each of these levels.
- The creation of specific SDG-related and youth-based council can be and should be established as has been seen in Hawaii through the Hawai'i Youth Climate Coalition in 2019.

Thank you for your attention!

Please keep track through programme webpage
https://bdplatform4sdgs.net/youth-on-sdgs/