

Global Sharing Session (Virtual) on

Youth, SDG Accountability & the Voluntary Local Review

Situating Bangladesh's Experience within the Global Context

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Organised by



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1. Introduction

Looking back on the youth and SDGs

- The role of the youth has always been highly emphasised ever since the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were first conceived and Agenda 2030 was adopted around the globe.
- In fact, a third of the 17 SDGs exclusively refer to the youths in view of their development, participation and well-being.
- Even indicators that do not directly refer to the youths have serious implications for them.
- As a result, it has been assumed that the youths will play a crucial role in the Voluntary National Review (VNR) 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 youths 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 youths 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 operationalise a global strategy for youth employment and implement the Global Jobs Pact of the International Labour Organisation.

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 marginalised 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 youths (16% of the global population) between the ages of 15 and 24 years of which, a 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, more than 50% of the population is made up of youths.

Some of the issues they have faced include:

- Increasing youth unemployment rate, which has doubled from 6% in 1994 to 12% in 2018
- Rising unemployment among the higher educated youths
- Other issues such as high prevalence of child marriages, high adolescent fertility rates which were at 31% in 2018 and low completion rate of secondary schooling

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

Despite the challenges, **youths in Bangladesh have not been involved or mentioned beyond perfunctory consultation meetings** in either 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. increased focus 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, **Restless Development** agency produced the framework for “**Youth-led Accountability for the SDGs**” in 2016.

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

- A. Empower a generation of SDG infomediaries
- B. Develop ‘shadow’ indicators grounded in lived experiences

Transparency and access to information

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

Emerging accountability approaches and practices

- A. Develop communities of practice on data-driven social accountability
- B. Put ground level panels and platforms at the forefront of accountability
- C. 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 policies of 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 analysed is the scope **for involvement of youth in the SDG accountability process** given that there is a huge population of disengaged youths in Bangladesh.

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 analytical framework will centre around **three main experiences:**

- i. The Mobilisation Experience
- ii. The Localisation Experience
- iii. The Accountability Experience

2. Mobilisation Experience

Global Perspective

Existing literature has found that very few countries have actively participated in involving the youths in the 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 aims 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 youths for voicing their concerns and participating in development policy discussions.
- “**Youth Multimedia Campaign Training Programme**” 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. It 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 efforts to end child marriages.

2. Mobilisation Experience (Contd.)

Global Perspective

- Under **Act!2030**, an estimated 600 youths across the globe* have been mobilised 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 youths in rural **Philippines** and other developing areas through training and strengthening of digital literacy skills. Additionally, CodePhil connects youths 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 organised strikes, workshops and civic and legislative engagement.

National Perspective: Official

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

*Includes youths from Algeria, Bulgaria, India, Jamaica, Kenya, Mexico, Nigeria, the Philippines, South Africa, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe

2. Mobilisation Experience (Contd.)

National Policies & Programmes 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 organisations.	6	Skills and Training Enhancement Project (STEP) (July 2010-June 2016)	a. Taka 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 stipends 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 organisations			
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 gap between academia and industry.	7	Bangladesh Skills for Employment and Productivity (B-SEP) Project (January 2010-December 2018)	To improve the environment for industry skills development in order 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 development needs.	8	Global Jobs Pact of the International Labour Organisation	Aim to develop and operationalize a global strategy for youth employment by 2020. Allocated taka 74,367 crore (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	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. Mobilisation Experience (Contd.)

National Perspective: Non-State Actors

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

Some of the examples of mobilising youths 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.
- **Ignite Youth Foundation** introduced “**Stop Youth Poverty**” – a programme that provides free access to computers, internet, capacity building, coaching/counselling, event management, environmental training, leadership training, and career guidance.
- **Bangladesh Youth Environmental Initiative (BYEI)** introduced a series of seminars, symposiums and 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.
- **Action Aid Bangladesh** created “trainer groups” who’ve been educated in terms of understanding the SDGs, learning about data collection, analysis & reporting and harnessing these skills to communicate with the local administration.

3. Localisation & Contextualisation Experience

Global Experience

The global experience in terms of localising 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 VLRs go on to reveal some more information regarding youths and SDG accountability:

- **Turku, Finland** reports back in its VLR of the establishment of a **Parliament of Children and Youth Council** which actively participates in influencing on a city level.
- In **O'ahu, Hawaii**, city voters helped to establish an officially recognised **O'ahu Youth Commission** to ensure that views of the youths are incorporated in 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 utilising this mechanism as a **means of reducing inequality**.
- Boston in the US implementing 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**.
- Phoenix, Arizona implementing this process across 5 public schools to involve students in **allocating \$26,000 school district funds**.

3. Localisation & Contextualisation Experience *(Contd.)*

National Experience: Official

- 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 on raising employability. The follow-up information or the outcomes of these services provided are not formally reported in 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 the implementation and coordination of SDGs on a local level.
- The General Economics Division (GED) has proposed Upazila Nirbahi Officers (UNOs) and Deputy Commissioners (DCs) to formulate a local SDG Action Plan that involves the local government agencies and bodies in the upazila and district levels respectively.
- 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 administration has implemented a localised plan, an issue that has arisen is that **the roles of relevant stakeholders including the role of youths have not been explicitly outlined.**

3. Localisation & Contextualisation Experience (Contd.)

National Experience: Official

- In review of the VNRs published in 2017 and 2019 and the latest 8th Five-Year Plan, the bulk of national experience in terms of localising programmes targeting youths fell under the National Youth Policy 2017, where there has been:
 - a) Establishment of **youth training centres across 11 districts**, strengthening training facilities at the upazila levels for creation of employment and self-employment opportunities.
 - b) Enhancement of 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 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. Localisation & Contextualisation Experience *(Contd.)*

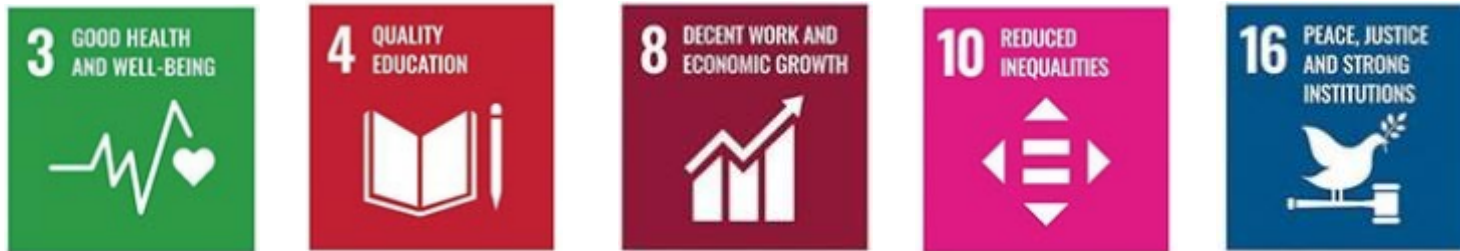
National Experience: Non-State Actors

- In terms of the efforts made by non-state actors (NSAs) in localising 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 organisation 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 involving youths in the accountability process on a local level, **ActionAid Bangladesh is a pioneer** in jointly working with four local NGOs to conduct **four separate youth-led VLRs**.

3. Localisation & Contextualisation Experience (Contd.)

National Experience: Non-State Actors

- This **VLR initiative** resulted in the implementation of a total of 1636 Household Surveys (HS), 24 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and 40 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) across Bagerhat, Chattagram, Dhaka and Nilphamari districts.
- The study spanned four months from August to November 2020 and the SDGs selected for review comprised those focused on the youths. **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 were female.

3. Localisation & Contextualisation Experience *(Contd.)*

The VLR Experience :

- In Dhaka, Nari Maitree (NM) had jointly conducted this study in the Sutrapur and Gabtoli areas. It was found that majority of the indicators such as maternal, under-5 and child mortality rates were on target. However, the report also revealed areas of contention such as the lack of equal pay for equal work, increase in 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 HS, 6 FGDs and 10 KIIs in Bagerhat Pourasava, Bagerhat Sadar and the Fakirhat Upazila of the **Bagerhat district**.
- In **Nilphamari**, it was Udayankar Seba Sangstha (USS) that had jointly worked with Action Aid Bangladesh and conducted 402 HS, 6 FGDs and 10KIIs. Previously, they'd also been able to establish 15 youth organisations 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) conducted 404 HS, 6 FGDs and 10 KIIs in wards 9 and 29 of the district.

4. Accountability Experience

Global Perspective:

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

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 VNR.
- 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 districts based on their youth-friendly services, information of which has then been presented to the Ministry of Health and Childcare to advocate for improved services.

National Perspective: Official

- In terms of monitoring the progress of attaining SDGs, the Government of Bangladesh has published the 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: Official

- 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. It further mentions 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.

National Perspective: Non-State Actors

- The VLR initiative by Action Aid Bangladesh to map SDG accountability with a focus on marginalised and excluded young people has been one of the pioneering ways towards accountability.
- Collating the information obtained from the four district-wise dedicated VLRs, there has been a VNR 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 about family planning among the youths (approximately 77%) as well as sex health education (approximately 60%). However, awareness is higher among females than male youths.
SDG 4	Of the 23.29% of the respondents who claimed family members have acquired ICT skills, 59.29% were male youths and only 33.49% were female youths.
	Worryingly, only 11.61% of primary schools in the four districts were found to be equipped with internet while 21.82% had 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 that a young family member (aged 15-24) was not in education, employment or training (NEET).
SDG 16	41.75% of the 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 the respondents reported that they participated in decision-making meetings.

5. Outlook

Experience	Good Practices	Progress in Bangladesh
Mobilisation Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating official roles for youth representatives that report directly to the Prime Minister as was the case in Canada and Burkina Faso • Empowering youths in terms of ICT skills and applying them to collect data for their own development and protection of rights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While youths are consulted with, there are no known official roles delegated to a youth member in the process of SDG implementation, monitoring & evaluation. • Youth-led platforms and programmes in Bangladesh are focused on teaching general skills with the outcome focused on increasing employability of the youths
Localisation & Contextualisation Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing local level youth councils who are encouraged to actively participate in local decision-making processes • Instilling civic awareness through educating through “localised participatory budgeting processes” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 youths.
Accountability Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The publishing of a “youth-led informal shadow report” on SDG accountability to support Japan’s own VNR 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The recent youth-led VLR conducted by ActionAid Bangladesh in partnership with NGOs across four districts.

5. Outlook *(Contd.)*

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

- Rather than solely focusing on skills for employability, youth-based skills training programmes deployed by both government and NSAs should also involve training to collect data, through modern ICT solutions, relevant to the protection of youth's well-being and rights.
- The youths 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 such as a climate change focused youth council.

5. Outlook (Contd.)

Based on the national dialogue held by the *Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh* in partnership with ActionAid Bangladesh, the following key points arose:

- There needs to be **localised initiatives taken to raise awareness about the SDGs** among the youths across all corners of Bangladesh.
- Many of the existing youth-based programmes in Bangladesh focus on skill development and training for employability and self-employment purposes. However, there are **no records documenting the progress of the youths**, especially in terms of employment, after they've completed any of these training or skill development programmes.
- In a similar vein, there needs to be an **accountability mechanism that holds respective governmental or non-governmental institutions liable** for not meeting their responsibilities towards the youths.
- Providing youth councils should not be the end of all solutions; rather there needs to be **promotion and protection of a "safe space"** wherein the youth are encouraged to debate ideas and challenge traditional constructs.
- Given the current youth situation in Bangladesh and the exacerbating impact brought on by COVID-19, now is the time to introduce and swiftly implement the **youth unemployment allowances** as a means of social security.

Thank you for your attention!

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