Optimistic next generation to lead Bangladesh towards prosperity

The Next Generation research series intends to bring the opinions and perspectives of young people in Bangladesh to the forefront of policy debates. The reports serve to harness the potentials of the Next Generation in building a nation that they dream of and long to achieve.

The first Next Generation report in Bangladesh, published by the British Council in 2010, sparked a much needed debate about young people and the future of the country. It was the first national youth survey of its kind and it provided us with a unique insight into the status, aspirations and attitudes of young people across the country.

‘Next Generation Bangladesh 2015 and beyond’ is a follow-on to the 2010 report and is placed in the context of the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As the action plans towards the SDGs are being framed, there is a definite need for the thoughts of Bangladeshi young people to be included in this process. Within this context, this Next Generation report looks into five important areas affecting young people’s lives - governance, law and order, education and employability, environment, and health.

The 2015 report records inspiring optimism among the Next Generation. They agree with the country’s current development direction, and they believe that in 15 years the country will be a more prosperous one than it is now. But they also see challenges. They are concerned about the political restlessness, infrastructure deficiency, lack of job opportunities, corruption and inadequate healthcare. The young people have also developed a level of apathy that keeps them from socio-political engagement. Yet they remain optimistic. They envision a democratic, equal and green future for Bangladesh, and they want to lead the country to that destination.

The report corroborates with other studies that highlight the young generation’s optimism about a prosperous Bangladesh. On the other hand, the report provides unique insights into the different challenges that young people face in Bangladesh at depth.

This report was commissioned by the British Council, ActionAid Bangladesh and the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB). The research was conducted by The Nielsen Company (Bangladesh). Institute of Informatics and Development (IID) prepared this particular brief based on the study.

The research involved a nationwide survey of the youth population, one-on-one interviews and a number of focus group discussions (FGDs).

**Sources of data**

- **5000** Young people (15-30 yrs) surveyed
- **15** In-depth interviews
- **18** Focus group discussions

**Urban-rural distribution of respondents**

- **20%** Urban
- **4%** Semi-urban
- **76%** Rural
The next generation is optimistic about Bangladesh’s future

As the young people* see, in 15 years from now, Bangladesh will be -

- less prosperous: 12%
- more prosperous: 75%
- no major change: 13%

Over the last 5 years, job opportunities for young people in Bangladesh have -

- worsened considerably: 2%
- improved considerably: 23%
- worsened slightly: 12%
- improved slightly: 50%
- no major change: 8%
- no answer: 4%

Compared to last year, youth's own economic condition will -

- worsen: 4%
- remain the same: 11%
- improve: 85%

Young people think that overall Bangladesh is heading in -

- wrong direction: 37%
- right direction: 60%
- no answer: (3%)

- of which, 54% believe Bangladesh will become more prosperous by 2030
- of which, 88% believe Bangladesh will become more prosperous by 2030

Concerns remain over key sectoral issues

The major problems faced by Bangladesh today are -

- Political instability: 54%
- Poor transport system: 41%
- Electricity crisis: 39%
- Inflation: 33%
- Increasing corruption: 32%
- Lack of job opportunity: 32%

Urban youth are more concerned with -
- Political instability (65%)
- Corruption (42%)

Rural youth are more concerned with -
- Poor transport system (45%)
- Electricity crisis (40%)

Perception about key institutions of Bangladesh -

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66% of male and 53% of female youth are aware of sexual health issues

Among those who take drugs, main reasons for taking drugs are -

- Fun: 68%
- Curiosity: 19%
- Peer pressure: 18%
- Problems in family/ love relations: 9%
- Forced by elders: 3%

* Per cent figures presented in this report represent per cent of young people surveyed for this study, unless mentioned otherwise.
Social conflicts are linked to the economy and unemployment

5 most common factors that cause conflict in the community -

- Dispute over property/land: 65%
- Domestic violence: 44%
- Political conflict: 33%
- Clash with neighbours: 32%
- Dowry: 14%

Top 5 factors that cause young people to get involved in violent acts -

- Unemployment: 69%
- Demand for more money: 30%
- Pressure from friends: 29%
- Political beliefs: 22%

Main victims of violence are -

- Women: 73%
- Low income people: 71%
- Children: 41%
- Students/youth/unemployed: 39%
- Political activists: 21%

Conflicts are resolved by -

- Community leaders/elders: 49%
- Local government officials: 37%
- Family members: 5%
- People themselves: 3%
- Law enforcing agencies: 3%

6% of youth have personally experienced discrimination. Most common reasons for discrimination are -

- Educational status: 29%
- Economic status: 28%
- Gender: 16%
- Political beliefs: 14%
- Religion: 10%

62% of youth have not earned income in the last 12 months

- 66% are female
- 34% are male

Youth have late entry into employment

48% of youth who are 25-30 years old did not have earned income in the last 12 months

Sectors with higher job availability are -

- RMG Industry: 74%
- NGOs: 45%
- FMCG*: 29%
- Agriculture: 22%
- Education: 15%

Education has prepared them for job market -

- Agree: 39%
- Somewhat agree: 24%
- Somewhat disagree: 20%
- Disagree: 4%
- No answer (6%)

Experience is more vital than education for job -

- Agree: 46%
- Somewhat agree: 33%
- Somewhat disagree: 30%
- Disagree: 3%
- No answer (4%)

Quality of education is satisfactory -

- Agree: 44%
- Somewhat agree: 24%
- Somewhat disagree: 20%
- Disagree: 9%
- No answer (3%)

ICT is not emphasized in education system -

- Agree: 42%
- Somewhat agree: 33%
- Somewhat disagree: 20%
- Disagree: 6%
- No answer (10%)

Most common suggestions by youth to improve education system -

- Provide quality and trained teachers: 65%
- Set up more institutions: 50%
- Stricter regulations against leakage of exam questions: 29%

* Fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) are daily consumable low cost goods such as toiletries, soft drinks, etc.
Youth entrepreneurship and civic engagement is still low

75% perceive entrepreneurship as risky
59% think access to credits or loans are difficult

Does/did youth run their own business?

- Yes 12%
- No 88%

Of those who own(ed), types of their businesses -
- Medium business 22%
- FMCG 22%
- Agro based 14%
- Livestock business 9%
- Handicrafts 8%

Of those who have businesses, they face challenges like -
- Unsettled market 21%
- Lack of skilled staff 19%
- High import cost 14%
- Lack of infrastructure 11%
- Lack of security 11%

Of those who have plans, type of business they plan to start -
- FMCG 28%
- Agro based 21%
- Medium business 12%
- Tailoring 11%
- RMG related business 10%

Socio-political engagement is rare among youth -
- 10% of youth have worked to address any local issues in the community
- 13% of them were actively engaged in community groups in the past 12 months

Youth participation in community groups -
- Political groups 21%
- Sport groups 23%
- Student/youth groups 4%
- Credit groups 25%
- Community associations 12%
- Women groups 10%
- Cultural groups 6%
- Other 7%

Climate change remains a regional concern

Concerns about the environment vary from region to region

Percent of youth who noticed changes in environment -
- 54% in Rangpur
- 30% in Rajshahi
- 66% in Khulna
- 65% in Barisal
- 25% in Chittagong

Percent of youth who have been directly affected by environmental changes -

Rural
- Yes 28%
- No 63%
- No answer (9%)

Urban
- Yes 16%
- No 77%
- No answer (7%)

Of those who have been affected, major impacts were -
- Health problems 30%
- Seasonal workloss 24%
- Water logging 23%
- Crop damaged 18%
- Lost land 18%

Institutions that work to conserve environment -

Urban
- Local government 62%
- Civil society 26%
- Community based orgs 19%
- Individuals 18%
- NGOs 8%

Rural
- Local government 59%
- Civil society 30%
- Community based orgs 14%
- Individuals 22%
- NGOs 12%
Young people want to lead Bangladesh towards prosperity

89% of youth find it important to have young leadership in various sectors of the society

About important political or national issues, youth are -

- Not interested at all: 29%
- Somewhat interested: 18%
- Less interested: 27%
- Very interested: 26%

Youth participation in national elections -

- Casted vote: 24%
- Didn’t cast vote: 33%
- Not enlisted voter: 31%
- No vote in their areas: 12%

85% of youth believe the young generation will make Bangladesh a better country. This belief stands irrespective of their interest in politics or important national issues

Of those who believe so,

- Very interested: 26%
- Somewhat interested: 27%
- Less interested: 17%
- Not interested at all: 29%

87% of youth will support the political party that has a good policy for youth

Youth vision: A democratic, green and equal Bangladesh

Issues that are of key importance to young people -

- Access to good health care service: 99%
- Getting a quality education: 99%
- Safety and security: 96%
- Having an honest and responsive government: 98%
- Finding employment: 95%
- Democracy: 82%
- Environment: 87%
- Equality: 81%

* Candidates won uncontested.
The youth are the most vibrant, creative and productive strength of a nation. They are the reflection of hopes and aspirations of each nation and they bring the world together. Globally, the youth population has reached 1.8 billion - about a quarter of the world’s total population. Considering the enormous size and potentials of this youth population, recent global development policies and planning have ‘youth’ as an overarching issue.

In Bangladesh, about one third of the 158 million Bangladeshis are young (15-30 years). Recognizing their potential, Article 15 (Part Two) of the constitution places the improvement of this productive force at the centre of the country’s efforts to improve the standard of living of the whole population.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which expands upon the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) ending this year, will drive Bangladesh’s development efforts for many years to come. The SDGs consist of a set of goals and targets that maintain a particular focus on youth. Youth centric issues like inclusive and equitable quality education, healthy lives for all at all ages, full and productive employment, and climate change are highlighted in the SDGs. These issues are also reflected as the major concerns of youth in Bangladesh through the Next Generation survey.

Thus, these youth priorities should be echoed in the planning and policy documents of Bangladesh, including in the midterm planning documents like the Seventh Five Year Plan (SFYP) and annual program documents like the Annual Development Program (ADP). This will not only meet the constitutional obligation of the state, but will also align the development efforts of the country in light of the SDGs to secure a future which the next generation of the country will live and lead.