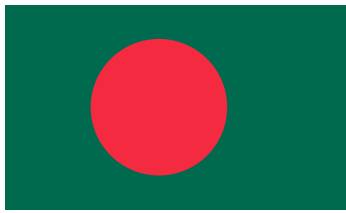




APFSD Youth Call to Action 2021: Bangladesh¹



INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic in Bangladesh, one of the densely populated countries of the world, has heavily impacted household and individual level earnings with a large number of people becoming unemployed. Lower- and middle-income classes have been experiencing a significant drop in income. It has also affected education sectors by shutting down educational institutions in person activities without prior technological intervention preparedness temporarily pushing students out of school. Educational activities, classes, exams are mostly in halt during the pandemic from primary to tertiary level. Bangladeshi children and youth will stay out of education until the coronavirus situation is overcome.

COVID-19 has brought unbearable mental health difficulties with the concern of educational loss among students as well as for entering into the labor force. The ongoing pandemic now threatens to roll back progress on ending child marriage. As children and families cope with school closures, loss of income and increased pressure in the home, there are heightened risks of child marriage. In severe cases these consequences have led to suicidal behaviour among individuals. Domestic, sexual, mental abuses also increased due to COVID-19 affecting young people the most. It has had a disproportionate impact on people, and the effects are varied – depending on genders, disabilities, ethnicities, socio-economic class, race and even age. When it comes to differentiated impacts, women bear a disproportionate load of the adverse impacts of the pandemic.

Bangladesh has policies in papers but gaps in implementation. For SDG 3, there is a lot of challenges that hinders the expansion of knowledge and awareness on sexual and reproductive health and rights (mostly the challenges arise out of superstition and conservative religious beliefs). There is still hesitancy around conversations/discussions regarding basic sexual and reproductive health and needs (e.g., menstruation, puberty, sexual hormones) especially in rural areas. Unacceptability to generate mental-health related discussions due to the existence of some socially conservative rules, regulations and superstitions prevents young people from getting the information or services they need. In Bangladesh, achieving SDGS still mainly depends on development in the labour market and success in expanding decent employment opportunities especially for young people that mainly indicate SDG 8 but there is a lot that needs to be done to enable income generating opportunities. Another one major problem is the impacts of climate change in Bangladesh. Due to its geographical location and elevation from sea level, our country is more vulnerable to the effects of climate change but climate literacy is still not a priority in public and private interventions. It is high time to implement all climate policies and plans taken under SDG 13.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

We urge the government to take the following steps:

- Ensure young people's inclusive unbiased, non-political participation while making government policies and access to government level planning - from local level administration to national decision taking tables.
- Ensure effective implementation of technological interventions (taking online fair exams) to address education system failure due to COVID-19.
- Focus on 21st century/soft skills development among young people along with technical skills to build a better workforce as well as a better country.
- Organize youth councils/structures to empower youth through youth-led solutions and community learning centers and by connecting them with the government's different initiatives.
- Focus on sustainable development issues of youth from micro to macro level as young people's concerns is still not a priority.
- Ensure inclusive Covid-19 recovering strategies by including under-represented youth groups, ethnic, indigenous youth, climate impacted people with the tagline of- leaving no one behind.
- Expansion of awareness programs both on online and offline platforms for ensuring the inclusion of young people from different walks of life and also enable digitalization and removal of language barriers to get easy access from all levels of youths.
- Creating opportunities to raise 'unified' voices from country level at all international decision taking tables.
- Inclusion of comprehensive sexual education (CSE) in the primary level education and ensuring the practice of it
- Inclusion of sexually diverse people and people with disabilities during the construction of various national policies.
- Establishment of youth groups regarding the SRH educations and policies and youth friendly SRHR policies while considering the perspectives of youths to ensure better implementation. Establish national development policies regarding the various complex sexual and reproductive rights related issues which should address the youth exclusively.
- Include climate change issues in all level of curriculum (primary, secondary, tertiary)
- Ensure meaningful youth participation and capacity building that includes indigenous persons, persons with disabilities, individuals from the trans gender community and establishing a National Youth Platform to develop Climate Leadership among youth groups.
- Invest in skill development of young agri entrepreneurs/ farmers and strengthen local food supply.
- Ensure accountability and transparency must be ensured in all the stages of allocation and implementation of climate action initiatives.
- Enforce laws directly to stop climate pollution.
- Ensure eco-tourism and consider indigenous communities voices in CHT in the fight for climate change. The foreign donation led development projects must also take environment and human well-being as priority.

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1. The APFSD country and sub-regional briefs were developed through collective discussions and engagements between youth advocates at the APFSD Youth Forum on March 14-16, 2021. The Bangladesh drafting team consists of Mahmuda Samanjar (country facilitator) and Sufiya Khatun (rapporteur). Overall supervision was provided by the ARROW team.