



জাতীয় যুব অধিকার এসেম্বলি National Youth Rights Assembly

Effective Youth Policy for Youth Right and Development

24-25th January 2016

A.K.M Gias Uddin Milky Auditorium
Department of Agricultural Extension
Farmgate, Dhaka



Leadership Development Program

National Youth Rights Assembly 2016

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WAVE Foundation

3/11, Block-D, Lalmatia, Dhaka – 1207, Bangladesh

Phone: +88 02 8143245, 58151620

Fax: +88 8143245, 58151620 Ext. 123

E-Mail: info@wavefoundationbd.org

Fb: [facebook.com/nationalyouthrightsassembly](https://www.facebook.com/nationalyouthrightsassembly)

Contributors

Aniruddha Roy

Nazma Sultana Lily

Saeed Ahmed Siddiquee

Tareq Nomani Shemul

Noore Jannat Proma

Gulam Mohiuddin

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Paperplane

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Conference Background and Overview

Establishing youth rights and their development is one of the major thrusts of WAVE Foundation. From its program implementation experience in local and national level over two decades, WAVE realizes that there is no alternative to involve the potential youth in national development and establishing good governance. To that end, various activities like trainings on leadership and skill development of youth as well as awareness-raising campaigns and events on establishing youth rights have been under implementation since 2011. As its continuity, WAVE organized 'National Youth Rights Assembly' on 24-25 January, 2016 at A.K.M Giasuddin Milky Auditorium, Department of Agriculture Extension, Farmgate, Dhaka. The assembly was supported by Counterpart International.

From a demographic perspective, Bangladesh is one of the most youthful countries in the world. Our National Youth Policy defines youth as the population in the age group of 18-35 years. Department of Youth Development implements diversified programs and projects in the light of National Youth Policy 2003 aiming at engaging youths in the mainstream development process and fostering the potentialities of youths through providing productive education, skill development trainings on different trades, self-employment and leadership. Alongside government initiatives, private sectors have been playing vital role in generating youth employment and NGOs are undertaking various activities for youth development. Despite these, significant number of the youth are still deprived of quality education and employment while 31.05% youths are poor. In the meantime, Government of Bangladesh has published Draft Youth Policy for public reflection and recommendations.

In this backdrop, the Assembly is organized to focus on the formulation of 'Effective National Youth Policy for Youth Rights and Development' as well as aiming at uniting youth under single umbrella to establish youth rights, particularly, right to education, skill and employment.

The vibrant event was graced by the active presence of the eminent personalities from all walks of life- policy-makers, economists, researchers, social activists, artists and youths from different educational institutions and organizations across the country. The event opened up a window for a constructive and interactive dialogue between youths and catalytic agents who can scale up the momentum of youth development and engagement in the development process. The 'National Youth Rights Assembly' also presented a unique opportunity to overview the Draft National Youth Policy 2015 and offering youth recommendations on the draft policy. The assembly was also dazzled by the fascinating display of creativity, entrepreneurship and struggle.

As an outcome of the assembly, a national-level youth platform named 'National Youth Assembly' has been created through the representative participation of youths from different organizations and educational institutions. A national committee consisting of twenty-five members has been formed. The platform will adopt an open-ended, participatory and dynamic approach to design and implement its course of actions.

National Youth Assembly is expected to play a pivotal role in utilizing the demographic dividend of Bangladesh through taking pragmatic actions to capacitate youths and engage them in development process and undertake extensive programs and campaign activities under 'Youth Rights and Development Program' to ensure youth rights, particularly rights to education, skills and employment. The youth platform will aim at contributing to the sustainable development goals which will in turn create necessity and opportunity for experience sharing and exchange at regional and global scale.

Opening of the National Youth Rights Assembly



National Anthem



Rally



Releasing Balloons



National Youth Policy and National Youth Rights Assembly



The Opening Session of the National Youth Rights Assembly started off with a warm welcome to all the participants on behalf of WAVE Foundation, particularly to all the students from different Universities and Colleges from different corners of the country. The efforts of the youth and esteemed guests to come together for the future of the country was applauded and appreciated. Kaniz Fatima, Coordinator, Rights and Governance, WAVE Foundation, extended special thanks to Dr. Sri Biren Sikdar, MP, State Minister of Youth and Sports, Government of Bangladesh for his participation and requested the panelists to take their seats on the stage. Ms Fatima introduced the Honourable guests and speakers and the agenda for the day as follows:

Dr Qazi Kholiqzaman Ahmad, Chairman, PKSf was the Chief Advisor of the National Youth Rights Assembly and Dr Sri Biren Sikdar, MP, State Minister, Ministry of Youth and Sports, Government of Bangladesh graced the occasion as Chief Guest. Dr Nazneen Ahmed, Senior Research Fellow, Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies and Mr Rakib Ahsan, Chief of Party, Counterpart International were present as Special Guests of the session while Dr Akhter Hussain, Chairman and Professor, Department of Public Administration, University of Dhaka presented the Study on National Youth Policy. Mr Mohsin Ali, Executive Director, WAVE Foundation shared a brief overview of assembly and Ms Nazma Sultana Lily, Convener, Assembly Organizing Committee delivered the welcome note to the audience of National Youth Rights Assembly.

Ms Nazma Sultana Lily
Convener
Assembly Organizing
Committee



Ms Nazma Sultana Lily, Convener, Assembly Organizing Committee welcomed all the participants and guests and briefly discussed the pivotal role of the youth in Bangladesh's history and evolution and the importance of establishing their rights and addressing their needs. Drawing on historical evidence she spoke of the youth's leadership during the language movement of 1952, the uprising of 1969, the liberation war of 1971 and the movement for democracy in 1990. She stated that the youth rights assembly was organized at a crucial time when different policy changes are inevitable in the national framework. She drew attention to the fact that the youth need a positive environment, training, motivation and opportunities to flourish and take the country forward. Ms Lily noted that the Government has directly and indirectly recognized the rights of the country's youth and spearheaded a number of initiatives towards the realization of their rights. However, despite these efforts, much of the country's

youth are still struggling particularly in the areas of education and employment. Thus, she said it is important to shift focus of all stakeholders to the issues concerning the establishment of youth rights. To this end, the National Youth Rights Assembly is an unprecedented arrangement, where, alongside determining the future of the country's youth, a platform will be created to discuss and develop recommendations relevant to the Draft National Youth Policy. "This event will give us the opportunity to get a firsthand account of the experiences of the youth and by sharing their personal stories and dreams, we hope that they will be able to contribute to the Draft National Youth Policy and subsequently to their own development," Ms Lily said. She ended by once again thanking all the participants and with the hope that the assembly would fulfill the objective of establishing youth rights and lead the way towards developing a constructive framework for youth development.



Presentation of Study on National Youth Policy



Dr Akhter Hussain
Chairman and Professor
Department of Public
Administration
University of Dhaka

Dr Akhter Hussain, Chairman and Professor, Department of Public Administration, University of Dhaka presented the study concerning youth development and rights. He started off the presentation with a background of the country where one-third of the total population is comprised of youth. Historically the youth of the country has played a pivotal role. He stated that the country now needs adequate quantity of educated, skilled and motivated youth whose leadership can elevate the country to the highest ranks.

Defining the “youth” population, Dr Hussain explained that according to the Draft National Youth Policy, the population aged between 18-35 years is identified as “youth.” Youth Rights generally refers to, among other basic rights, the access to quality education, participation in all decisions related to the youth welfare, protection from harmful drugs, use of firearms and all forms of exploitation (be sexual abuses or child labor); right to decide about their marriage (especially the girl-child); right to gainful employment; right to participate in governance processes; right to form associations; right to access to information; right to maintain child-parent relationship etc.

He further explained that the term “youth development” can be seen in three different ways, such as, the natural process through which youth grow into adults; principles underlying youth programs that encourage thriving among youth; and practices that foster the development of young people (Hamilton,

Hamilton, & Pittman, 2004). He informed that in Bangladesh, all young people irrespective of their gender, socio-economic status, ethnicity, geographic location or disability have the right to education; right to skill development; right to employment; right to freedom of opinion, conscience and expression; right to participate in the decision making process at all levels, especially youth development; right to protection from all forms of abuse, violence, exploitation and degradation; and right to leisure, cultural and sports activities and the right to live in a good and healthy environment.

Education and skill development: The educational system in Bangladesh is three-tiered and highly subsidized. But the education system does not cater to the needs of the labour market.

Employment: Youth employment generation would be a major challenge for Bangladesh in the coming years, according to a report released by the World Bank titled “Toward Solutions for Youth Employment”. In 2013, the youth unemployment rate in Bangladesh was 10.3%, higher than the regional South Asian average of 9.45%. The report mentioned that the gender differential in Bangladesh was striking, with young women constituting the majority of unemployed who are also lagging behind in education and training in Bangladesh. The youth development office reports that as of 2015, 15% of the country’s population is unemployed.

Freedom of opinion, conscience and expression: The constitution of Bangladesh guarantees the 'freedom of thought and conscience' (Article 39/1). Over subsequent years the government's development plan has focused on ensuring and encouraging Internet connectivity. Bangladesh further benefits from a vibrant traditional media industry, though journalists face threats and legal constraints.

Participation in the decision making process at all levels: In Bangladesh today young people have limited scope for participating in decision-making at local and national levels.

Protection from all forms of abuse, violence, exploitation and degradation: In Bangladesh, many young people are being subjected to various kinds of violence and crime. Frustration has complicated the problem of youth of Bangladesh. In addition, there are other forms of problems faced by youths, particularly young women in Bangladesh such as early marriage, dowry, women trafficking and so forth.

Leisure, cultural and sports activities and to live in a good and healthy environment: Leisure activities include reading books and newspapers, listening to music, watching TV, indoor and outdoor sports activities, or spending time with friends and family. Ministries like the

Education, Youth and Sports and Cultural Affairs have undertaken various healthy recreational activities for improving physical and mental faculties of youth like, different games and sports, debates, literacy competition and other cultural activities.

Dr Hussein stated that the government has recently prepared a draft of National Youth Policy-2015 which recognizes that youth development is a multisectoral concept and calls for an integrated approach. It stresses that the youth should be given more access to the process of decision making and implementation. The draft policy has set four thrust areas, viz., Youth Empowerment, Gender Justice, Intersectoral Approach and an Information and Research Network. The Policy recognizes the key sectors of concern for youth, such as education, training and employment, health.

He elaborated that the goals/objectives for Youth Development during Seventh Five Year Plan (2016-2020) are to accelerate economic growth and create productive employment opportunities through transforming youth into human resources. Bangladesh is a signatory of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—which establishes the framework for joint global action on poverty, inequality, and climate change for the next 15 years. Empowering youth is a key component in ensuring the success of the SDGs.

Institutions Involved in Youth Empowerment

Ministry of Youth and Sports

The Ministry of Youth and Sports has been dispensing various services for the development of the youth section of the population. The Department of Youth Development implements policies and programs for the youth and has offices in 64 districts and 476 sub districts and 60 institutional training centers throughout the country.

Sheikh Hasina National Youth Center

Sheikh Hasina Youth Center under the Ministry of Youth and Sports was established in 1998. The Center has different activities for youth development.

Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment

So far Bangladesh has sent nearly 9 million workers in 160 countries of the world. The main objective of the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment (MoEWOE) is to ensure welfare of the expatriate workers and enhancement of overseas employment especially for the youth.

Department of Youth Development

The DYD imparts skill development training for female and male youth people on different trades to make them skilled for their gainful employment or self-employment. Union Digital Centers are newly established one-stop service outlets operating at all Union Parishads of the country. Each Union Digital Center is operated by two young local entrepreneurs - a male and a female. About 30,000 local youths got ICT training from Union Digital Centers. Skills and Training Enhancement Project (STEP) aims to strengthen public and private training institutions, to improve the quality of skills training and employability of trainees, both at home and abroad, including the disadvantaged. Bureau of Manpower, Employment & Training (BMET) has Technical Training Centers (TTCs) located in different districts of the Country to provide skills development training.



Private Sector

Non Government Organizations

NGO programs provide livelihood training in different trades and financial education linked with its microcredit program to help young people start their own business, targeting the age group of 14 to 25.

Donors' Intervention

UNICEF supports the Government of Bangladesh's (GoB) Ministry of Education and its implementing partners with technical and financial assistance to increase their capacity to implement life skills based education for at least 2.5 million in school adolescents in 20 UNDAF districts by 2016.

Life Skills Based Education: To empower the youth to handle challenges education and training are being provided to the youth to overcome these challenges and lead a healthy and productive life.

Young Champions Initiative: The Young Champions Initiative (YCI) of the United Nations Girls Education Initiative (UNGEI) works for young women and men aged 15 to 20 years who would work with the UNGEI movement as advocates and spokespersons for children and girls' education in their country.

Public Private Partnership Program

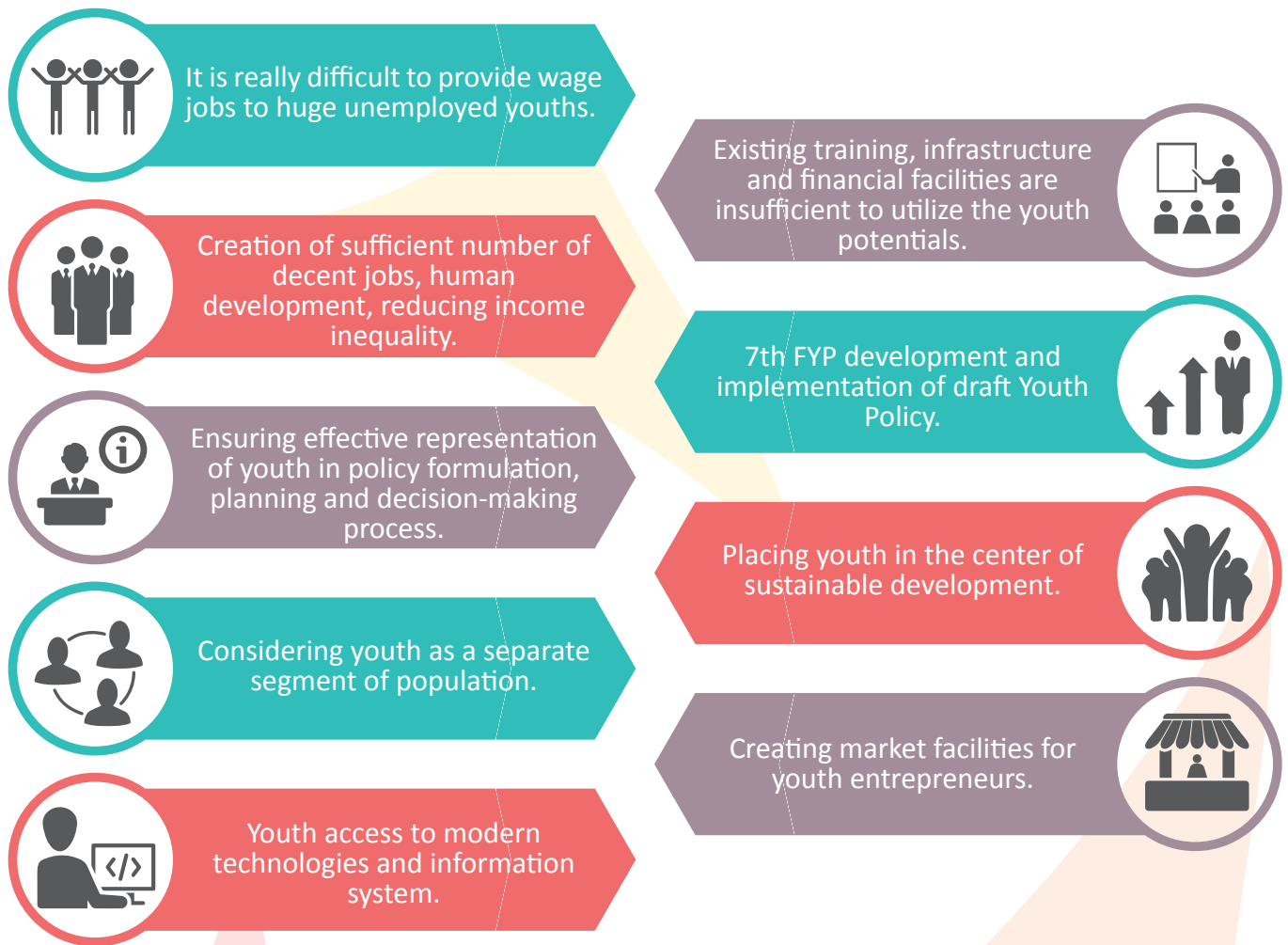
Currently, the DYD is operating some training and capacity building programs on different trades through joint collaboration of public private partnership (PPP) with different government and non-government organizations like Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters' Association (BGMEA), Western Marine Service Ltd, Day-Bangladesh, Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association (BNWLA), Thengamara Mohila SabujSangho (TMSS).

Policy/ Intervention Gap

Youth rights are human rights. However the draft policy does not specifically mention the rights of youth. The new policy lacks specificity with regards to its implementation. For instance, the policy gives a generalized statement that the government would priorities education, training, employment and technological development as part of youth empowerment, but it does not specify how it would do so. Section 8.3.2 of the draft policy mentions that the youth will be provided opportunity to earn experience by working as apprentice in different organizations but it does not specify how this facility would be ensured. Some youth platforms have emphasized on entrepreneurial opportunities in the youth policy and while the policy has also committed the same in principle, it has not discussed how it would ensure those opportunities.

The youth policy mentions providing banking assistance for youth entrepreneurs, however there is no clear direction about the kind of banking assistance the youth will receive. Section 14 discusses global youth exchange programs, developing a link among voluntary youth organizations of different countries and encouraging the youth to express their opinion and experience through media and Internet. However the draft policy and Information and Communication Technology Act amended in 2013 draw a clear contradiction about the government's will to encourage youth about sharing their mind on the internet. Again, various operational rules for effective implementation of the Policy would require complementary and detailed operational rules, many of which have not yet been formulated. The draft policy is highly inconsistent with other policies for example the environment policy provides that environmentally sound agricultural practices are to be encouraged. However section 11.2.3 of draft policy says youth should encourage producing harmless HYV and Genetically Modified crops. HYV crops need a lot of fertilizers and pesticides to grow which increases pollution. Genetically modified crops may cause a threat to the environment. Inter-agency coordination is essential for youth development, but the policy does not present clear operational guidelines for such inter-agency coordination and synchronization of approaches.

Current and Future Challenges for Youth Development



Conclusion

The skilled, young citizens of the country can help build a happy and prosperous nation. As such, policy initiatives and interventions should be focused on their development. A favorable environment should be created for youth education, skill development and gainful employment. These opportunities will help them to become responsible citizens.



Recommendations

Policy Related

Youth rights should be specifically mentioned in the policy.

The policy should specify how government would prioritize education, training, employment and technological development as part of youth empowerment.

The policy should specify how the youth would be provided opportunity to earn experience by working as apprentice in different organizations.

The youth policy should give clear direction about providing banking assistance for youth entrepreneurs.

To implement the policy complementary and detailed operational rules should be formulated.

The DYD should be strengthened with human and physical resources to respond to the demanding tasks & responsibilities mentioned in the Policy.

Adequate budgetary allocation should be there for implementation of the policy.

The policy should be consistent with other policies. For sustainable development the policy should encourage HYV and Genetically modified crops

The policy should present clear operational guidelines for inter-agency coordination and synchronization of approaches.

The Government should form a committee consisting of relevant stakeholders to evaluate the achievement of the policy. Without implementation and monitoring the new policy will turn into merely an uncharted guideline like the old one.

Interventions Related

Develop a roadmap and a communication channel for youth engagement;

Pursue technical and vocational education and training leading to skills development;

A platform for collaboration and partnership with the private sector should be created to promote youth entrepreneurship development and mainstreaming.

The amount of loan received from GO/NGO is not sufficient to run self-employment projects. Therefore, the amount of loan needs to be increased.

Identify new trades for training program. Information technology should be selected as area of training instead of traditional trades.

Develop a reliable labor market data and information system on youth employment.

Build employment services and centers for youth.

Strengthen the capacity of the social partners and promoting tripartite solutions for youth employment at the local level.

Enablement and capability building for disadvantaged youth.

Assembly Overview

Mr Mohsin Ali
Executive Director
WAVE Foundation



Mr Mohsin Ali Executive Director, WAVE Foundation acknowledged the efforts of all the participants to attend the assembly. He began by explaining the reason behind WAVE Foundation's efforts to arrange the National Youth Rights Assembly. "In Bangladesh there is mention of child rights, women's rights, farmers' rights, right to education, right to food – but have you ever heard any discussion about youth rights? Why not? This is WAVE Foundation's first question. This is where our work starts," pointed out Mr Ali. The findings from the discussions would be presented to the society at large, to policy makers and all relevant stakeholders. "Today we have with us our Honourable State Minister and we want to present in front of him the responsibilities of this very Ministry towards the establishment of youth rights," stated Mr Ali.

Mr Ali highlighted some current statistics concerning the youth population collected from the Ministry. According to Government statistics, in 2015 there were 5 crore 6 lac and 70,000 youth aged between 18 and 35 according to the National Youth Policy. Currently 45% are deprived of education, estimated 2 crore 28 lac, 45% unemployed, 31.5% are poor. He applauded the Government's efforts to address these issues, stating that the present Government is implementing more programs, taking more initiatives, allocating more funds than ever before and in various ways the youth are benefitting. The Government, private sector organizations, NGOs – whether through training or leadership development – are all engaged in this work.

Mr Mohsin Ali gave a brief overview of WAVE Foundation's work with the youth. Mr Ali further presented the seven recommendations to be presented to the Honourable State Minister and, through him, to policymakers and particularly our Honourable Prime Minister as well as to the wider population. These recommendations are as follows:

“

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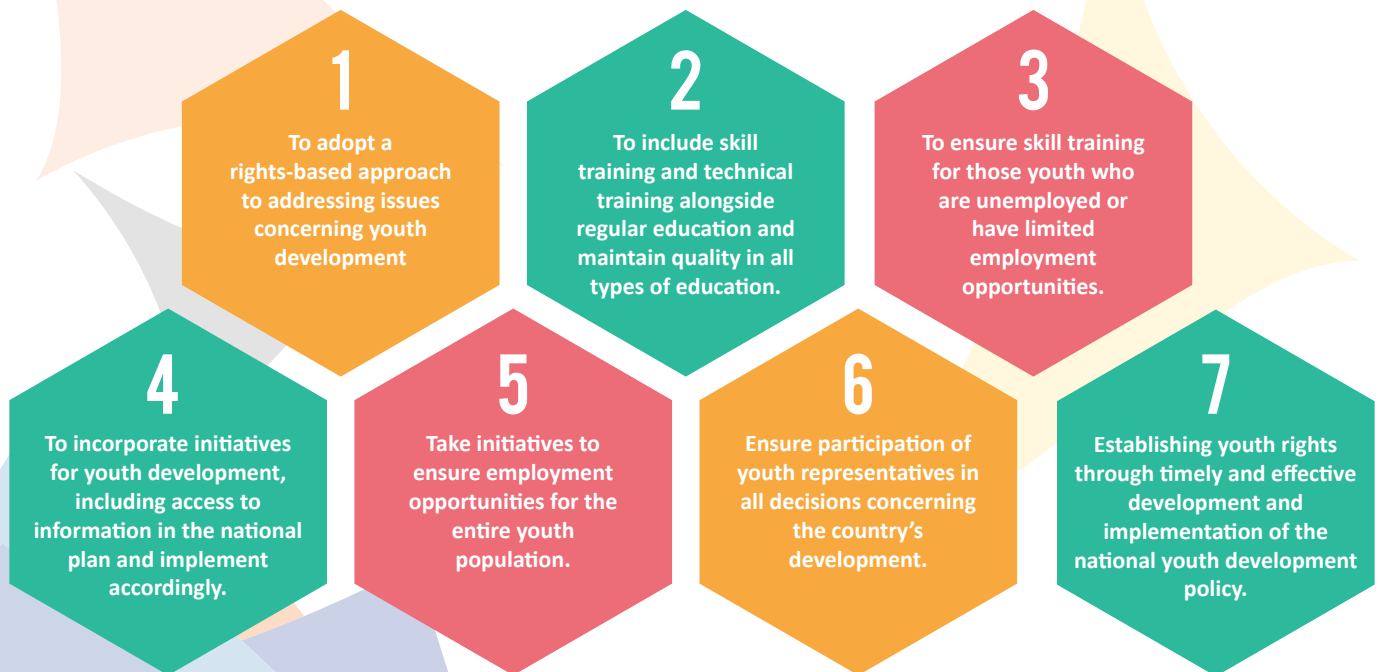
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Objectives of the Assembly

- To present the discussion findings and a set of recommendations for the Draft National Youth Policy with regards to youth rights.
- To gather the experiences from the social initiatives taken for youth rights
- To establish Youth rights particularly with regards to education, skills and employment
- To create solidarity with the social revolution towards establishing good governance and rights
- To create a new youth network with the youth organized by Wave Foundation as well as other youth from different educational institutions and organizations to establish youth rights and leadership, fundamental rights, democracy, good governance and a prosperous country

Recommendations



Mr Rakib Ahsan
Chief of Party
Counterpart International



Mr Rakib Ahsan, Chief of Party, Counterpart International, began with greetings and salutations to all the participants on behalf of Counterpart International. Mr Ahsan informed that Counterpart International has been implementing the Leadership Development Program since 2012 with financial support from USAID. In accordance to their mission statement, Counterpart International “partners with local organizations – formal and informal – to build inclusive, sustainable communities in which their people thrive.” Currently Counterpart International is operational in 25 countries around the world where it works in the areas of youth and community leadership building, food nutrition and health, enterprise building, creating income generating opportunities, among others.

Mr Ahsan further elaborated that the main objective of the Leadership Development Program is to empower leaders at the grassroots level through training and

support to become agents of change within their communities and help overcome the challenges facing their communities. Till now, 13,681 people have received leadership development training of which 49% is comprised of women.

“While at the field level, Counterpart International is involved with the leadership development training; on the other hand, part of its national advocacy initiatives include this National Youth Rights Assembly,” said Mr Ahsan. He described how many youth leaders involved with the program have become self sufficient and working as representatives at local and national levels. He ended with the hope that WAVE Foundation would continue to play a significant role in this sector and that in the future these trained youth will participate in various development initiatives on a large scale and contribute towards establishing good governance and democracy in Bangladesh.



Dr Nazneen Ahmed
Senior Research Fellow
Bangladesh Institute of
Development Studies (BIDS)



Dr Nazneen Ahmed greeted all the participants and started by reflecting on the significance of the time during which the national youth rights assembly was taking place. She explained that time, in this case, was a significant factor, where “demographic dividend” played an important role in determining the economic progress of the country. Further elaborating on the concept of demographic dividend, Dr Ahmed stated that children under 15 and the elderly over 65 fall into the bracket of “dependents” since they have to depend on the working population who are between the ages of 15 and 65. Within the working population, those between 18 and 35 years of age comprise the strongest labour force. At the time of the country’s liberation, the

dependant population more or less equaled the working population. However, economic progress has brought the country to a stage where currently the dependent population is significantly less than the working population. “We have this opportunity now, but it will not last forever,” reminded Dr. Ahmed. “If we can start this from the individual and family level the whole country can be benefitted.” She ended her speech with the hope that the country would be able to make its way towards this future.

Dr Ahmed described four major benefits of the demographic dividend as follows:

- Increase in labour force: This means an increase in the country’s production, be it agricultural or others.
- Increase in savings: If less people are dependent on the income of the working population, they are able to save more. Increase in savings will increase the country’s investment and contribute towards economic growth.
- Development of human capital: Less expenditure on the dependent population means that more can be spent on the well being of the future generation, their health and education etc.
- Creation of increased demand: If there is more money to spend, there will be greater demand which means more goods and services will be produced. The wheels of the economy will keep turning.

Dr Sri Biren Sikdar MP
State Minister
Ministry of Youth and Sports
Government of Bangladesh



Dr Sri Biren Sikdar, MP started his speech by welcoming all the participating youth, speakers and guests. With regards to the Ministry's role in establishing youth rights, the Honourable State Minister informed that a draft national youth policy is underway. The publishing of the policy had been delayed since the Ministry had decided to revise it by taking more recommendations and suggestions from all stakeholders. In the digital age, the old youth policy formulated in 2003 cannot be applied, opined the Honourable State Minister. He directed all the attendees to visit the Ministry's website to provide suggestions which would be taken into consideration.

Dr Sikdar affirmed that the country was indeed fortunate to have one-third of its population comprised of youth, half of which is women. He reiterated that the demographic dividend would not last forever and would continue till about 2040. He accredited the youth for playing a pivotal role in all the country's achievements.

"For our one-third of youth population we have to create all the opportunities that they need," stated the Honourable State Minister. He affirmed that the Government fully recognized this fact and the Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had in this context stated during the 2008 elections, "I want to create employment in each and every household, and I will." He stated that this was not just an election speech, but an aim that the Government has been working toward. In this context he spoke about the National Service Program started under the Ministry of Youth and Sports under the charge of the Honourable State Minister with the objective to arrange employment.

He informed that Youth Development Offices are imparting income generation training at the Upazila level. He further elaborated that there are 45 lac youth with 22 lac women who have become self employed after receiving training from the Youth Development Office, and those who did not want jobs are now in a position to employ others.

The Honourable State Minister described his plans for the Sheikh Hasina National Youth Center which he hopes to build as a center of excellence of international standard with qualified faculty, research, a diversity of subjects. "We want to implement a youth-friendly youth policy through consultations with all the stakeholders," he said.

The Honourable State Minister expressed gratitude for being given the opportunity to attend the Assembly which would help him to achieve his objective of formulating a strong National Youth Policy and said "Every country, every individual, must have a dream. We now dream of a self sufficient country by 2021 and a developed country by 2041. The youth must be ready and help make this dream come true."

“

We want to implement a youth-friendly youth policy through consultations with all the stakeholders.





**Dr Qazi Kholiqzaman
Ahmad**
Chief Advisor
National YouthRights Assembly
Chairman, PKSF

“ It is important to think of rights along with responsibilities. This includes the responsibility is to consider oneself equal among others, bringing the powerful and the powerless on the same platform. ”

Mr Dr Qazi Kholiqzaman Ahmad started with a warm welcome to everyone present. He stated that it is important to consider the whole duration of a person's life – from birth till death – and not just one portion. “At every stage, no matter what age, if the heart is young, it is possible to work” he stressed.

Regarding the education policy in Bangladesh, Dr Qazi Kholiqzaman affirmed that the policy had been approved and accepted by everyone and covers a wide range of topics to include everyone. Vision 2021 should not exclude anyone, he emphasized, and recalled that our consciousness from the liberation war was to have one society where everyone would have the rights to which they are entitled, where human rights are ensured and people can live a dignified life. He pointed out that Bangabandhu had said, “This revolution is for our freedom; this revolution is for our independence.” Thus, “freedom” had been mentioned first which means freedom from any kind of bondage or repression.

Dr Qazi Kholiqzaman also highlighted the importance of education to be on this path and the education must be achieved with full focus and commitment and not simply through the mechanical practice of going to school. Everyone must learn properly and must be able to apply that learning to their work. With an education it is possible to get a job, he stated. However to do big work one must organize. To

become organized one must think of their aim and objectives, and take steps towards those ends.

On the topic of rights, he stated that it is important to think of rights along with responsibilities. This includes the responsibility is to consider oneself equal among others, bringing the powerful and the powerless on the same platform. This is when it will be possible to ensure our own progress as well as progress for others and the country as a whole through an organized process. Thus, Dr Kholiqzaman explained that when programs are taken it has to be through consciousness of our liberation, unity, humanity in addition to skills, education, employment etc. Employment can be of two types – being employed by others, or being self-employed.

He advised women to build their skills. “No one will hand you the opportunities, you will have to reach out for those opportunities,” he said. Reverting to the words of the Honourable State Minister, he reminded everyone that a lot of opportunities are in the process of being created, but it is up to the youth, men and women, to make arrangements to be able to benefit from those opportunities. He ended by saying that change is needed not only at the government-level or administration level but also within the population and communities.

The second session was started off with a brief introduction of the assembly and greetings to all the participants. Mr Sardar Arif Uddin, Program Director, Counterpart International outlined the framework of the session.

Presentation on Leadership Development Program

Mr Tapan Kumar Saha
Assistant Executive Director
WAVE Foundation



Mr Tapan Kumar Saha called upon the youth to claim their rights and begin a social revolution. He then began a short presentation on the Leadership Development Program-LDP being implemented by Counterpart International in partnership with WAVE Foundation, Democracywatch, Manab Kallyan Parishad, Young Power in Social Action (YPSA) and Toymu.

The LDP program has been in implementation since 2012 with support from USAID and will continue till March 2016. The program is operational in 90 union parishads, 18 upazilas, 14 districts and 4 divisions. Direct beneficiaries include 13,681 youth and community members of which 6,874 are youth leaders.



Project Goal

To increase capacity and participation of citizens to effectively and actively engage in democratic processes and enhanced community development in Bangladesh.

How LDP is Working

- 01** Working with local civil society organizations
- 02** Implementing with the objective of national development
- 03** Taking learning from past and current experiences
- 04** For sustainable development involving local community members
- 05** Creating leadership among community leaders
- 06** Mobilizing youth and community to organize
- 07** Ensuring unity and sensitivity

Project Objectives

Build the capacity of community leaders to become change agents for democratic processes and development.

Build the capacity of youth leaders to become change agents for democratic processes and development.

The program strives to achieve these objectives by working with two groups: the community group and the youth group. Skill training is provided to community leaders above the age of 35, so that they can contribute to the economy and lead productive lives. Similarly those who are between the ages of 18 to 35, get skill training to be able to participate in development efforts of the country.

Training Provided by LDP



Youth Level

- Appreciative Youth Leadership
- Youth Informed Citizenship
- Leadership and Communication Skills



Community Level

- Appreciative Community Leadership
- Development Issues
- Good Governance and Community Development

Training of Youth Leaders by WAVE Foundation at a Glance

2012

280 community leaders and 272 youth leaders trained

788 community leaders and 771 youth leaders trained

2014

502 community leaders and 499 youth leaders trained

2013

In these three years a total of **3,112** leaders emerged through the various training program of the LDP. Of these, **1,542** were male and where almost **50%** of leaders comprised of women.

Participants also engaged in activities beyond these training programs which included sharing best practices, experience and success, ICT Training, Mentorship training, arranging internships, meeting with the leaders (both youth and community leaders) at the union level, arranging local level advocacy with the leaders, various day observation, using citizens observation and monitoring tools to improve the quality of local services. They also arrange forums at different levels such as ward and uapzila level with UP representatives and work to establish different networks.

LDPs Work with Youth Leaders

- Facilitating youth leaders to undertake community initiatives
- Enhancing capacity of youth training centers of Department of Youth Development
- Increasing youth participation in ICT
- Creating networks for effective leadership
- Creating temporary work opportunities
- Arranging various meetings and forums to discuss youth-related issues

LDPs Work with Community Leaders

- Motivating community leaders to undertake community initiatives
- Creating networks for effective leadership
- Arranging experience sharing visits in different communities
- Increase civic participation to oversee monitor and enhancing good governance in the communities
- Organizing meetings on social partnership related issues



Achievements of WAVE Foundation's Leadership Development Program at a Glance



3,112 beneficiaries received leadership training in **21** unions of **4** districts



1,542 of the participants were male and **1535** were women, so that **49%** representation of women was ensured



6 youth leaders got internship opportunity through the LDP



17 field officers supported participating youth in leadership and engaged in advocacy with trained leaders



25% leaders have participated in various skill and life skill training at the Youth Development Office and become empowered



15% leaders have become part of different union-level committees



LDP leaders have thus far taken and implemented **155** social initiatives



At the various service centers such as Community Clinic, Union Parishad, the youth leaders have worked to ensure good governance



Youth leaders have worked to create employment opportunities in their communities



Youth leaders are actively working to stop various socially oppressive customs such as child marriage, eve teasing etc.

Case Presentations

Mr Md Ziaur Rahman

LDP Youth Leader
Democracywatch
Mymensingh



Md Ziaur Rahman, LDP Youth Leader, Democracy Watch, Mymensingh, introduced himself as a social leader and development worker from Mymensingh Sadar Upazila. The initiatives he has taken include:

- Establishment of community library called “Alokito Gronthagar” through which books are sent to community houses and collected again.
- Counseling children who are school drop-outs to help them resume their studies. He has been successful in a majority of cases.
- Collecting funding for treatment of poor cancer patient.
- Participation in rally to ensure joyful learning for school children and also rally against eve teasing.
- Stopped 20-25 child marriages.
- Establishment of Shahid Minar at a University
- Working on adult education.

Mr Rahman’s work been appreciated and recognized through the following:

- Being awarded “Best Social Worker 2010” by Mymensingh district
- Awarded Joy Bangla Youth Award 2015
- Because of all this work and recognition I was selected for a feature article titled “Today’s Robinhood” in Daily Somokal on 31 October, 2015
- Participant in discussion with the Honourable Prime Minister’s son Shajib Wazed Joy on a TV program called “Let’s Talk” on 31 July, 2015





Mr Kazi Arif
Elevating Lives
Jahangirnagar University

Mr Kazi Arif introduced himself as a Masters graduate from Jahangirnagar University a coordinator in “Elevating Lives” provides career counseling to students with seven others in 2015 with the main objective of elevating the lives of the youth through career counseling, personal development, mentoring and coaching. The generate organization conducts assessments for individuals and generates reports to give students accurate and

appropriate guidance. The assessment measures 175 factors including task preferences, motivations, work environment preferences, interests and interpersonal preferences. It then uses these preferences to determine suitable careers for the students. Moreover, a professional pool provides coaching/mentoring to the students. The professional pool includes following specialization in the team presently:

- Certified administer of Harrison Assessment
- Banker
- Merchandiser
- Development Professional
- University Teacher
- Consultants from different background

Mr Anwar Jahangir
LDP Youth Leader
Kaliganj Upazila, Jhenaidah



Mr Anwar Jahangir, LDP Youth Leader from Kaliganj Upazila, Jhenaidah introduced himself as an LDP Youth Leader who received training from the LDP program from July 2015 till 2016 in a number of stages along with other community leaders. He stated that they were deeply inspired by the training and motivated to step up to their social responsibilities and had taken a number of initiatives in this regard. Some of these initiatives include:

- Developing and displaying a list of medicines for community clinics to benefit disadvantaged people who are prone to health problems.
- Telling inspirational stories of successful leaders to primary school children to build an ambitious and motivated student group. One such endeavor included telling the story of Bangladesh Bank Governor Atiur Rahman to 183 girls and 175 boys from three primary schools of Kola Union. Children expressed later that teachers had never told them stories in such a manner before and they wanted to hear more of such stories. Teachers also said that they were inspired to tell at least one educational story every week to the students.
- Starting a citizen's charter at three community clinics of Rokonpur Union. Most of the people are poor and uneducated and thus they are now able to find out about services and benefits and have greater knowledge of their rights. Poor women and children in particular are now regularly availing services from the community clinics.
- Distributing blankets to poor 193 poor women and 134 poor children of Sundarpur Union during the winter.
- Displaying a banner containing the famous letter written by Abraham Lincoln to his teacher for his son at five secondary schools in Kola Union. The letter describes the responsibilities of a teacher towards a student and vice versa and continues to inspire students and teachers at those schools.
- Lobbying with appropriate offices and local government for improving services for farmers.
- Carrying out advocacy work to make Raigram Union Village Court more effective.
- Bringing drop-out school children back to school
- Helping to arrange debate competitions and quiz competitions at the secondary school level.





Mr Zakirul Islam
LDP Youth Leader
Natore Sadar Upazila, Natore

Mr Zakirul Islam, Youth Leader from Natore described the initiatives he had taken towards social change. These included:

- Establishing community library at Shibdur village of Natore with support from WAVE Foundation and Counterpart International in 2013. Currently the library holds about 400 different type of books. The library also offers online service, photocopy, photo-printing and other Internet services and keeps two national daily newspapers. On an average, the library gets 5-10 women, 20-25 men and about 10-15 students who come to browse through magazines and newspapers and read different types of books.
- Supporting farmers by providing important consultation regarding farming. A newspaper is also published every season and distributed to farmers containing information on farming for that season. Various questions of local farmers are also addressed and the use of organic fertilizers and pesticides is promoted.

Teaching English through BBC Janala:

Recognizing the need to be proficient in English in order to compete in the modern and progressive world, the group is involved in teaching English through the BBC Janala Program. Currently about 30 girls and boys are taking English lessons. Till date about 94 participants have built English language skills through this program.

ICT Center:

Through the ICT Center established by Zakirul Islam and his group, the youth in such areas are able to reach for their dreams. One example is that of a girl who, with support and guidance from the Center is now studying at the Marine Fisheries Academy. Another youth with support from the Center is now working as a Medical Promotion Officer at Aristo Pharma Ltd. in Dhaka. These youth are encouraged and counselled to pursue higher studies. Until this intervention there was hardly any villager who had studied higher than HSC. In the same village now many students with support from the Center are now pursuing post-secondary education.

**Mr Sajedul Rahman &
Ms Sadia Yasmin Lubaba**
Active Citizens Youth Group
Dhaka



Mrs Sadia Yasmin Lubaba and Mr Sajedul Rahman from Active Citizens Youth Group, Dhaka participated in the 'Active Citizen Youth Leadership Training' organized by WAVE Foundation and British Council in December 2014 where they learned about the responsibilities of Active Citizens and how s/he can contribute to society. Participants developed skills on planning, leadership advocacy and gender analysis. "We realized that some of our attitude has to be changed," said Ms Lubaba. As part of their training, the Active Citizens Youth Group initiated a social action project to address the issue of unemployment in the country titled "Learn outsourcing and be your own boss" focusing on youth and employment. This project aims to enhance skills of unemployed youth on online outsourcing that could generate self employment and contribute to our country's growth. A four-day training

was organized on graphics, web development, search engine optimization etc. for the first batch on during 8-22 March 2015 where 25 youths from different backgrounds participated. 10 female youth and 10 male youth participated in the training. Among them, 2 boys and 1 girl have carried on with outsourcing and have started earning money through this.

“ We believe our determination at every level of cooperation will help to make impressive gains and help our dreams come true ”

The group also participated in the Active Citizens Dhaka Regional Summit 2015 where the project was much appreciated and awarded 4th place among Social Action Projects. The group is now preparing to launch training for their second batch of unemployed youth in Meherpur district. "We believe our determination at every level of cooperation will help to make impressive gains and help our dreams come true," expressed Ms Lubaba.





Mr Anwarul Haque
Director
Extreme Vulnerable Poverty
Program
CARE Bangladesh

Mr Anwarul Haque, Director, Extreme Vulnerable Poverty Program, CARE Bangladesh expressed how deeply the presentations from youth across different districts of the country had inspired him. He expressed his belief that if everyone takes initiatives like this Bangladesh will inevitably make amazing progress.

Speaking of his own experiences, Mr Haque informed that he had been involved in starting a project in 2006 where local people had to be included to build local leaders. During this process it was found that more than 50% of the community people were young and majority women. Though this was inspirational, at the time it had seemed dubious since many believed that if leaders were older and more experienced, community members would be more likely to listen to them and take their advice. However, they later found that this ideology was wrong since it was the young people that drove the project forward.

Addressing the youth, Mr Haque encouraged them to be addicted to positive things that interest them: to books, music, films, dreams and ambitions. He also reminded them that only dreaming is not good enough and they must work towards their dreams. "You have to start from whatever situation you are in at the moment," he advised. Referring to a book by Bangabandhu, he mentioned that the book says that there are people who dream and analyze remain in the planning process. He called upon the new generation to bring about change. "You are an educated generation. You are Shakib-Al-Hasan's youth, who is now among the world's top all-rounders. If you all decide that we will stop child marriage, violence against women, you can stop it. If you decide that men, women, rich, poor, all of us can create a beautiful society, then you can. I hope you will do what we couldn't," concluded Mr Haque.

**Dr Purnima Doris
Chottopadhy-Datta**
Principal Adviser, CLAP Project
GIZ



Dr Purnima Doris Chottopadhy-Datta, Principal Adviser, CLAP Project, GIZ, expressed solidarity with the youth who face a lot of issues with education, employment etc. She also revealed that she personally knows this since she has four children of her own who have faced a lot of issues. “However the struggle has to be there,” she stressed. Focusing on women, she said that the challenges for women are far greater and even at the Assembly there were much fewer girls than boys raising their voices. “So we have to work harder to create opportunities for girls,” she said. She commended the Assembly for succeeding in bringing youth from districts together and hoped to see more good work emerge and more initiatives taken in the future. She ended by reminding everyone to pay particular attention to women in their work.



Session 3

Youth Rights and Future Bangladesh

Mr Mohsin Ali, Executive Director, WAVE Foundation started off the third session of the Assembly by reflecting on the reasons behind arranging the Assembly and what it hoped to achieve. He urged the attention of the Honourable Prime Minister's attention to the seven important recommendations placed in the opening session.



Drawing special attention of lawmakers and policymakers, Mr. Ali also urged these recommendations to be incorporated in the national development plan and the national youth policy. He encouraged the youth to become part of the new organization to be formed in the second day of the assembly and concluded by thanking all the participants.



Mr Hasanul Huq Inu MP
Minister
Ministry of Information
Government of Bangladesh

Chief Guest of the session, Mr Hasanul Huq Inu, MP, Honourable Minister of Information, Government of Bangladesh started by quoting Rabindranath Tagore who had said that Bengalis usually start something but don't finish it. Lamenting that this was true in many cases, on a positive note he noted that there were good examples of Bengalis following through with their dreams. He stated that the youth have to also take a firm decision on what they want to achieve and stay committed to the decision. "Remember, the difference between pass and fail is very little – you fail at 39 and you pass at 40. So if you are unsuccessful at something, just try a little bit harder and you can be successful." Quoting Steve Jobs, the Honourable Member of Parliament stated, "Live as if you would die tomorrow and learn as if you'll live forever." He encouraged the youth to pursue learning and not be deterred by obstacles.

Regarding overall economic development, Honourable MP Mr Hasanul Huq Inu, emphasized on the need to eliminate discrimination and ensure inclusive democracy. He also urged the youth to stay alert and become sharp swords and not to become the weaponry of any political party. "You will be the country's conscience and have the courage to say what is right. Remember, when the population is weak, the leader of the country becomes strong. But a strong population does not need a strong leader. So instead of looking for a powerful leader, become a strong youth population," he advised.

Reflecting on the current world scenario, the Honourable MP observed that the world is no longer following the UK or US, but instead looking towards China, India, Brazil, Russia, Asia, Africa and Latin

America. Focusing on Bangladesh he elaborated that our Constitution still has some lackings, for example there should be a provision for the State to be responsible for ensuring food for all citizens, which is missing. Similarly, there should also be a provision for the State to be responsible for ensuring access to information technology for all citizens. He admitted that he was trying to ensure these two provisions, but had so far been unsuccessful. "Just like the Government is giving free books in secondary schools, creating free labs, they can provide free Internet as well to reduce inequality," he said.

He urged the youth to never allow dictators, terrorists and an enemy government come into power. He further stated that policies were being created to protect the people since no action can be taken without a policy. He encouraged the youth to remember and imbibe one belief, "We can," in order to rise against a bribe-based, reference-based system. He invited everyone to take a pledge to bring the country back on track to being a policy-based administration and emphasized on staying united and become organized to achieve success. He also repeated the need for the youth to become open swords to combat injustice and inequality and not become the weaponry of any party. He also encouraged women to walk with her heads high and side by side with men. He concluded by encouraging everyone to work towards a prosperous Bangladesh where there is no inequality, gender discrimination, terrorism and where youth rights can be established.





Mr Sardar Arif Uddin
Program Director
Counterpart International

Reverting to the topic of youth rights, the Program Director of Counterpart International, Mr Sardar Arif Uddin observed the lack of adequate research in our country regarding youth rights. There was a nation-wide survey conducted by British Council, Action Aid and ULAB. WAVE Foundation has reviewed a policy that was presented in the earlier session. Counterpart International has conducted some surveys. These surveys have revealed that the government is now undertaking some programs for the youth. However these programs are not comprehensive and are scattered in nature. Surveys are also saying that 49% of conflict resolution is undertaken by the community youth. Thus the government needs to come up with a comprehensive program and can formulate the policy to this end which the assembly can contribute towards.

Referring to the National Youth Policy formulated in 2003, Mr Sardar stated that Bangladesh has a lot of policies which are basically a list of activities. However, a policy should serve as a direction, guideline and a vision. Since no vision mapping for the youth has been undertaken, there is no possibility of a policy to reflect on any vision. Furthermore, he informed that the policies also have no implementation framework or strategy or any indication of how it will be monitored.

Similarly, the youth policy has been drafted with a list of activities but without any clear guideline, vision, strategy or monitoring framework for implementation, stated Mr Sardar.

Emphasizing on the need for the government to have a comprehensive vision and plan, Mr Sardar also pointed out that though none of the targets of the SDGs specifically relate to the youth population, none of the targets can be achieved without directly engaging the youth. In this process he offered that NGOs can provide support in the process by conducting surveys, reviewing policies etc. He also suggested that the government can commission an academic vision mapping towards this purpose. He reminded that the Assembly can also help with this, and the government has declared the creation of a platform or organization for the youth to express themselves. He hoped that the issues that emerge through this platform can be incorporated into the upcoming youth policy.

Mr Sardar ended his speech by going back to the topic of rights. "Is it my right to beg for free services or claim services in return for my taxes?" he questioned and explained that the youth must know how to claim their rights.



Dr M M Akash
Professor
Department of Economics
University of Dhaka

Dr M M Akash, Professor, Department of Economics, Dhaka University and Special Guest at the Assembly greeted everyone and praised the speech of the Chief Guest, Honourable MP, Mr Hasanul Huq Inu, who spoke of vision, information and self exploration.

Dr Akash discussed the section of the position paper that speaks of the Constitution drafted in 1972, stating that it is a progressive Constitution developed in the immediate aftermath of the liberation war and taking into account the population's collective needs. This was changed in a backward regression by both the ruling party as well as those who were against the liberation. After a lot of changes the Constitution has now taken a different shape. He specified that the Constitution he would discuss was the original version shaped by the struggles and dreams of the people. First and foremost, he stated, everyone would have to read it. Taking a poll among the participants of the assembly Dr Akash found that only a small minority had read it and advised everyone to read at least the sections concerning the youth as a first step towards ensuring youth rights.

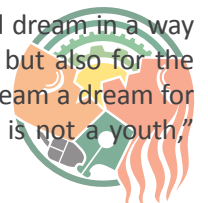
Dr Akash informed that the Constitution stated: "The State shall endeavour to create conditions in which, as a general principle, persons shall not be able to enjoy unearned incomes, and in which human labour in every form, intellectual and physical, shall become a fuller expression of creative endeavour and of the human personality." He exclaimed that there could not be a bigger dream than this and one that has been rarely implemented anywhere in the world. He reminded that human beings have the ability to think and connect this thinking to their physical work. There is no work devoid of thought, knowledge or planning.

With regards to employment, Dr Akash drew attention to three types of income generating options recognized by the Constitution which includes the public sector, private sector and cooperatives. While the Constitution

puts a limit on private sector growth, there is no limit on the public sector and cooperatives. He mentioned that to enter the public sector the main challenge is that it is not merit-based and bribes and references are often required, so that the youth are no longer eager to run after government jobs and instead pursuing jobs in the private sector. Dr Akash encouraged to youth to consider cooperatives which has a lot of development potential. He gave the example of cooperatives like Amul in India and Mondragon in Spain. Amul has no individual owner, but is owned by a multitude of small cow-rearers. Grameen Bank was also the same, where owners included 3 million poor women shareholders except the governance controversies.

Dr Akash further spoke of the four groups who have championed Bangladesh's advancement. These included the country's farmers, the garments workers, the migrant workers and the youth population.

Regarding the fourth champions of progress – the youth – Dr Akash commented that the youth should be innovators and thinkers and decide to start their own businesses instead of running after employment. Regarding capital, Dr Akash encouraged them to look at cooperatives. He gave the example of a 40-member cooperative currently operational in Bangladesh which is comprised of poor or low income groups. As part of the scheme they deposit Taka 200 every week and the State gives them back the whole amount after a certain period. In this way the members have so far accumulated 17 crore taka. "So the capital is there, but a manager is needed to give shareholders their money and properly manage the business," said Dr Akash. He ended by saying that the youth should dream in a way which is beneficial not only for them but also for the whole country. "If the youth cannot dream a dream for which s/he is ready to die, then s/he is not a youth," concluded Dr Akash.





Dr Qazi Kholiqzaman Ahmad, Chief Advisor of the National Youth Rights Assembly and Chairman, PKSF, started by observing that it is important to value time and work in a timely manner which is a major problem in our country. However, he noted that despite these problems the country is moving forward. He informed that Gallup, an organization which conducts surveys around the world, has found Bangladeshi people to be the most hopeful for the future of the world. Bangladesh has also been ranked second in terms of economic potential. Thus the country had people who are hopeful and as well as economic potential.

“Another important thing we have to preserve is our own conscience and dignity,” stated Dr Ahmad. He advised the youth to incorporate their conscience in all their work and prepare themselves by embedding their beliefs so that they can say, “I can.” He mentioned how people from

outside criticize the country for its corruption and lack of good governance. However, corruption is present around the world and exists in every country. “That is not to say that we want to be corrupt, but change will take time, it is gradual,” reminded Dr Ahmad. He said that the change would come from the new generation through new policies and when the people’s needs were slowly fulfilled for a healthy society to emerge. He concluded by emphasizing the need for an inclusive and people-centric development, where the youth have an important role to play. The United Nations has set some targets of which number 8 mentions employment and also talks of people-centric development, he informed. He called upon everyone to participate in people-centric programs and policies and ended by reminding that youth rights and responsibility go hand in hand and both should be considered with equal priority.

Session 4 Information Technology, Prosperous Bangladesh and Youth

Mr Nirmal Das
Coordinator
WAVE Foundation



Mr Nirmal Das introduced the topic of discussion and requested the distinguished guests to take the stage. He informed that the distinguished guests present at the 4th session would speak about how information technology can be used to create a prosperous country and how the youth can be involved in this.



Dr Jashim Uddin observed how numerous challenges had been discussed during the day-long assembly and referred to two specific issues discussed in the last session. This included the question of which sector one should work in the private sector, the public sector or cooperatives. He pointed out that while there had been detailed discussion on public sector and cooperatives, very little had been said about the private sector. Thus, the present session where all the distinguished guests were shining successes in the private sector would give insight into their own experiences.



**Mr Mahmudul Hasan
Shohag**
Chairman
Onnorokom Group



Mr Mahmudul Hasan Shohag from BUET having studied Electrical and Electronic Engineering. He went on to innovate the Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) and has established Pi Labs employing others to innovate in the IT sector. His motto is to be in business, but not only for profit but also for social development.

Mr Shohag started by introducing himself as a “small man with big dreams.” He defined dreams in the words of Abul Kalam Azad, as not the kind of dreams that lets you sleep, but the kind that does not. He explained that he had started his journey as an entrepreneur at the age of 19 after finishing his Intermediate and enrolled in BUET. EVM had been innovated by him and three of his team mates during his time at BUET with a total saving of Taka 6,000. The journey started in 2000 and the first seven to eight years were spent in great struggle which he regarded as a challenge to overcome. “That is an important mindset – to view the struggle as a challenge and not a problem” said Mr Shohag. Currently Mr Shohag has 8 companies employing 1,000 full-time people and a total of 3,000 employees including part-time workers.

Mr Shohag told the story of his friend Masud who had been part of the team of three friends who innovated the EVM. His early life was spent in poverty. In 1996, when Masud was in Class 7 or 8, he became interested in technology by seeing different technology-related magazines. He searched and found a computer training center in his town and convinced a local cybercafé to let him use their computers when they were not being used. And in this way he started learning computer programming by himself. Later, Masud joined Notre Dame College where he didn't have the opportunity to use computers. It was when he enrolled in BUET, that Masud and Mr Shohag's paths crossed. “He was a shy, ordinary boy and I didn't think he

would be able to do much, but it turned out that he did more practical work than I did,” admitted Mr Shohag. Mr Shohag had a computer which his parents had bought him which was used much more by his friend Masud. The three friends started doing outsourcing work through a website and Masud used to actively find these things. Masud would often work from morning till night, without any lunch. They started bidding for work and was able to earn up to Taka 80,000. When the money came the first thing they bought was a computer for Masud.

He pointed out that in screaming for rights, the focus was on problems elsewhere, whereas the problems lay within the youth population itself. “If you can't find a job, why can't you start outsourcing?” questioned Mr Shohag. he said that those who are inspired see the glass half full and are the ones who change the world. It is not those who are frustrated and seeking problems all the time. He stressed the importance of a positive mindset which is essential to achieving success.

Emphasizing on positivity, Mr Shohag reminded that during the war of Independence, They didn't have much, but there were people with motivation and emotion and determination to fight for liberation.

He recalled that when he had started his organization he had 4 people and within five and a half years two of his team mates had dropped out but him and his two friends had kept trying. So he ended by urging everyone to stay committed so that real change was possible in the country.



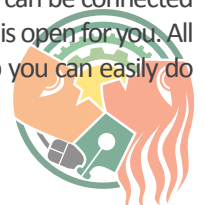
Mr Manik Mahmud
Capacity Development
Specialist
A2I Program,
Prime Minister's Office

Mr Manik Mahmud, Capacity Development Specialist, A2I Program, Prime Minister's Office has been part of the Access to Information (A2I) project since 2007 but has over 17 years of experience in the field of information technology. Stating that he was not an innovator, he told his own story of A2I and how the project was creating opportunities for youth. "Part of our work is to find bright, talented entrepreneurs so that more Shohags are created in Bangladesh and the country can rapidly grow," he explained.

Mr Mahmud told the story of a boy named Taher who studied till Class 8 in Mymensingh Fulbaria Upazila. Taher had somehow become familiar with computers and had gotten to know the Agriculture Worker at the Fulbaria Upazila named Abdul Malek. Malek had been dissatisfied with his work because he felt that even though he had worked in the field for 15 years often he was unable to solve the farmers problems because either the farmer did not understand him or he did not understand the farmer. Taher asked him if he had a laptop and an old camera, which he had. Then he suggested to Malek to go to different villages and take pictures of the problems that the farmers faced. So taking his bicycle, Malek went around the village taking pictures and kept a database in his laptop. Then when the farmers started coming to him he showed them the photos and they were easily able to identify what kind of problems the farmers were having and was able to give effective and accurate solution. Within the next 6 months, the problems of the farmers started getting solved and he was able to serve 60% more farmers than before. A year later, taking the advise of Mr Mahmud, Malek opened a Facebook page and posted his story there.

This caught the attention of the Agriculture Minister who invited him to the Ministry and asked him what kind of support he needed. After a lot of thought Malek said he needed Taka 16 thousand to buy a camera. The Minister told him to think about how his work could be applied in 64 districts of the country and then come back after a week. A week later, Malek returned and asked for Taka 1 lac to buy a laptop, a bicycle and a camera and within five minutes of discussion the Minister said that in three days he would get the money.

"I told you this story because youth like Taher and Malek are involved in work like this and the government is motivating them and recognizing their efforts and giving them courage as well as means," explained Mr Mahmud. He elaborated that these benefits are being availed by many participants. He also informed that the Government has created a fund called Service Innovation Fund which supports youth in carrying out activities and projects for the welfare of the people and encouraged the youth to avail this. "We often criticize the government, but the government is creating such opportunities to incentivize ideas," noted Mr Mahmud. He further stated that the government is also trying to give different types of training through e-learning to build skills among the 35 million people who want to go abroad. He encouraged everyone to avail these opportunities that are accessible through laptops as well as mobile phones. Speaking of e-commerce, Mr Mahmud stated that A2I is trying to unite people involved with e-commerce and connecting them through the Government's Union Digital Centers in 4500 unions so that the unions can be connected through rural e-commerce. "The business is open for you. All you need is Facebook. Until you get a job you can easily do this," encouraged Mr Mahmud.





Pollob Mohaimen
Deputy Feature Editor
Prothom Alo

“It is not necessary to be an IT specialist to work in outsourcing. One could even write recipes and use IT to start outsourcing work.”

Pollob Mohaimen, Deputy Feature Editor, Prothom Alo drew attention to the fact that Bill Gates of Microsoft had started his venture at the age of 20 and Mark Zuckerberg had started Facebook when he was 23 or 24. Mahmudul Hasan Shohag had also started his work at the age of 19. He therefore stressed that information technology is for the youth and the IT sector is always advancing with the help of the youth. “It is created by the youth and for the youth,” he stated. He further explained that the IT revolution does not require extensive infrastructure, but rather relies principally on the human mind. People from Asia have taken ownership of this technology and enabled regular citizen’s to take control of it.

In terms of software export, Mr Mohaimen discussed that it is important to have a wider knowledge of the market also and not to assume that anything we can develop here can be used in other countries. He also pointed out that it is not necessary to be an IT specialist to work in outsourcing. One could even write recipes and use IT to start outsourcing work. He warned, however, that one needs patience and resolve to build a career in outsourcing and not expect immediate returns.

Mr Mohaimen told the story of how people at road side tea shops discovered a way to hear cricket scores through the smart phone by inserting a cigarette filter inside the earphone jack. Thus he emphasized that Bengalis have strengths which they should focus on and no one is always there to teach you how to innovate.

Mr Mohaimen concluded by encouraging youth to pursue their interests. Speaking of his own experience he informed that he had completed his Honours in Physics from Dhaka College but had an interest in writing from an early age. Between 1992 and 1996 he worked at a computer firm and from there he went into journalism. Thus he became involved in reporting technological advancements and has come a long way since. He encouraged to youth to write about their own efforts or initiatives and send them to Prothom Alo and they would try their best to publish it to inspire the youth.”

Mr Shafiqul Islam
IT Professional
Outsourcing



“I had never dreamt that I would be a software engineer” said Mr Shafiqul Islam, an IT professional involved in outsourcing. Mr Shafiqul came from a struggling family in Kushtia. ,Meanwhile a company named Aptec started computer courses in Kushtia and caught Mr Shafiqul’s interest. After finding out more about the company, Mr Shafiqul became keen to study computers and became enrolled in computer courses alongside his Intermediate studies. After finishing his HSC, Mr Shafiqul enrolled in a 3 year diploma course, but after a year of studies was told to complete the remaining years in Dhaka. With his limited income and large family, Mr Shafiqul was ready to give up his dream of being a software engineer, but was encouraged by his mother to travel to Dhaka.

In Dhaka, Mr Shafiqul enrolled for his second year in Aptec. Given his financial constraints, the management expressed their concern that Mr Shafiqul would not be able to afford the cost of the program. Thus he started thinking about what else he could do alongside his studies to get an income. “I went to IDB to see possibilities of what else I could do and become a specialist. One of my acquaintances who worked at Aktel said I could work with an engineer who was working there as a hardware assistant.” Thus Mr Shafiqul went to class three days a week and the rest of the time he worked. Once he became a hardware specialist he was given the responsibility of running a software that had been installed in the company.

From IDB, Mr Shafiqul went off to Malaysia to study. In the year 2007 he started looking for jobs and entered a “chat room” where someone messaged him about his skills and he mentioned that was specialized in graphics, photo editing, etc. He was then asked to design a logo which he completed successfully. Subsequently she gave 500 photos to edit for which he received 140 US dollars. In this way Mr Shafiqul continued to work till she offered him 100,000 photos to edit for 25,000 US dollars. Realizing that he could not do this alone, Mr Shafiqul took a leave and came to Bangladesh for a month and hired and trained people to help him carry the work through. Although he got the work done, he faced challenges in obtaining the money due to banking restrictions and had to route the funds through several accounts while facing questions from authorities about the source of the funds. Mr Shafiqul returned to Dhaka and started working as a supply engineer while also running his own organization called Computer Palace which offers information as well as training on outsourcing and freelancing. So far he has successfully trained 500 youth who have all gone on to become self sufficient through outsourcing work. He ended by encouraging everyone to explore outsourcing avenues for the opportunities that lie there and not be daunted by external challenges.



Question and Answer



We have good universities and lots of graduates are emerging from these universities and we are told not to be frustrated. However, our Honourable Minister Inu has advised us to become bribe-free and fight for a corruption-free country.

Answer from Mr Mahmudul Hasan Shohag

"From my experience, all year there is ongoing recruitment. You can check bdjobs. Recently I took 8 accountants. I was going to take 17.. At each recruitment phase I've received up to 500 applications. But 1 or 2 applicants were eligible. So you might be thinking that because of bribes and references you are not getting jobs. That is wrong.

Yes, this may be some reasons in some sectors, but just in the private sector that are lots of job opportunities. We suffer because of lack of competent people. At one time I had become so frustrated with recruitment because people couldn't even spell words like 'Bachelor'. The education was very shallow. If you are competent, you will not look for jobs, jobs will look for you. We run a school in a slum where 500 kids study now. My dream is to remove exams from these schools altogether. There will be only assessments. No certificates or public exams. You may say how can they get jobs without certificates? But I know that when a person is competent, employers don't look for certificates and qualifications. In fact, leading BUET engineers in my company are working under a Manager who has a background in Forestry from Khulna University. He has picked up skills on his own and BUET engineers now work under him. So that's why I'm saying is don't look at the problems, look at those who have succeeded in getting jobs without bribes or references."



"We see a lot of job advertisements and we have the skills to apply for those jobs but there is already a condition placed there of 5 years experience. How can we have experience before getting jobs?"

Answer from Mr Mahmudul Hasan Shohag

"In our company we actually write in advertisements that experience does not matter. And as for other companies you can send a free deposit CV and in your cover letter you can write about why you can be a valuable employee even without any experience."





You have spoken of your struggles. Tell us about the most memorable struggle and how it inspired you."

Answer from Mr Mahmudul Hasan Shohag

Actually there's no end to struggle. I don't usually like to bring up challenges and struggles. I like to say that if there is a wall in front of you, think of it as an opportunity. Because you are getting the opportunity to lift yourself up. In terms of struggle, making money was the main challenge in my life. We usually punish our children if they get something wrong and we tell them that they

need to get everything right and not make any mistakes. This is the wrong mindset. You have to let them make mistakes and tell them to make lots of mistakes but to learn from them. So it's not about focusing on the struggle, but holding on to your motivation and to keep thinking, use your brain, use your brain, use your brain and use your brain."



I have lots of friends who work in outsourcing and they have knocked on fake addresses. So please give suggestions on how to avoid fake addresses."

Answer from Mr Shafiqul Islam

"Actually the supporting departments of the site where you are getting outsourcing jobs from can help you. I will give my mobile number and you can call me for detailed queries."

Answer from Mr Pollob Mohaimen

"Please totally ignore online lotteries and other advertisements which are fake. Don't give money to these sites and don't get trapped into these things. Shofiq had come to Aptek 14 years ago. Aptek is no longer there. Shofiq has been to Malaysia and come back and he has created another organization and is earning an income and training others. Those who give outsourcing work they are selective and they select skilled people. You have to do the work well, you have to meet deadlines, otherwise your career in outsourcing will be over."



Photo Gallery



Social Movement for Basic Rights, Democracy and Governance in the Spirit of the Liberation War: Role of Youth



Mr Nazrul Islam
Coordinator
WAVE Foundation

Mr Nazrul Islam introduced the session recalling that the youth has played an instrumental role in the country's liberation war when there was a need to find freedom from oppression and create an independent country. He hoped the session would enable everyone to revisit and revive the spirit of the liberation war and the country's history and the experience and guidance of the distinguished guests would help the youth in their fight to create a progressive and democratic country free from oppression, corruption and inequality.



A minute of silence in the memory of Martyr Abdul Alim Chowdhury

Dr Nuzhat Chowdhury

Associate Professor,
Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib
Medical University
Daughter of Martyred
Intellectual Dr Abdul Alim
Chowdhury



Dr Nuzhat Chowdhury stated that she is an eye doctor and an Associate Professor and has students who are working towards post-graduate degrees in Ophthalmology. However, she stressed that her main identity is that of a Martyred Intellectual's daughter and she would speak from that perspective.

Drawing attention to the importance of patriotism, Dr Nuzhat reminded everyone that it is not necessary for one to be the child of a martyr to feel love for the country. She pointed out that the country was the mother of every citizen and even someone who chose to be the citizen of another country could not deny their true identity of blood; and by blood the people of the country are all Bengalis. So she emphasized the need to know one's own identity. Speaking of "Birongonas" she reminded everyone to keep in mind that these girls were all students like them when their lives had been destroyed. Speaking of the martyrs and freedom fighters she described how they had spilled their blood in their youth for the future generations and for the country and the youth of today are indebted. "You can run away from the country or you may become a terrorist and go against your country, but will always be accountable to your own conscience and your own blood for what you owe." She also stressed on loving and respecting the country as a mother, regardless of whether she is poor or unable to do anything for its people.

Expressing her appreciation for the assembly, Dr Nuzhat observed that the youth of the country are an extremely neglected group with half of them unemployed. She lamented that the country's greatest strength was facing such hardships. "Where have we failed?" she again questioned. In response to the same question, Dr Nuzhat opined that the failure lay in the country's education system which are divided into three streams.

She pointed out that the education system should not be based on division and inequality, but rather on merit; and based on this merit everyone should have the right to build a successful life. She encouraged the youth to raise their voices towards this issue. She concluded with the belief that the generations that followed the freedom fighters can achieve anything if they take this oath. In the words of Bangabandhu, "No one can hold us down."

“

You can run away from the country or you may become a terrorist and go against your country, but will always be accountable to your own conscience and your own blood for what you owe.

”





Mr Ranjan Karmakar
Executive Director
Steps Towards Development

Mr Ranjan Karmakar extended warm greetings to all the participants and distinguished guests, especially the youth, and welcomed them on the journey towards the future. Elaborating on the spirit of the liberation war, Mr Karmakar focused on the following: political freedom; the need for the country to be administered through the citizen's opinions and decisions; eliminating inequality between people, men and women; eliminating inequality among the indigenous and religious groups; all citizens will get the chance to voice their opinion and participate in policy formulation; everyone will get justice; there will be economic freedom where no one will think themselves insignificant; there will be cultural freedom where every person of every race will have the opportunity to practice their culture.

Mr Karmakar urged everyone to read the Constitution and at least two books on the liberation war and feel the experience and anguish of the liberation war. "Let us all claim our responsibilities so that we can also avail our rights and build the country in the spirit of the liberation war. And as Dr Nuzhat said, let us repay that debt we owe our martyrs with our honesty, our pride and our work," he concluded.

Mr Fazle Hossain Badsha Mp
Member, Standing Committee
on Ministry of Local
Government,
Rural Development &
Co-operatives, Bangladesh
National Parliament



Reflecting on the need to establish youth rights, the Honourable MP recalled the role of the youth during the liberation war. He spoke of the day in Curzon Hall when Mohammad Ali Jinnah had delivered a speech to appeal to Pakistani youth to convince them to accept Urdu as a State language. Immediately the youth had protested and vehemently refused to accept Urdu and said so to the face of the Head of State of the newly formed Pakistan. “This was the start of the liberation war. And it was started by the youth. That is history,” said Mr Badhsa. He further explained that this had progressed in steps, with the language movement of 1952 continuing till 1969 where in the month of January, Shaheed Asad was shot by the police in front of Dhaka Medical College because it was thought that he was responsible for organizing the youth and by killing him they could dominate the youth population. At the time Mr Badsha was a high school student and during his visit to Dhaka he remembered hearing on slogan all over Dhaka city, “My name, your name, Asaduzzaman, Asaduzzaman.” One youth’s name spread from Tetulia to Teknaf, described Mr Badsha. It could not be stopped. This was the youth’s participation.

Whenever I find a member of a martyr’s family, I feel as though they are the most important members of the revolution in Bangladesh. Referring to the youth today, Mr Badsha lamented that the youth are suffering in dire crisis with 6 crore youth unemployed. Mr Badsha expressed his agreement with Dr Nuzhat, that a standardized education

system must be established through which the youth are able to learn the spirit and values of the liberation war and establish themselves as competent citizens to that they have the skills to secure employment. He pointed out that terrorists have created a culture of fear and the youth would have to create a culture of courage in order to overcome them.

If the State goes into the hands of robbers, it will never remain with the people, he stated. Thus he hoped that the youth would start the revolution to bring the country back to its people. Mr Badsha emphasized that freedom from oppression, inequality, exploitation is yet to be realized. As a part of this fight, he requested everyone to start by reading the Constitution.

He concluded by urging the youth to take this history to heart and overcome the culture of fear to achieve a culture of courage for a revolution. “Then indeed tomorrow we will find the Bangladesh that we fought for,” he ended.

“

Whenever I find a member of a martyr’s family, I feel as though they are the most important members of the revolution in Bangladesh.

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Session 6

Youth's Sharing with Successful Personalities

Dr Jashim Uddin, Deputy Managing Director, PKSF moderator of the session welcomed all the participants to the 6th Session of the second day of the National Youth Rights Assembly. He encouraged the youth to learn from the experiences of the successful and distinguished guests and to emulate their work and be inspired by them to move forward. He introduced the distinguished guests of the program.



Mr Shykh Seraj
Media Personality, Agriculture
Development Activist
and Director & Head of News,
Channel i

Mr Shykh Siraj greeted all the participants of the assembly. He stated that at the time of food crisis in the country he had used the media to widen the meaning to the definition of farming and farmers. He opined that it is because of the limitations to the existing definition and views of farming that farmers are in the state they are today. If the youth from the cities can be engaged with agriculture, they can change the situation and ensure dignity of farmers and the farming profession. "So I have encouraged the youth to return to their homes after their education and join their fathers in farming vegetables, raising livestock and poultry, fish farming, instead of running after jobs, and in doing so we have achieved some success," informed Mr Siraj.

Elaborating on his long engagement with television, Mr. Siraj revealed that in the 1980s he had given a great deal of thought to the responsibilities of a broadcaster. He believed that in a country where people didn't get food to eat or education and struggled with poverty, the television had to be more than simply an entertainment box. It could be used as a tool for

development, to train and inspire people and to give people dreams. Given the food insecurity that was prevalent at the time and the economy was largely village and agriculture-centric he decided to focus on agricultural reporting to instigate change. This was the goal, however the work was not easy. As Mr Siraj described, television at the time was focused primarily on entertainment. People eagerly awaited dramas and hardly cared for agricultural programs. He rarely saw any interest even within his own family in his program. This was a major challenge. Alongside giving more expression to the agriculture sector and farmers, Mr Siraj also wanted to change the outlook on farmers and agriculture through television. He motivated low income housewives and unemployed youth to engage in poultry and livestock rearing, homestead farming, fish culture and so on. "Today the country is running 1.5 lac fish farms valued at Taka 35 crore and 1 lac 25 thousand poultry farms in which 50 lac youth are engaged through forward and backward linkages. These poultry farms are valued at Taka 37 crore.

Speaking to the youth, Mr Siraj pointed out that if asked, none of the participants would say they wanted to be a farmer. This is because the idea of farming has a negative connotation attached to it. Yet farmers are keeping 16 crore people in the country alive. He showed, that the space of thought was constrained and people must be connected to their roots and families in order to move forward or for development efforts to be comprehensive. “If we had a

comprehensive development plan over 40 years we wouldn't have faced many of the challenges we face today. So expand your thought and consciousness. Dhaka city is not Bangladesh,” said Mr Siraj.

He ended by reminding everyone that they have a responsibility towards the farmers and must acknowledge how much they are contributing towards the country and the economy.



Question to Mr Shykh Seraj



What is the role of the youth in terms of GMO products?

I am not yet clear of my position with regards to GMO foods. I understand that today we are producing much more hybrid rice to meet the growing demands, but I am sure there is a side effect to this. Similarly GMO has side effects as well. But I am not very clear on these side effects. A type of brinjal, Bt-brinjal is about to be released into the market by the government which will not be affected by pests. But I have a concern whether a vegetable is not being eaten by pests, is it safe for us to eat?



We know that unemployment is high among educated youth. Are there any plans to include agriculture related programs in educational institutions of the country?

We are working with Dhaka University in offering a full course on Agriculture Journalism which we are involved with. I don't fully agree that unemployment is high among educated individuals, because there has been a lot of progress in terms of employment. You cannot find labourers in a village. The problem of the educated unemployed is that they can neither go this way or that. You will see that in Dhaka city, road side tea shop owners make at least 1000 taka every day; a rickshaw pullers makes Taka 35,000 monthly. So it is the type of work that is the factor. Instead of thinking about what other people will think you need to cultivate your own merit. You have to fix your goal and your maker will take you to that goal.



**Ms Rezwana Chowdhury
Bannya**
Musician and Associate
Professor
University of Dhaka



Ms Bannya humbly greeted the participants and started by discussing the criteria for success. The criteria as defined by economics would identify success as productive work, and by this definition, Ms Bannya's work as a musician would be deemed unproductive, she speculated. In this context she opined that success was not simply earning a big income and being very famous, but at the end of the night to be able to go to sleep a happy and content human being. She described how a very ordinary person who lives with their family and takes responsibility for them may go to bed happy and content whereas someone with a lot of money and fame may remain depressed.

Speaking to the youth, Ms Bannya urged them to dream big, but to include others in their dream. She spoke of core family values which are priceless and embedded in the Bangladeshi culture – of including parents, siblings, extended family and

relatives in everything; of taking care of others. "Our family values make us much more humane, aware, principled, loving, caring, considerate towards others. However, she observed that Bangladeshi families are increasingly becoming more nuclear and preoccupied with their own selves and a lot of those values and connection with others are starting to diminish with modern technology. She thus reminded the youth of the need to never lose the family values which are priceless and to go on to have great aspirations concerning their own success, but to also include others in those aspirations. "You may be a small family, but you have neighbours, communities, friends, think with everyone. Not just about yourself. If you think only about yourself you will not be happy," warned Ms Bannya. She ended by thanking the students for bringing their youthful energy which benefits everyone around them and wished them a successful and happy journey ahead.



Question to Ms Rezwana Chowdhury Bannya



Do you have any future plans with those who are talented by are not finding ways to express themselves?

Those are the ones we are teaching at “Shurer Dhara”. But you have to understand, talent and good voice is not everything. Ultimately it is up to your maker to decide who will be successful. I have seen over years of experience that in spite of talent and voice many cannot stick to singing because of various pressures. On the other hand someone with an ordinary voice through great hard work has achieved something. So just having a good voice is not enough. We teach our students to be hard working and committed. A voice is god given. But training and nurturing that voice is up to us.



Inequalities between men and women have existed for many years and was greater during your time. You were able to go very far despite the social constraints. How did you find the courage to drive yourself so far?

In 1975 I passed my intermediate and I was probably 16 or 17 years old and I was from a middle class family. My father was in government service. I was good at studies and for a girl from a middle class family to leave her studies at the University to go and sings was unimaginable. But I had promised my father that I would finish my studies after coming back, because I didn't know if I would be successful, but singing in Santi-niketon was my dream and my passion and so my father let me go.



Mr Mahboob Zaman
Managing Director
Datasoft Systems Bangladesh Ltd



Mr Mahboob Zaman expressed his appreciation for arranging the assembly concerning youth rights, particularly for bringing youth from different districts and possessing varying skills and disciplines. Reflecting on the topic of being a “successful personality,” he opined that success is actually measured against one’s achievements, both individual and collective. It is also measured against ones goal. Money and fame come later as a consequence of those efforts.

“It was our good fortune to have been youths during the liberation war and to have been able to participate in it. A dream is not one that you see only for yourself, but that you help others see and not just for oneself, but for the country,” said Mr Zaman. To the youth he also reminded that they too could become freedom fighters, by fighting a different kind of revolution. “Freedom fighters come in different forms at different times to fight for their country,” he opined.

Elaborating on the successes of Datasoft and IT in Bangladesh, Mr Zaman discussed how Datasoft had successfully achieved CMMI Level 5 accreditation from

Carnegie Mellon University which has been secured by only 377 software companies around the world. Through BASIS, Mr Zaman has also strived to create CMMI Level 3 companies and now a total of 13 CMMI Level 3 accredited companies exist in Bangladesh. He urged the youth to explore the limitless potential of information technology when reaching for their goals. Giving his own life experience he described how he had been part of different youth movements, starting with the liberation war to walking a distance of 364 kms by foot to protest an oil and gas deal which had saved the country 5300 crore taka. Also during the 1986 flood in which Dhaka city had submerged, his youth organization had started a saline factory engaging volunteers. Today when there are natural disasters people don’t have to rely on saline companies but can make their own. He ended by revealing that it had been his hope and strive as part of a youth organization to start an assembly on youth rights at the parliament and expressed his joy and appreciation for Wave Foundation for succeeding in this. He stated that on behalf of his company and BASIS and on a personal level he would extend any support necessary towards the success of the assembly and youth endeavors.



Session 7

Emergence of a New Youth Organization



Moderator Kaniz Fatema, Coordinator, WAVE Foundation opened the 7th Session of the Assembly which aimed to give the youth the opportunity to voice their demands and needs for Youth Rights & Development. As stated by the Honourable Minister of Information, Mr Hasanul Haque Inu, the only way to present the demands of the youth is through Youth Organizations. Thus, Ms Kaniz Fatema encouraged the youth to explore the potential of the youth organization and the youth can use it to fulfill their aspirations and bridge the existing gaps in ensuring youth rights.

Mr Aniruddha Roy, Coordinator, WAVE Foundation expressed that the inspirational exchanges of the previous sessions had indeed been constructive in coming up with important recommendations. He reiterated that one of the objectives of the Assembly was to start a new youth organization bringing like-minded youth to work towards development of youth and the country. He noted that 120 youth had registered for this initiative. He thanked everyone for their participation and welcomed them to share their views and voice their queries. He also mentioned that during the session the names and responsibilities of the committee members of the youth organization would be announced and a draft of the youth declaration would be presented and discussed further.



Ms Nazma Sultana Lily, Convener, National Youth Rights Assembly welcomed the youth participants to engage in a brainstorming for the draft declaration which, she stated, already covers a lot of the issues voiced by the youth in the session. She explained that in a sense the declaration was the organization's position paper and would form the backbone of the new youth organization. She briefly discussed the different components of the declaration.

Voices of the Youth – Queries and Propositions



The youth participants including students from different educational institutions from different districts of the country offered suggestions and directed questions regarding the new youth organization as follows:



Suggestions

In the localized committee if the President is a Male, then the Vice President should be female and vice versa. Also there should be at least 6 localized bodies representing the 6 divisions of Bangladesh;

As "assembly" is an English word, a Bengali substitute will be more suited for the organization. "eg: shomabesh or daal"

There should definitely be an IT related Secretary

The organization should work with other youth organizations operating in the country

Voting should be passed if at least 80% of the total members cast their vote.

Youth all over the country should be targeted

There should be trainings on active citizenship on frequent basis to develop leadership skills.

11-15 persons should comprise the Governing Body

Decentralization of the Governing Body and taking the activities of the youth organization to division-level.

Governing Body members selected from various division of the country should have some experience with membership in other youth organizations so that they can give good leadership and direction.

Youth rights and development should be at the top of the agenda for the session since it is the most important issue and the focus of the assembly.

Presenting recommendations for the draft national youth policy is an occasional activity undertaken when such an opportunity presents itself and not a permanent objective.

With regards to the youth declaration, this should announce the name of the organization, the objectives of the organization in brief.

The youth population is the largest in the country and so the committee should include much more members from across the nation;

The committee validity should be changed from 1 year to 2 year

Employment is the biggest challenge faced by the youth. So there should be a committee under this organization who should focus activities on addressing unemployment.

The new youth organization should place special emphasis on addressing .

Productive work for development can include micro enterprises for which the distinguished and successful panelists can provide counseling and mentorship.

Closing Session Declaration of National Youth Rights Assembly, Introduction to New Youth Organization and Discussion

Mr Mohsin Ali, Executive Director, WAVE Foundation welcomed all the participants to the Closing Session of the National Youth Rights Assembly. He presented key issues to the Honourable Minister of Education, which primarily included the fact that a large section of the youth population (45%) is still deprived of education and employment opportunities. He ended with the hope that the honorable Minister would take meaningful initiatives towards incorporating the recommendations presented through the assembly.





Mr Norul Amin
Manager
WIN and Communication
Oxfam

Mr Norul Amin greeted all the participants. On behalf of Oxfam he extended complete solidarity and allegiance with the youth declaration was developed through the two-day assembly by the youth. He drew attention to some of the learnings from his own experience, the first of which was the frustration faced by graduating youth who have to show experience to apply for jobs in every sector apart from the public sector, and there are very few opportunities available for the youth in the public sector. In that case he suggested that the government, non-government, private and donor organizations can create 6-month voluntary learning opportunities for the youth, so that they can get the experience and practical skills. On the other hand when the youth are interested to start their own business, they face the challenge of acquiring investment capital. The youth are not

eligible for bank loans to start businesses. So in order to apply the youth into productive work for the country, he suggested creating loan opportunities for the youth at the banks.

Mr Amin also spoke of the thousands of youth from the country who are going abroad in search of jobs and faced with unimaginable challenges due to lack of adequate skills. Even when it comes to behavioral skills they are lacking, as a result of which they are not able to cope with the competition and have to come back. Thus he highlighted the need to determine if migrant workers have adequate skills and whether they are getting proper wages. He ended by requesting the Honourable Education Minister to focus on these issues and ensure skill training and dignified jobs for our people for the development of the country.

Dr Binayak Sen
Research Director
Bangladesh Institute of
Development Studies-BIDS



Dr Binayak Sen observed that there is varying data on the youth population. The United Nations considers 15 – 24 to be the working population. In Bangladesh this is set at 18-35 years. In general he informed that the actual youth population is under 25 years of age which means that the country is strong in terms of its youth.

He discussed two utopian ideologies implemented during his lifetime: one was the liberation war and the establishment of a nation with thoughts of democracy, nationalism, and secularism. The other was the country's commitment towards democracy that was realized in 1990. However, 25 years have passed since then and he voiced the need for a third utopian establishment. Regarding this third utopia. He stated that the youth of this generation can play an important role in establishing this new platform. Bangladesh in this extent has been able to use the youth in this regard, in case of garments industry, international migration, farming and so on. However the challenge is that children of farmers want to explore other fields and the way to do this is through education and skill training. In this regard it has been said for the youth policy that mainstream education should also include skill training and technical training. Dr Sen observed that of the different types of education systems in the country the one with the least return is the Madrasah education system and within that system female madrasahs have the least returns. "If we want to increase the returns from this system it is necessary to combine this with regular education," said Dr Sen and urged the Honorary Minister to elaborate on

strategies underway towards this.

Dr Sen noted that there had been considerable investment on female stipends that have been successful in increasing women's participation in education and employment. However, after investing, and making them educated, it is important to also create opportunities for them to enter the labour market. Female labour force participation has increased, but the quality of labour is not high, he informed and as examples spoke of the livestock sector where unpaid family worker category has increased but in case of wage labour or business it hasn't to that extent. He also emphasized that the demographic dividend, would come mainly from female labour participation since male labour participation is already at 70-80% so cannot be increased much. So increased female labour participation which is currently at around 35% would be needed to utilize the demographic dividend.

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If we cannot create a knowledge-based society, then we will only have a commercial and consumer class with which it will be very difficult to achieve the third utopia with the goals of SDG that we spoke of

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However, Dr Sen pointed out that though the middle income group is increasing, whether this is a knowledge based group is not clear. He discussed how previously bookstores in supermarkets, have now been replaced with tailoring shops. "If we cannot create a knowledge-based society, then we will only have a commercial and consumer class with which it will be very difficult to achieve the third utopia with the goals of SDG that we spoke of," concluded Dr Sen.



Mr Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad, Chief Advisor of the National Youth Rights Assembly and Chairman, PKSf presented a synopsis of the issues addressed over the duration of the two-day session.

In light of the discussed issue, he highlighted the achievements that are needed as follows

- We want a developed country. Not only do we want to be a mid-income country, but we also want to ensure quality of life for everyone from all walks of life.
- We want a people's democratic nation.
- We want a country free of socio-economic inequalities.
- We want a country free of gender-based inequalities;
- We want a country free of terrorists and terrorism;
- We want a corruption free society.
- We want pollution-free environment.
- We want basic quality education for everyone.
- We want to ensure primary health care for everyone.
- We want employment opportunities for the working population;
- We want to ensure food and nutrition for everyone.
- We want cities free of traffic and hassle.
- Most importantly, we want to build the country in the spirit of the liberation war.
- In light of the assembly we want to establish youth rights; and in this context we want an effective youth policy.

Mr Ahmed noted that some challenges are always faced by a progressive economy and new challenges will always emerge. "We need to identify these and resolve them and this is the most important and I believe that efforts towards this end are underway. Everyone creating this youth organization must be cognizant of how the emerging challenges can be addressed," he stated. He also emphasized that youth responsibilities and dedication must go hand in hand with youth rights in every area, whether education or employment. The youth must work with this commitment. In the spirit of the liberation war, one society will be created where everyone will get equal opportunity and dignity and freedom. "This is framework with which we will work. I hope that this youth organization will focus not only on the rights but also the responsibilities of the youth to contribute towards the country's development," he concluded.

Mr Nurul Islam Nahid MP
Minister
Ministry of Education
Government of Bangladesh



Mr Nurul Islam Nahid expressed his sincere gratitude to be able to participate in the assembly and wished he could have heard for himself the voices of the youth raised during previous discussions.

Referring to Vision 2021, the Honourable Minister noted that it aspired to take the country to the level of a mid-income country and the most important tool to achieve this quickly is a combination of knowledge, skills and technology. He asserted that these resources must be developed and utilized quickly and every single citizen must contribute to ensuring the country's success in reaching the goal. "We have to build a progressive army with the strength of the youth," advised Mr Nahid. As a pathway to preparing the youth, he opined that combining technical education with mainstream theoretical education was of paramount importance.

Elaborating on the education system that would best benefit the country, Mr Nahid said simply that world-class education, technology and knowledge was required to build the youth into modern builders of the nation. "Many might be thinking these are big dreams, but we have no other alternative and the whole world has now become one global village," informed Mr Nahid. "We are all global citizens and the world has taken you to a point where all doors are open for you. How you will prepare yourself and how your country prepares you will take you towards the work that you are best suited for."

Mr Nahid emphasized the need for higher education to be part of a skilled labour force. To this end, he described some of the initiatives he had taken to break the social stigma and negative conception of technical skills training due to which previously only 1% of

students availed technical education. Through large scale campaigns undertaken by the Honourable Minister, there is more students applying now for technical education than available seats. For girls, the Ministry has provided stipends and started programs for women in five divisions. At the same time in many high schools technical education has been introduced with the aim to start quality technical education in every upazila. Efforts have also been made to connect all the country's universities with universities around the world alongside introducing training programs. "Our aim is to steer at least 20% of the youth towards technical education and training based on realistic occupations," stated the Honourable Minister.

Mr Nahid concluded by focusing on the country's strengths where MDG targets set for 15 years had been already achieved in 12 years. He described how the country had achieved gender parity in education and women had broken barriers to enter the military and police force. Highlighting on this social change, he encouraged everyone to become ready and inclusive in the journey towards prosperity and development.

“ We are all global citizens and the world has taken you to a point where all doors are open for you. How you will prepare yourself and how your country prepares you will take you towards the work that you are best suited for. ”



Best essay competition organized by WAVE Foundation



Sadega Tasnim
Leading University, Sylhet



Al Amin
Dhaka University



Tasfia Tahsin
Dhaka University



Crest distribution



Mr Aniruddho Roy, Coordinator, WAVE Foundation formally introduced the committee members of the new youth organization formed in the previous session. He called upon each of the members to take their positions on the stage



Ms Nazma Sultana Lily, elected President of the newly formed youth organizations explained the goals and objectives of the youth organization formed during the two-day assembly. She highlighted that the new youth organization which will be known as the National Youth Assembly intends to strive towards establishing basic rights including youth rights and building a prosperous and conscientious nation through establishment of democracy and good governance. To this end the youth will endeavor for enhanced youth leadership in the spirit of the liberation war, and claim their responsibilities towards the country and fight for increased participation and representation in social and national processes. The youth shall raise voices for youth rights, particularly related to skill training, education and employment through multifaceted campaigns; express solidarity with social movements campaigning for basic rights, democracy and good governance. Ms Lily further elaborated that the National Youth Assembly which was started with the youth connected to WAVE Foundation would also expand its membership to include youth from across the nation and from different educational institutions.

Referring to the youth declaration developed during the

previous session, Ms Lily also stated the youth organization would focus initiatives and efforts on building knowledge and skills through issue-based knowledge dissemination, dialogues and workshops, training, cultural programs and competitions. At the same time the organization will engage in activism and policy advocacy to promote basic rights, democracy and good governance. Recalling the statement of the Honourable Minister of Education where he spoke of building a progressive army to build a progressive Bangladesh, the youth organization expressed its eagerness to be part of such an army and the movement to ensure basic rights to education for all. Ms Lily concluded by welcoming the youth to unite for the establishment of their rights and take an unwavering stand against all forms of inequality.

On behalf of WAVE Foundation, Mr Mohsin Ali, Executive Director, WAVE Foundation extended a warm welcome to the new members of the newly formed youth organization – the National Youth Assembly. He expressed his deep gratitude to all the participants and distinguished guests for taking the time to participate in the National Youth Rights Assembly. Ms Noore Jannat Proma, Senior Program Officer, WAVE Foundation welcomed everyone to enjoy the cultural program.



Photo Gallery

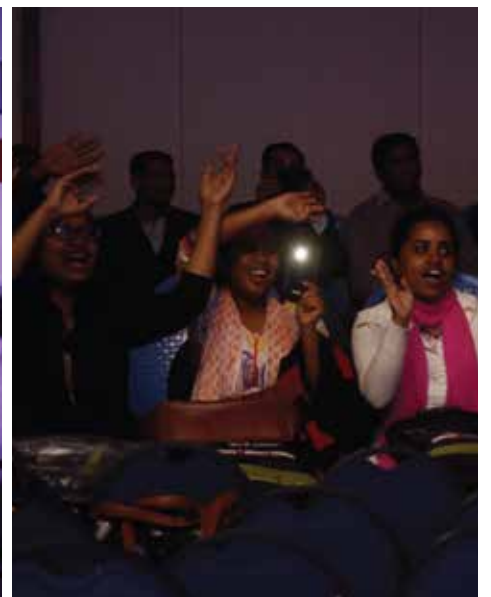


Photo Gallery

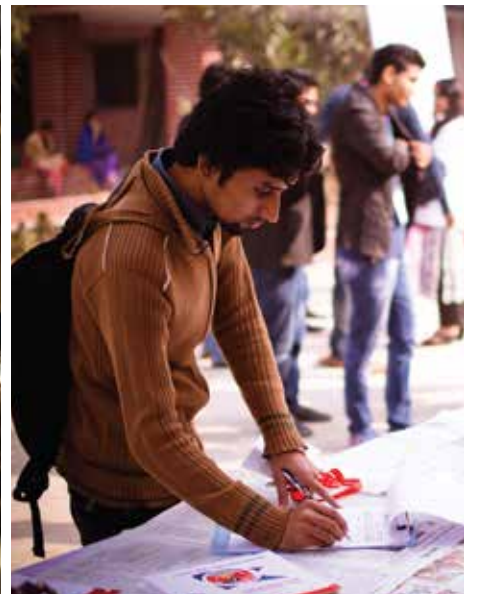


Photo Gallery

