



# Asia-Pacific Regional Youth Call to Action 2024



## Bangladesh

### Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Eradicating Poverty in Times of Multiple Crises: The Effective Delivery of Sustainable, Resilient and Innovative Solutions in Asia and the Pacific with Young People at the Forefront

#### SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

##### SDG 1 - No Poverty

In Bangladesh, many young people face pressure to excel in competitive examinations, which often leads to wasted time and low success rates. Instead of this traditional approach, it would be more beneficial to provide proper guidance and opportunities in areas that align with their interests and passions. By focusing on developing marketable skills, youth and youth with disabilities can increase their chances of achieving their career goals and improving their living standards, thus breaking the cycle of poverty.

Unfortunately, youth initiatives often do not receive prioritisation, and accessing funds, grants, or loans for grassroots entrepreneurs is challenging. The existing loan options typically come with high-interest

rates and require extensive documentation, making them inaccessible to many young entrepreneurs. Additionally, young people often lack specialised skills needed for the competitive job market due to limited resources, accessibility and facilitation. To address these challenges, innovative approaches are essential. Leveraging technology for financial inclusion, promoting sustainable agriculture and livelihoods, enhancing access to quality education and healthcare, and strengthening social safety nets can all help alleviate poverty and its root causes. Emphasising vocational and technical education would equip young people with practical skills necessary for seizing opportunities in various sectors.

Although Bangladesh has made strides in poverty reduction, marginalised groups, including youth, women, persons with disabilities, and the LGBTQIAP+





community, still face significant challenges. Economic disparities hinder access to essential services and perpetuate cycles of poverty. With 28% of the population being youth aged 15 to 30, there is a vast potential workforce that could contribute to the economy if provided with proper education and training. The government should focus on skill-based education and establish training centres in different areas to ensure accessibility for youth. Soft skills like language learning and hard skills such as operating sewing machines or other heavy machinery are in high demand in industries like garments and footwear. Additionally, awareness programmes are needed to motivate youth to explore opportunities beyond the secure government sector.

Furthermore, marginalised communities, including the LGBTQIAP+ community, face discrimination and lack of rights. While some recognition has been given to the transgender community, they still face significant challenges. Increased awareness and support from the global youth community are crucial for advocating for the rights of these marginalised groups and addressing economic discrimination.

## SDG 2 - Zero Hunger

Analysing the current situation of Sustainable Development Goal 2 (SDG 2) in Bangladesh reveals several challenges, particularly concerning food security, nutrition, agricultural sustainability, and equitable access to resources. The analysis encompasses various marginalised groups, including youth, persons with disabilities, LGBTQIAP+ individuals, indigenous communities, and women, highlighting their unique challenges within the context of SDG 2.

**Food Security and Nutrition:** Despite progress in reducing extreme poverty and improving food security over the years, Bangladesh still faces significant challenges in ensuring access to nutritious food for all. Many marginalized groups, including rural communities, indigenous peoples, and persons with disabilities, often lack access to sufficient and diverse food sources. Limited access to nutritious food exacerbates malnutrition, particularly among women and children, leading to long-term health implications.

**Agricultural Sustainability:** Agriculture remains the backbone of Bangladesh's economy, employing a significant portion of the population. However, challenges such as climate change, land degradation, water scarcity, and unsustainable farming practices threaten agricultural productivity and livelihoods. Indigenous communities, who often rely on traditional farming methods, are particularly vulnerable to these challenges, as they face displacement due to land grabbing and lack access to resources for sustainable agriculture.

**Access to Resources:** Equitable access to land, water, seeds, and other agricultural resources is crucial for promoting inclusive and sustainable agricultural development. However, marginalised groups, including women, indigenous peoples, and persons with disabilities, often face discrimination and limited access to these resources. Women, in particular, have restricted access to land ownership and control over productive resources, which undermines their role in agricultural production and decision-making processes.

**Youth Engagement:** Engaging youth in agriculture is vital for the sector's future sustainability and innovation. However, many young people perceive agriculture as unattractive due to its association with poverty and lack of opportunities for advancement. Limited accessibility and access to education, training, technology and financial resources further hinder youth participation in agriculture. Traditional gender roles and social norms may restrict young women's participation in agricultural activities. Inclusivity of Persons with disabilities and LGBTQIAP+ individuals face multiple barriers in accessing agricultural resources, livelihood opportunities, and social services. Discrimination, stigma, and lack of accessibility infrastructure limit their participation in agricultural activities and hinder their economic empowerment. There is a lack of targeted policies and programmes addressing the specific needs and challenges faced by these marginalised groups in the agricultural sector.

**Women's Empowerment:** Gender inequality remains a significant barrier to achieving SDG 2 in Bangladesh. Women, who constitute a significant portion of the agricultural workforce, often lack decision-making power, access to credit, and ownership rights over land and assets. Cultural norms and discriminatory practices perpetuate these inequalities, limiting women's ability to contribute effectively to agricultural production and food security.

### SDG 5 - Gender Equality

Bangladesh has indeed made significant progress in advancing gender equality over the years, yet it continues to grapple with deep-rooted gender disparities that persist across various facets of society. Despite notable strides, youths, women and LGBT+ individuals face substantial barriers in accessing education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, while harmful practices such as child marriage and gender-based violence remain prevalent, significantly impacting women's sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). Efforts to empower women, including those with disabilities, promote their leadership, and eliminate discriminatory laws and practices are crucial for achieving true gender equality in Bangladesh.

Education serves as a cornerstone for gender equality, yet disparities persist in Bangladesh. While enrollment rates for girls have improved significantly in recent years, challenges remain in ensuring their retention and completion of education. Cultural norms, poverty, and limited access to quality education facilities disproportionately affect girls, particularly in rural areas. Furthermore, discriminatory attitudes often discourage girls from pursuing higher education or entering traditionally male-dominated fields, limiting their opportunities for economic empowerment.

Healthcare access is another area where gender disparities persist in Bangladesh. Youth, LGBT+ persons, and women face challenges in accessing essential healthcare services due to cultural barriers, limited resources, and inadequate healthcare infrastructure, particularly in rural areas. Additionally, stigma surrounding women's health issues, such as

menstrual hygiene and reproductive health, further exacerbates these challenges. LGBT+ individuals also encounter discrimination and barriers when seeking healthcare services, including challenges in accessing appropriate and inclusive care.

Economic empowerment is crucial for advancing gender equality, yet women in Bangladesh continue to face significant barriers in accessing economic opportunities. Limited access to financial resources, lack of property rights, and gender-based discrimination in the workplace hinder women's participation in the formal economy. Furthermore, women's unpaid care work often goes unrecognised and undervalued, perpetuating economic inequality. Initiatives promoting women's and women with disabilities entrepreneurship, access to credit, and skills training are essential for enhancing women's economic empowerment and narrowing the gender gap in the workforce.

Harmful practices such as child marriage and gender-based violence remain pervasive issues in Bangladesh, posing significant threats to women's and women with disabilities SRHR. Despite legal frameworks aimed at preventing these practices, enforcement remains weak, and cultural norms often perpetuate their prevalence. Child marriage not only deprives girls of their childhood but also jeopardizes their health and educational prospects. Gender-based violence, including domestic violence and sexual harassment, continues to undermine women's safety and well-being, creating barriers to their empowerment and participation in society.

Efforts to advance gender equality in Bangladesh must address these multifaceted challenges comprehensively. This includes promoting women's leadership and participation in decision-making processes, strengthening legal protections for women and women with disabilities and LGBT+ individuals, and investing in education, healthcare, and economic opportunities that are inclusive and equitable. Civil society organisations, government agencies, and international partners play critical roles in driving these efforts forward.

**SDG 13:**

In the context of Sustainable Development Goal 13 (SDG 13) on climate action, Bangladesh faces significant challenges exacerbated by its vulnerability to climate change. This vulnerability is particularly acute for marginalised groups such as youth, persons with disabilities, LGBT+ persons, indigenous communities, and women. The current situation can be analysed based on these challenges:

**Youth:** Youth in Bangladesh are disproportionately affected by climate change impacts such as extreme weather events, rising sea levels, and changing rainfall patterns. These events can disrupt their education, livelihoods, and overall well-being, further exacerbating existing socio-economic vulnerabilities.

**Persons with Disabilities:** Climate-related disasters pose unique challenges for persons with disabilities, including limited access to evacuation shelters, loss of assistive devices, and increased barriers to healthcare services. Additionally, infrastructure damage can hinder their mobility and access to essential resources. Mainly women with disabilities faced increased caregiving responsibilities, heightened risks of gender-based violence, and limited access to resources and decision-making processes during and after climate-related disasters.

**LGBT+ Communities:** LGBT+ individuals may face heightened risks during climate-related disasters due to discrimination and marginalisation. They may encounter barriers to accessing emergency shelters, healthcare services, and social support networks, exacerbating their vulnerability to adverse climate impacts.

**Indigenous Communities:** Indigenous communities in Bangladesh often rely on natural resources for their livelihoods and cultural practices. Climate change-induced environmental degradation, such as deforestation and saline intrusion, threatens their traditional way of life, food security, and cultural heritage.

**Women:** Women are disproportionately affected by climate change due to existing gender inequalities and socio-cultural norms. They may face increased caregiving responsibilities, heightened risks of gender-based violence, and limited access to resources and decision-making processes during and after climate-related disasters.

Bangladesh faces environmental challenges related to smoking and vehicle emissions, which contribute to air and land pollution, exacerbating climate change impacts. The improper disposal of cigarette and e-cigarette waste pollutes soil, waterways, and beaches, harming wildlife and contributing to environmental degradation. Moreover, youth smoking perpetuates the demand for tobacco, indirectly fueling environmental degradation and climate change through deforestation and chemical cultivation practices.

**SDG 16 - Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions****Youth:**

- **Access to Justice:** Many young people, especially those from marginalised communities (especially persons with disabilities) face challenges in accessing justice due to barriers such as lack of legal awareness, financial constraints, accessibility and discrimination. Strengthening legal aid services and youth-friendly justice mechanisms can help address these issues.
- **Political Participation:** Youth often encounter barriers to meaningful political participation due to age-related restrictions, accessibility, lack of representation, and political marginalisation. Promoting youth inclusion in decision-making processes and creating platforms for their active engagement in governance can help address these challenges.
- **Human Rights:** Ensuring the protection of youth rights, including the right to education, Rights and Protection Act of persons with disabilities-2013, employment, and freedom of expression, is crucial for fostering a just and peaceful society. Efforts to



combat child labour, trafficking, and exploitation are essential to promote the well-being of young people.

#### Women:

- **Gender-Based Violence:** Women and women with disabilities in Bangladesh face high rates of gender-based violence, including domestic abuse, sexual harassment, and trafficking. Strengthening legal frameworks, improving access to support services, and challenging cultural norms that perpetuate violence against women are essential for promoting gender equality and justice.
- **Legal Empowerment:** Enhancing women's legal literacy and access to justice is critical for addressing gender discrimination and ensuring women's and women with disabilities rights are upheld. Legal aid services, women-led advocacy initiatives, and awareness campaigns can empower women to assert their rights and seek recourse for injustices.
- **Political Participation:** Despite some progress, women remain underrepresented in political leadership roles in Bangladesh. Promoting women's political participation and influencing women with disabilities to participate in politics through quotas, training programs, and supportive policies can help address gender disparities in governance and decision-making.

#### LGBT+ Individuals:

- **Legal Protection:** LGBT+ individuals in Bangladesh face legal discrimination and persecution due to laws criminalising same-sex relationships. Reforms to decriminalise consensual same-sex conduct and protect the rights of LGBT+ individuals are essential for fostering inclusivity and upholding human rights.
- **Access to Justice:** LGBT+ individuals often face discrimination and violence, limiting their access to justice and legal protection. Strengthening anti-discrimination laws, training legal professionals on LGBT+ rights, and establishing safe spaces for reporting hate crimes are crucial steps towards ensuring justice for LGBT+ communities.

- **Social Inclusion:** Addressing societal stigma and promoting acceptance of LGBT+ individuals are vital for fostering a more inclusive and tolerant society. Education, awareness campaigns, and community-based initiatives can help challenge stereotypes and promote understanding and acceptance of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.

#### Persons with Disabilities:

- **Accessibility:** Persons with disabilities often face barriers to accessing justice, including physical barriers in courtrooms and legal institutions. Ensuring accessible infrastructure, including ramps and assistive technologies, is essential for enabling persons with disabilities to navigate the legal system.
- **Legal Capacity:** Many persons with disabilities face challenges in exercising their legal capacity due to discriminatory laws and attitudes. Promoting supported decision-making mechanisms and recognising the rights of persons with disabilities to make their own choices are critical for ensuring their autonomy and agency within the legal system.
- **Inclusive Policies:** Implementing inclusive policies that address the specific needs of persons with disabilities, such as accessible legal aid services and reasonable accommodations in legal proceedings, is essential for ensuring equal access to justice and upholding the rights of persons with disabilities.

#### SDG 17 - Partnerships for the Goals

Addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by youth in Bangladesh necessitates a comprehensive and nuanced approach that tackles issues across education, employment, healthcare, and social inclusion. Here's a more detailed exploration of each aspect:

**Education:** Despite improvements in youth literacy rates, disparities persist between rural and urban areas. To address this, targeted interventions are needed to ensure equitable access to quality

education, especially for marginalised groups such as girls, children with disabilities, and those from low-income families. This may involve the expansion of educational infrastructure in underserved areas, provision of scholarships and financial assistance, teacher training programmes focusing on inclusive education, and curriculum reforms that promote critical thinking, creativity, and digital literacy.

**Employment:** High youth unemployment rates underscore the urgency of creating more opportunities for decent work. Initiatives should focus on enhancing vocational training and skills development programs tailored to the needs of the labour market. Special attention should be paid to addressing gender disparities in employment by promoting women's participation in traditionally male-dominated sectors and providing support for entrepreneurship among young women. Moreover, efforts to remove barriers to employment for persons with disabilities, such as improving accessibility and offering reasonable accommodations in the workplace, are crucial for fostering their economic empowerment.

**Healthcare:** Access to comprehensive healthcare services, including sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) information and services, remains a significant challenge, particularly in rural areas. Youth-friendly healthcare facilities equipped with trained staff and youth-friendly services should be established to ensure that young people can access confidential and non-judgmental care. Public awareness campaigns addressing stigma and discrimination against marginalised groups, including LGBTIQAP+ individuals, are essential to create a supportive environment for seeking healthcare services without fear of discrimination or harassment.

**Social Inclusion:** Social norms and cultural practices often perpetuate exclusion and marginalisation, particularly for women and LGBTIQAP+ individuals. Efforts to promote inclusivity should involve community engagement and awareness-raising activities aimed at challenging discriminatory attitudes

and fostering acceptance of diversity. Creating safe spaces and platforms for youth, especially those from marginalised groups, to voice their concerns, participate in decision-making processes, and engage in civic activities is vital for promoting their active participation and leadership in society.

**Multi-Sectoral Approaches:** Collaboration among government agencies, civil society organisations, the private sector, and international partners is essential for the effective implementation of policies and programs addressing youth development. This collaboration should prioritise the mobilisation of resources, knowledge sharing, and capacity building initiatives aimed at strengthening the institutional framework for youth empowerment and inclusive development.

## OUR KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

### Recommendations on SDG 1

1. Ensure equal access to quality education for everyone, regardless of gender, location, or socioeconomic background.
2. Ensure quality and affordable healthcare and strengthen social safety nets for everyone, especially in rural areas and for marginalised communities.
3. Promote community-led development projects that actively involve young people in decision-making processes.
4. Ensure employment, education and training (NEET) for young people. We, youth can proactively identify individuals living in poverty in Bangladesh through non-governmental organisations, taking the initiative to support and work for them. This ensures that the assistance meant for the poor is directed to those in genuine need, preventing non-poor individuals from exploiting these resources.
5. Increase Government and Private Corporations support and invest in sustainable startups.
6. Encourage SME business by cutting down loan interests.
7. Diverse streams of education and skills should be introduced and made affordable.

### Recommendations on SDG 2

1. Encourage the adoption of sustainable agricultural practices that prioritise nutrition-sensitive approaches, diversification of crops, and conservation agriculture.
2. Prioritise the availability of culturally appropriate and diverse food options to address specific nutritional needs and preferences, particularly for LGBTIQAP+ and indigenous populations and ethnic minorities.
3. Promote knowledge-sharing platforms and innovative solutions that leverage digital technologies and data analytics to improve agricultural productivity, market access, and resilience to climate change impacts.
4. Implement comprehensive nutrition education programs targeting vulnerable populations.
3. Recognise women and youth in all their diversities as agents of change and ensure their meaningful participation in the planning, financing and implementation of climate responses, including access to sexual and reproductive health services and information at all levels and at all times.
4. Implement comprehensive educational programmes that integrate climate change awareness into school curriculum, ensuring that young people are well-informed about the impacts of climate change and the importance of sustainable practices.

### Recommendations on SDG 5

1. Increase the leadership building skills of all youth, youth with disabilities and LGBTIQAP youth.
2. Youth and youth with disabilities and LGBTIQAP+ youth should be included in policy making.
3. Gender-disaggregated data on key indicators such as education, employment, health, and political participation should be collected and accessible.
4. Gender transformative approaches should be included in policies and implemented on ground level.
5. Establish platforms for capacity building, mentorship, and skill development specifically tailored for young people interested in climate action. This includes training programmes on sustainable practices, advocacy, and project management.
6. Promote the active involvement of young people in decision-making processes related to climate policies at local, national, and regional levels. Create youth advisory boards or councils to ensure their voices are heard.

### Recommendations on SDG 13

1. Invest in climate-resilient health infrastructure and facilities to mitigate the impacts of extreme weather events and changing climate patterns on healthcare delivery.
2. Address gender inequalities in access to resources, information, and technologies for climate adaptation and mitigation, promoting gender-responsive approaches to sustainable development.
7. Facilitate the transition to a green economy by promoting green job opportunities and entrepreneurship for young people. Provide incentives for sustainable businesses and initiatives that contribute to climate resilience. Allocate resources and funding to support youth-led projects and initiatives focused on climate action. Establish grant programmes, scholarships, or seed funding to empower young individuals to implement sustainable solutions.
8. Numerous new agricultural practices have been adopted, and many of them have negative impacts on the environment and human health. Youth must be aware of the negative consequences of these so-called agricultural technologies.
9. Include climate education, gender and sex , and disability related issues in mainstream education (National Curriculum).

### Recommendations on SDG 16

1. Invest in capacity-building initiatives for conflict prevention, mediation, and peacebuilding at the community, national, and regional levels.
2. Strengthen legal frameworks to combat gender-based violence, including laws and policies that criminalise domestic violence, sexual harassment, and harmful practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation.
3. Enhance transparency, accountability, and integrity within institutions, including government agencies, law enforcement bodies, and judicial systems.
4. All public and private institutions including the workplace, educational institutions, and judiciary should be made women and women with disability friendly.
5. Improve the capacity and responsiveness of public institutions to deliver services efficiently and equitably.
6. Protect and promote the rights of civil society organisations and independent media in promoting accountability, transparency, and good governance.

### Recommendations on SDG 17

1. Foster collaboration and partnerships between governments, civil society organisations, private sector entities, and international development agencies to enhance access to healthcare services and promote gender equality.
2. Prioritise investments in education and training for health professionals, policymakers, and community leaders on gender-responsive healthcare delivery, including addressing gender-based violence and discrimination in healthcare settings.
3. Leverage international development assistance and aid coordination mechanisms to ensure that funding for health and gender equality programmes are aligned with national priorities and promote sustainable outcomes.
4. Every country and every sector has a role to play in achieving the SDGs. Bangladesh's SDGs funds, capacities and also technologies emphasise the need for partnership and collaboration. Mobilisation of additional financial resources for developing countries from multiple sources must be carried out.
5. Fully operationalise the technology bank and science, technology and innovation capacity building mechanism for least developed countries by 2017 and enhance the use of enabling technologies, in particular information and communication technology.
6. Provide capacity building support for implementing effective technology and targeted capacity building in developing countries to support national plans to implement all the sustainable development goals including through North South cooperation.

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