



**ONE  
LAND  
MANY  
VOICES**

Every voice matters



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# The Unheard: Echoes from the Grassroots

Every voice matters

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The world is going through significant upheaval. Bangladesh is also experiencing rapid changes. However, too many voices remain unheard, too many challenges unaddressed.

In this edition of *The Unheard: Echoes from the Grassroots*, YPF brings you straight to the frontlines. From the industrial ambitions of Rajshahi's youth to the coastal struggles of Chattogram, our report captures the realities shaping lives across regions, education gaps, employment hurdles, healthcare shortages, environmental threats, and governance challenges.

But this is more than a snapshot of problems.

It is a blueprint for action.

By combining grassroots insights with strategic policy guidance, we envision a future where youth-led innovation drives local economies, sustainable development safeguards our environment, and transparent governance empowers every citizen.

Our mission is clear: to turn knowledge into impact, to amplify voices that matter, and to design solutions that last. This magazine is a step toward a Bangladesh that works for all. For YPF, listening is just the beginning; acting with foresight and prudence is the future.

This is how local knowledge and national governance can finally work in sync to produce lasting solutions.

## **Aamer Mostaque Ahmed**

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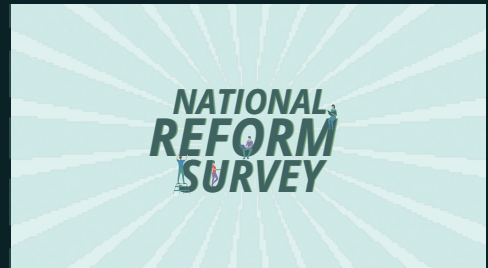
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# Field Report

SATKHIRA  
NETROKONA  
RAJSHAHI  
CHATTOGRAM



## Project Overview

# One Land, Many Voices



Bangladesh stands at a pivotal moment of transformation, with the nation's youth leading the charge for meaningful change. However, to sustain this momentum and ensure that reforms are effective, inclusive, and far-reaching, it is crucial to track progress and gather insights from all segments of society, especially from the grassroots. Historically, top-down policy implementation has failed to capture the unique challenges and aspirations of diverse communities. The first phase of the project developed a youth-led reform matrix and policy area scorecard to systematically track reforms and assess their impact on 5 thematic areas: Healthcare, Education & Skills, Law & Governance, Environment and Economy. One Land Many Voices, the second phase of the project further expanded towards collecting and integrating ideas from the grassroots level of Bangladesh into advocacy for evidence-based policy making. Interviews were conducted across Bangladesh's diverse regions, enabling youth, marginalized communities, and local leaders to discuss their recommendations for reform. Through the findings from the field, youth leaders will be able to collaborate with civil society organizations, experts, and the media to raise awareness and build support for policy changes.

This project adopted a qualitative research methodology to explore youth and community perspectives on five key policy areas. Primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews conducted across grassroots areas of Bangladesh.



The purpose was to capture local realities, challenges, and aspirations in participants' own voices. Secondary data from policy documents, national reports, and research studies were also reviewed to contextualize the findings. Data collection from grassroots began by mapping youth participants from the following targeted regions: Satkhira, Chattogram and Cox's Bazar, Netrokona, and Rajshahi. The respondents were reached out through Youth Policy Forum's (YPF's) Grassroots Network, Civil Servants Network and ActionAid Youth Hubs. The youth clubs and organizations assisted in reaching the respondents. Students, young professionals, informal workers, women, and individuals from minority groups and different age groups were included in the

interviews, ensuring diversity and gender balance in youth representation. Structured interview questions and discussion guides were developed for field interactions.



Youth representatives from YPF visited the selected regions and conducted over 100 interviews and focus group discussions. Upon receiving consent, interviews and real-life stories were recorded. The videos were further utilized for reform advocacy through social media and website content such as short videos, regional and thematic documentaries, etc. 3 Key Informant Interviews were conducted with the local community representatives and civil servants. The insights captured community-specific issues, evidence and suggestions for further campaigns and advocacy efforts. Following the field visits, the research team transcribed and thematically analyzed the input and the insights will be systematically incorporated into future advocacy initiatives.



This, along with digital campaigns further enriches the policy tools to ensure that it reflects a balanced approach, ensuring it is both comprehensive and responsive to the needs of all stakeholders, especially those from underrepresented and marginalized communities.



The One Land Many Voices initiative is a timely and essential step toward creating a more inclusive, accountable, and progressive Bangladesh. Through this initiative, we have been able to hear the thoughts and recommendations of the grassroots. Moving forward, we aim to incorporate these insights into building advocacy initiatives for evidence-based policymaking. By engaging the grassroots and empowering youth to lead the charge for meaningful reforms, we can build a future that is shaped by the needs and voices of the people. Together, we can ensure that the reforms are not just enacted, but truly transformative.



# Methodology

This project adopts a Mixed-Methods Research Design, integrating quantitative data to measure the scale of youth opinion with qualitative insights to understand the depth of their experiences. Structured interview questions and discussion guides were developed for field interactions. Training sessions for field researchers on ethical data collection and interviewing techniques were conducted before the field visits. The methodology was structured in two phases: extensive field engagement comprising more than 100 video interviews, town hall meetings, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and a national reform survey. Field visits were conducted in Satkhira, Netrokona, Rajshahi, Chattogram and Cox's Bazar. The quantitative component consisted of an online survey which reached 265 young respondents from over 35 districts.



## Sampling Techniques

- For Video Interviews and FGDs (Purposive Sampling):
  - ensure the representation of voices that are historically excluded from governance, Purposive Sampling was employed for the video interviews and FGDs.
- For Survey (Online): A Convenience Sampling method was used for the online survey via social media dissemination.



## Data Analysis

- Qualitative & Thematic Analysis: Transcripts from the FGDs and interviews underwent Thematic Analysis. The research team coded responses to identify recurring patterns under the 5 policy areas for each of the regions visited, which brought out region specific issues and recommendations from the grassroots.
- Quantitative Analysis: Survey data was cleaned and analyzed using descriptive statistics. The analysis focused on identifying macro-trends, such as the ranking of most crucial issues in healthcare, education, economy, environment and governance as well as recommendations.
- Secondary Data Sources: Insights from the field was contextualized through a review of national policy documents under the policy areas, and a thorough research of regional contexts.

## Limitations

Given the use of non-probability sampling methods (convenience and purposive sampling) and a small sample size due to logistical and time constraints, the findings in this report are indicative trends within the engaged youth demographic, rather than statistically representative of the entire national population. It is also notable that the majority of the insights are from the qualitative interviews and FGDs, which limit the scope of generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the field visits covered only five locations, which might not be sufficient to capture the full diversity of Bangladesh's grassroots perspectives, challenges and recommendations. Despite these limitations, the initiative sheds light on crucial issues of the grassroots in diverse policy areas, enabling scopes for designing future interventions and advocacy activities. Future initiatives can be scaled up and take a more quantitative approach to elicit preferences and opinions from the grassroots while ensuring generalizability.





# SATKHIRA

Insights from Shyamnagar and Tala

Satkhira is an administrative region in the Khulna Division of southwestern Bangladesh. As the eighth largest district in the country, Satkhira has a population of approximately 2.2 million across its seven upazilas (sub-districts). The area of Satkhira district is 3,858.33 square kilometers (Bangladesh National Information Portal, 2025). One-third of the southern part of this land falls within the Sundarbans. Economically, this district is well known for fish farming, crab cultivation, honey production, mangoes, the dairy industry, pottery, and vegetables (Masud, 2025). Satkhira is one of the most climate-vulnerable districts in Bangladesh. Due to salinity, drought, cyclones, waterlogging, and floods, there is a severe crisis of safe drinking water in the region. Around 73% of residents in five coastal upazilas, Koyra, Dakop, and Paikgachha in Khulna, and Assasuni and Shyamnagar in Satkhira rely on unsafe, saline water for drinking (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2022). Sources of clean water that once existed are now either polluted, saline, or completely depleted. In Gabura village of Shyamnagar upazila, Satkhira, residents must constantly struggle for water. Many families here still survive by storing rainwater (Ahsanullah, 2025). Due to the consumption of highly saline water, many people in this region are regularly suffering from kidney-related diseases. It's not just the kidneys, exposure to saline water causes severe skin reactions among children. For women, the

acute shortage of clean water has made it nearly impossible to maintain menstrual hygiene. As a result, various infections are spreading, often leading to long-term health complications (Ahsanullah, 2025). Due to climate change, river embankments in Ashashuni, Shyamnagar, and Kaliganj have collapsed, displacing many people who have taken refuge in Satkhira town (Khalil, 2025).

## Findings

### Education

According to the Population and Housing Census, the literacy rate in Satkhira district is 75.32% (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), 2022). The interviews were conducted with teachers, government representatives, students and guardians. Major issues in education lie in inadequacy of infrastructure, funding, implementation of teacher's training and dropouts. Even though teachers here are getting the same kind of training as in urban areas, they don't have the infrastructural support to implement it. There is also a lack of funding in government schools. The salary scale of the teachers is another key issue which impacts the quality of teaching. Given the high inflation (9.45% according to Bangladesh Bank, 2025), it is often not possible to sustain. Then the



teachers have no other way but to select another side job. Maintaining a side job alongside teaching makes it difficult for the teacher to concentrate on teaching.



The lack of infrastructure was also highlighted by students from Satkhira. There is a lack of science lab facilities, equipment, classrooms and even toilet facilities. Compared to non-technical schools, technical schools had better laboratories and equipment access. Bangladesh has an average drop-out rate of 13.95%. According to a teacher, in Satkhira, the poor financial condition of students' families is a key reason behind the dropouts. When a student reaches 9th-10th Class, the parents can't fulfill their needs due to increased expenses of education. The students then gradually start working and, in some cases, leave education altogether and focus their efforts on earning money. Another key reason is lack of employment opportunities after completing higher education. A lot of students are getting involved in business or self-employment efforts due to the perceived low return on education. The quality of teaching is another issue that came up in the interviews. Irregularity of classes, not explaining complex topics properly etc. were major issues highlighted by students and their parents. The education issues in Satkhira largely stem from weaknesses in policy implementation and inadequate budgeting. Despite having government prescribed teacher training, implementation gaps arise because teachers lack infrastructural support to apply their skills effectively. Bangladesh's teacher training programs vary widely in quality and structure, often depending on the level and type of school (government, private, NGO-run). Many teachers begin their careers with limited formal training or pre-service training. According to a study of Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE), the majority of teachers received training after joining the service. Of the total professional training delivered, 77.6% was received after joining service and 22.4% before joining (CAMPE Education watch report 2023). This indicates a major temporal delay as a large proportion of teachers are only equipped

with the requisite interpersonal and pedagogical skills after beginning their careers. With 67 Primary Teacher Training Institutes (PTIs) (Primary Teacher Training Institutes, 2024), Bangladesh can improve a lot by implementing necessary policies. Previously, Certificate in Education (C-in-Ed) course was followed by the PTIs but the Diploma in Primary Education (DPEd) program and later Basic Training for Primary Teachers (BTPT) program have been adopted. Yet, there is a lot to improve. Lack of budget for the education sector in the national budget creates a direct and interconnected impact on infrastructure, teacher salaries and overall funding issues. The education budget for Bangladesh in FY26 is 12.1% of the total budget, or 1.53% of total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Ministry of Finance (MoF), 2025). This is lower than the recommended minimum of 4-6% of GDP and 20% of the national budget by UNESCO for any country (UNESCO, 2015). The allocation for education has been decreasing over the past 50 years, from 20.1% of the budget in FY 1972-73 to 11.88% in FY 2024-25. This is the 3rd lowest education spending (2016-2023) among 39 LDCs (CPD, 2025). This creates a cycle where poor infrastructure and low salaries hinder teaching quality and student learning, all stemming from inadequate financial support. Online gambling is an emerging issue that is not only impacting education but also creating situations that may cause social instability. A parent said, for women and girls, child marriage acts as a barrier towards continuing education. According to a school teacher, female students have almost equal (sometimes higher) participation and better class performance on average than their male classmates. The proportion of girl students in schools was 55% for Satkhira (*Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS), 2023*). However, continuation of education becomes difficult for most of them due to financial difficulties and societal stereotypes. Despite this, women's participation in skill development efforts and employment is noteworthy. From our interview with a representative from the Department of Youth Development (DYD) we got to know that many women of Satkhira are involved in fish enclosure and crab harvesting businesses.



“

In our school, we don't have enough benches, tables or chairs. There are problems in every aspect of the rural schools. Due to the infrastructural issues, we have to face many difficulties in teaching. We can't do much even if we want to.

-Teacher from Satkhira”

### Healthcare

In Satkhira, salinity levels in water sources have been recorded to be up to 30 times higher than the World Health Organization's (WHO) safe limit of 250 milligrams per litre (mg/l) chloride concentration in drinking water (1000 mg/l for Bangladesh) and 200 mg/l of sodium concentration (Ahmed and Rahman 2000, Tasnim, 2025). Women, particularly those who are pregnant or breastfeeding, face heightened exposure (Tasnim, 2025). Severe health issues related to the salinity of water (skin disease, waterborne disease and diseases related to women's reproductive health) are prevalent in Satkhira. Union level government hospitals in Satkhira face issues such as absenteeism of the health workforce, shortage of medicines and other resources etc. According to a staff from the only government hospital in Gabura union, during the last 4 months, no medicines have been supplied to the hospital. Absenteeism is another critical issue that hinders the healthcare service delivery in Bangladesh. According to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), the average rate of absence of doctors is 58.7%.



This issue disproportionately affects the rural population relative to their urban counterparts. Around 58.5% of the doctor-level positions remain vacant in the rural health complexes, compared to the national average of 39.4% (Islam et al., 2024). Even though gaps in surveillance and monitoring exist, many other factors need particular focus, including safety and community support, housing and flexibility in training. Apart from these, financial incentives to encourage retention in rural healthcare complexes are both insufficient and are also limited to the health facilities located in the hill tracts of Chattogram only, and not in any other rural outskirts of Bangladesh including Satkhira (Rawal et al., 2015). Even though these face severe implementation challenges, supply side measures like financial incentives and monitoring initiatives like 'Hello Doctor' at least exist on pen and paper (Anik, 2015), but policy gaps remain in addressing issues like community support from influential community actors, safety and housing facilities, and flexibility in training (*training leaves create vacancies which are often not fulfilled promptly due to administrative complexities*) for doctors. The unavailability of medicines in the local facilities can be attributed to the delay and ultimately cancellation of the 5th Health, Population, and Nutrition Sector Programme (HPNSP), through which rural health facilities receive several medicines for the provision of Essential Service Package (ESP) (The Financial Express, n.d.). Due to poverty, many cannot afford to go to private hospitals, hence going to the government hospital is their only way of seeking healthcare. Another key barrier in accessing healthcare is the condition of roads. While almost all patients are referred to the Satkhira Upazila Health Complex or Satkhira Medical College, the road infrastructure makes it extremely tough to transfer severely ill patients. According to the locals, sometimes patients can even die before they get to the hospital, just due to the delay caused by the road's condition. Child marriage is also prevalent in Satkhira, particularly in Gabura union, with girls getting married off in class 5 or 6. This poses a serious threat to their reproductive health. The combined effect of early marriage and high levels of salinity, there is a prevalence of miscarriages and cervical cancer. It has also been reported that access to menstrual hygiene is alarmingly low. Women have to use clothes during their menstrual period, which

poses serious health risks. Some women let us know that they cannot afford sanitary napkins or pads. Sometimes local NGOs provide pads after several months, but that is not a sustainable solution. Not everyone gets access to sanitary pads. And we learned that women use clothes during menstruation, but they can never let those clothes dry (after washing) under sunlight, causing them health issues. As far as menstrual hygiene is concerned, Jahan et al. (2024) demonstrates that 91% of the rural schoolgirls use unsanitary clothes due to lack of affordability (Jahan et al., 2024). Another study by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) revealed that the most popular menstrual material among adolescents in urban slums is menstrual cloth (22%) (Lopez, 2021). This is consistent with the field reports' findings stated above, indicating a sheer lack of mass awareness. Moreover, the National Health Adaptation Plan (2018) adopted by Bangladesh overlooks the reproductive health related risks of salinity intrusion, further exacerbating the situation (Rahaman et al., 2025).

Unhealthy practices with antibiotics have also come up in our interactions. We got to know that people rarely complete their prescribed dosage of antibiotics due to its high prices. Local pharmacies often sell antibiotics without prescription to the locals. These increase the chances of AMR. Although Bangladesh has a formal antimicrobial resistance (AMR) surveillance system established, it is still in early developmental stages. There exists a large number of unregistered pharmacies, where the surveillance system cannot be operationalized. Moreover, a study conducted among the pharmacy retailers from all divisions of Bangladesh revealed that 67.3% of those surveyed had insufficient knowledge about antibiotics, resulting in over the counter dispensation of those drugs without prescriptions from registered physicians (WHO, 2023). Individual and societal poverty is another reason behind the rising AMR cases, which is also reflected in the field report above (Roney et al., 2024). The high out-of-pocket spending, currently standing at 73%, more than half of which is spent on drug costs, can be attributed as another reason behind the lack of adherence to a proper antibiotic medication regimen in low-income communities (Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha, 2024). Even though key stakeholders like the MoHFW and Directorate General of Drug Administration (DGDA) have collaborated with international agencies like the WHO for initiatives like AMR inclusion in secondary school curriculum, creating appealing AMR advocacy materials like comic books, color posters etc., gaps remain in large scale mass awareness campaigns (WHO, 2023).

“

Today, I spoke with a 26-year-old woman who was married at the age of 14. Over the years, she endured four miscarriages, and when she sought medical help, doctors diagnosed her with cervical cancer, linked to years of consuming saline-contaminated water. Due to financial hardship, she was unable to continue her treatment. Later, when she finally had a child, the baby was malnourished and frequently ill. With no other means of care, the mother's only efforts to protect her child were relying on spiritual practices, such as placing a tabeez around the child's neck and visiting local hujurs (religious leaders).

- Local Guide

”

### Environment & Climate Change

Salinity is a key environmental issue in Satkhira. Findings from the Participatory Research and Action Network (PRAAN) highlight that shrinking freshwater sources are allowing saltwater to seep into rivers, ponds, and tube wells, turning once-safe drinking water into a daily health hazard (Tasnim, 2025). As health risks escalate, the climate crisis is driving saline intrusion further inland. With two-thirds of Bangladesh's land lying less than five meters above sea level, the southwest region remains especially vulnerable to this growing threat (Tasnim, 2025). This heavily impacts the agricultural productivity, health, and overall lifestyle of the people. Access to safe drinking water is nearly impossible without purchasing it. Even though the area is surrounded by water, none of it is drinkable. Here, people from all walks and



phases of life have one need: pure drinking water. Sometimes, their desire for drinking water exceeds their need for education and healthcare. Although initiatives are underway to provide water tanks for preserving rainwater, widespread corruption exists in the distribution channel. According to a resident of Gumantoli, “I have heard that the number of government-provided water tanks is adequate, but we don’t get them. Because influential people are there. And some people get those (water tanks) by monetary exchanges. A water tank would sometimes cost more than 5000 taka. Whoever cannot pay doesn’t get the water tank.” Additionally, there is also a lack of proper disaster management efforts for this vulnerable area. Not only is there a lack of proper cyclone centers, but also a huge gap in the equitable distribution of related resources. Natural disasters cause a lot of damage to the locals. Many people have mud-built houses, and even if there is a small storm, the loss and damage are huge. And most of the people are day labourers; they have to work all day for their livelihood, so if a storm occurs, they face major damage.



Access to safe drinking water and food has been recognized as a fundamental right, as per Article 32 of the Bangladesh Constitution (People’s Republic of Bangladesh, 1972, Art. 32; The Business Standard, 2025). Bangladesh has several national policies on water and sanitation, including the National Policy for Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation (1998), National Water Policy (1999), and Water Act (2013). Most of these policies are urban-biased, with little guidance for coastal and salinity-affected areas. For example, the Water Act 2013 gives local government authority to take initiatives to mitigate salinity problems, but considers it a lower priority problem no clear budget mechanism to act on it (Muhibullah, 2014). Organizations like Department of Public Health and Engineering (DPHE), Water Resources Planning Organization (WARPO), Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) and the Ministry of Water Resources (MoWR) handle water supply and water resource planning, but when it comes to coastal regions, no single institution owns the drinking water issue. For example, DPHE implemented the Bangladesh Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Project (BRWSSP) (2012-2017), funded by the World Bank, which covered 383 unions across 20 districts, installed 65 Deep Hand Tube Wells (DHTWs), 520

Filters (PSFs). But DPHE failed to take responsibility for post-operative maintenance and operational activities (Md. S. Khan, S.K. Paul, 2023). The National Adaptation Plan (2023-2050) includes a community-based rainwater harvesting and safe storage program for salinity-prone coastal areas by installing rainwater harvesting programs and training communities for its maintenance. Among the technologies most widely used, Reverse Osmosis (RO) is the most widely used. RO systems require uninterrupted power to function properly; hence, they cannot meet the water demand, especially in the dry season, when these areas face unprecedented loadshedding (Khan, 2025).

“

The water crisis here is severe. There is no source of freshwater—every drop is saline. Even for a single glass of drinking water, I have to buy it. That’s how desperate our situation has become.

- Resident from Gabura Union.

”

### Economy

Lack of employment and income-generation opportunities is a key economic issue in the regions we have visited. Common sources of employment include brick fields, driving, and other informal work. There is a strong tendency toward seasonal employment, where people work for only 6–7 months of the year and remain unemployed for the rest. Child labor is also present in Satkhira, largely due to the area’s economic conditions. It stems from poverty, parental illiteracy, and weak enforcement of child protection laws. According to the Child Labour Act of 1974, any person who employs a child in their workplace is subject to a fine of Tk 1,000. Furthermore, Section 34 of the same Act states that if an employer tortures or abuses a child labourer under the age of 16, they may face up to two years of imprisonment, a Tk 1,000 fine, or both. (Government of Bangladesh, 2006) However, in practice, shop owners, factory owners, and others rarely comply with or enforce these legal provisions (The Financial Express, 2012). Although primary education is legally compulsory, many poor families rely on their children’s income because of inadequate social safety nets and limited local



monitoring. Funding gaps in education and welfare programs allow the cycle of poverty-driven child labor to persist (The Financial Express, 2012). Satkhira has several promising export products, and the fisheries sector holds significant potential. To promote the country's diverse range of locally produced goods like these, export diversification is crucial. However, Bangladesh's export earnings remain heavily reliant on the ready-made garments sector. Diversification efforts are hindered by several challenges, including low levels of technological advancement, inconsistent trade policies, environmental and compliance concerns, shortages of skilled labour, limited innovation and R&D capacity, poor logistics infrastructure, intense global competition, and restricted access to finance for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (The Financial Express, 2025). The fisheries sector faces multiple challenges, including salinity, flooding, high feed costs, disease, and poor-quality post-larvae, which result in substantial losses for small farmers (Rezoana et. al, 2023). Weak regulation, limited access to credit, and insufficient insurance mechanisms hinder effective responses and reduce sector resilience. Residents also face difficulties in accessing low-interest loans, primarily due to the severe impacts of climate change, limited financial infrastructure, and institutional hurdles (Mohiuddin, & Nowreen, 2023). Despite several positive initiatives by authorities and relevant stakeholders, such as the iDea Project, a2i, Startup Bangladesh Limited, and various private incubators, small entrepreneurs in Bangladesh continue to face numerous challenges. These include limited access to finance, lack of mentorship, inadequate infrastructure, restricted market access, bureaucratic hurdles, uncoordinated strategies among ministries, and societal pressures that discourage entrepreneurship, as highlighted in a UNDP study (United Nations Development Programme, 2021). Additionally, in Satkhira local influential leaders sometimes forcibly take money or goods on credit from local businesses, acting as a disincentive for entrepreneurship. This problem is further compounded by weak oversight and inadequate law enforcement. Despite these challenges, there is a promising sector of youth entrepreneurship that can be tapped into. Providing appropriate incentives and support could help unlock this potential, offering a pathway toward economic development and improved livelihoods in Satkhira.



“

I have applied for loans in many different government banks, but I didn't get approval on any. So, I had to get the loan from a private bank, where the interest rate is high. If the government could lower the interest rates on such loans, entrepreneurs could benefit greatly.

- Local Business Owner

”

#### Law and Governance

Bribes in the government offices for basic services and corruption in distribution of water related resources are major issues in the region. A youth volunteer told us, “In the government's initiative for providing water tanks, we had to secretly pay the local representatives and brokers to receive those. We got the water tank after paying. Government job holders or well-off families received water tanks, but those who needed them the most were deprived. Even if it is unfortunate, it's the truth.”. In regular administrative work such as issuance of birth certificates, trade licencss etc. the locals have to bribe in almost every step throughout the process. Complaints regarding these bribes often go unaddressed.

On 27 May 2025, the Anti Corruption Commission (ACC) raided the Nagorghata Union Land Office and caught Assistant Union Land Officer Abdul Mukit, who was hiding bribe money in the dustbin. He was illegally charging informal money for routine land office services. (The Business Standard Report, 2025). Similarly, in Islamkati Union Land Office in Tala upazilla, over 6 thousand taka was illegally charged for land services officially worth only one thousand five hundred taka. (Sayid, 2024).

The question is why these problems are so prominent although Bangladesh does have strong anti-corruption laws and policies like The Anti-Corruption Commission Act (2004) and the National Integrity Strategy (2012) that collectively empower the ACC to impose investigations, prosecute corruption, and provide guidelines for transparency and accountability in the Public Offices. The persistence of bribery in local



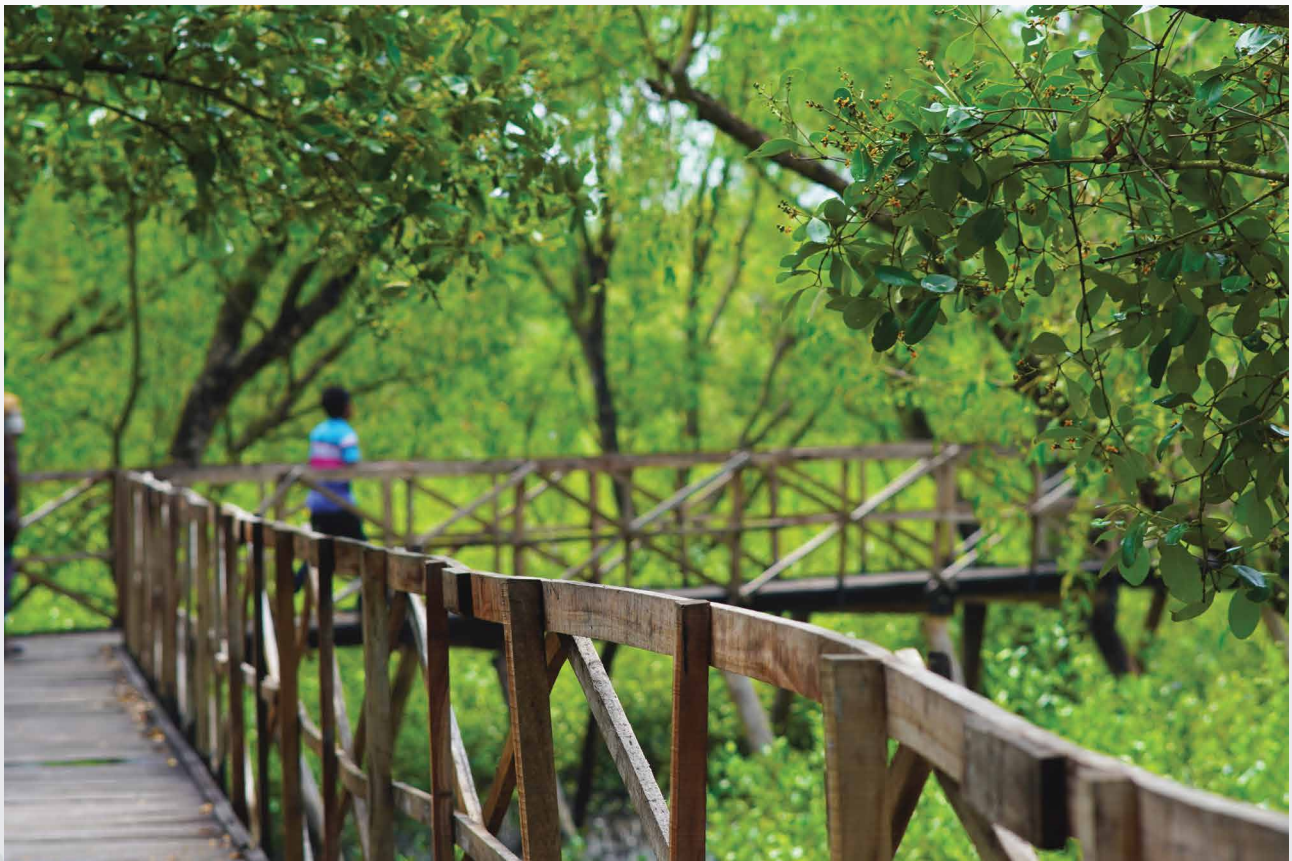
government offices takes place so prominently because the structure itself lacks transparency and accountability in the whole administrative process. This allows the officials to exploit their official positions for personal gain. The citizens also have a stake in it as they feel compelled to bribe the officials for faster services or think that bribery is the structure. Finally, the absence of an effective grievance redress mechanism discourages citizens from reporting these corruption practices, fearing threats to their lives or no such impact on their complain

It clears out that while policies are on paper, the failure lies in the implementation mechanisms. The legal frameworks are not being able to be effectively enforced due to political inference, insufficient resources and manpower for monitoring and finally a goodwill. Financial constraints (lack of staffing, lack of funds to carry out audits, or to train officials, or to set up accessible grievance channels) are one of the issues in the implementation process is not the primary issue; rather, it is the systemic failure to enforce the existing laws and policies to hold corrupt officers accountable that perpetuates the problem.

“

To enter a government office, you must first pay the messenger/support staff. Then, while at the office, if [monetary] discussions do not coincide with the officers, they will send you back with the message, "It cannot be done today. Come back another time. I am quite busy. The task will not be completed, so you will have to return another time."

- Resident from Gumantoli ”



## Recommendations from the People

### Education and Skills

- More frequent teacher's training according to curriculum changes
- Restructuring the salary scale of teachers taking their financial condition into account.
- Public-private partnership towards designing skill development initiatives and including newer sectors into them to attract more youths.
- Proper monitoring of the presence and performance of the teachers and ensuring accountability by the school committee.
- Strict legal action against gambling by the local government.



### Healthcare

- Improving health and supporting infrastructure in order to reduce access barriers
- Ensuring strict accountability from the health workforce involved in government healthcare service delivery, including doctors, nurses etc.
- Ensuring regular provision of medicines and related resources to union level healthcare facilities.
- Creating Awareness on Antimicrobial Resistance and Strictly Regulating the Sale of Antibiotics
- Addressing the underlying economic and awareness related factors responsible for child marriage.



### Environment and climate change

- Strict monitoring of the distribution channels related to safe water and natural disaster related provisions
- Establishment of cyclone centers in vulnerable regions with separate facilities for women.



### Economy

- Designing special loan programmes and incentives to encourage youth entrepreneurship

### Law and Governance

- Strict monitoring of the distribution of social security services (e.g. widow allowance, old age allowance)
- Strict enforcement of laws in terms of bribes and other exchanges in government offices.
- Digitalization of Administrative Processes, reduces the complex procedures that push for bribery.



# Satkhira in our Lense





# NETROKONA

## Insights from Durgapur

Netrokona, situated at the east of the Brahmaputra River, is proud of its ancient heritage, which is replete with a variety of traditional events and narratives. This region became appropriate for human habitation after emerging from the depths of the sea, as evidenced by a variety of theoretical analyses. The watercourses of the present-day Netrokona district, which originate at the foothills of the Garo Hills, consist of the meandering rivers Kangsha, Someshwari, Goneshwari, Moheshwari, Gaurautra, and other tributaries. The southeast is the direction of flow for each watercourse in this district. Consequently, the northern region of the district is elevated, and the land progressively descends toward the southeast (National Information Portal, 2025). Netrokona spans 2,794.28 square kilometers. The district's literacy rate is 66.25%, with a population of 2,323,187 (BBS, 2022; National Information Portal, 2025). The district has the potential to become a center of ceramic and glass industry, tourism, and freshwater fish production as a result of its natural resources, as per the Bangladesh National Information Portal. The district is confronted with substantial obstacles, despite the potential benefits. The mouth of the Atrakhali, a branch of the Someshwari River, has been obstructed as a result of unplanned sand extraction. Various government and non-government institutions, roads, bridges, and hundreds of dwellings in the region are at risk. According to reports, accidents involving sand-lad-

en vehicles result in an average of 25 fatalities annually on this road. (Chakraborty, 2025). Numerous residents have experienced hearing impairments as a result of the continuous, loud din generated by dredgers. Extinct from the river are numerous aquatic animals and fish species, including the rare Mahashol (Chakraborty, 2025).

## Findings

### Healthcare

The healthcare sector in Durgapur, Netrokona is currently experiencing a multifaceted crisis, which is characterized by a lack of accessibility, affordability, and availability. Although government health professionals do visit the village, their presence is inconsistent and infrequent. The primary healthcare delivery point in Kamarkhali, the local government hospital, is critically under-resourced. Despite the presence of some physicians and nurses, there is a persistent and severe shortage of essential medicines. Despite the presence of professional medical personnel, this deficiency necessitates patients to seek treatment elsewhere, regardless of their age, from infants to the elderly. Government healthcare is the sole affordable alternative for the majority of rural residents, who are confronted with destitution and unstable livelihoods. In severe instances, families are frequently

denied access to government facilities in Durgapur due to a shortage of available beds and medications, which leaves them with no choice but to seek private care. The majority of individuals with limited financial resources who seek treatment at government institutions are unable to obtain the necessary medications or support. The residents are required to travel to the Upazila Health Complex for any specialized or emergency care. This journey necessitates crossing the Someshwari river, a procedure that frequently necessitates a wait of at least 30 minutes. These delays can be catastrophic in medical emergencies, such as deliveries or critical health episodes. The absence of a bridge has led to the tragic fatalities of patients and the occurrence of accidents. Residents are obliged to abandon public facilities wholly due to these systemic malfunctions. Typically, they seek health-care from private clinics and pharmacies. Nevertheless, this privatized solution is financially unsustainable and presents significant health risks, including the consumption of unnecessary or incorrect medications. The inhabitants of Kollagora and Gaokanda, in particular, conveyed their necessity for a bridge to traverse the Someshwari river. A bridge over the river would be extremely beneficial for the residents of these regions, as it would simplify the process of traveling to the (upazila) health complex. In the event that this is not feasible, it would be extremely beneficial to appoint qualified physicians and nurses to the union health complex. Healthcare services and treatment could be promptly accessed by the residents of these regions.



The issues of AMR, absenteeism and shortage of healthcare physicians are common to this field report as well. Additionally, the local healthcare facility was found to be severely under-resourced. This can primarily be attributed to poor annual health budget allocation, which has been consistently less than 1% of the total GDP (Bitran et al., 2023). To worsen the situation, strict Public Finance Management (PFM) rules hinder proper utilization of the budget. Need based financing and result based financing are near non-existent in the health sector of Bangladesh. The issues associated with taking health services from private clinics and pharmacies are quality and affordability. As stated earlier, out-of-pocket-

payments are staggeringly high, moreover, the private clinics undergo no quality surveillance and monitoring since there exists no accreditation system for private facilities in Bangladesh (Bitran et al., 2023).

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The people who can't afford the medicines are the ones who run to government hospitals. But they don't receive the necessary services or medications there.

-Resident of Kamarkhali.

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#### Environment and Climate Change

One of the primary challenges that the residents of Durgapur, Netrokona, encounter is river erosion. The river has destroyed the residences of a significant number of them. The land has been completely eroded. The river erosion issue has commenced as a result of the use of dredgers. The residents also reported issues such as headaches, fever, and sound pollution due to this. The tubewells had dried up as a result of the installation of the dredger. The issue can be partially resolved by prohibiting the large-scale sand extraction and the use of dredgers in the river, but it is not a complete solution. Erosion is also significantly influenced by flash floods. Occasionally, the current accumulates gradually. River erosion occurs when the current is flowing at a high speed. According to a resident, approximately 10-15 feet of land are devastated following each flood. Erosion may also be precipitated by heavy rainfall. Consequently, individuals who possess land along the river may experience a loss of 2-3 decimals during each inundation. If they continue to lose portions of their land in this manner, they eventually end up losing their homes. Subsequently, the individual possesses no residence and lacks the financial resources to acquire additional property. According to a resident of Durgapur, there is no alternative location in the government hillocks. The financial situation of the population is such that they are unable to afford even three meals per day, and the expenses associated with treatment and medication are already substantial. The construction of a dam to permanently prevent the occurrence of floods is essential for the residents of these vulnerable areas, as erosion can occur at any time. The safe water issue in the region is also crucial. Tube wells are not feasible in certain areas of Durgapur due to ground



water depletion. Rather, the people have to excavate wells in order to collect water. Some residents of Ranikhong village expressed that they require water more than they require sustenance, and they urged the government to prioritize the provision of safe drinking water.



The government had designated the Someshwari River, flowing through Durgapur eligible for sand excavation in 2005 and allowed dredging of the river to improve its navigability. The area was leased out to five sand quarries, but this turned into a tool used by the influential locals to destroy the river (Rahman, Chakroborty, 2023). The residents around the area suffer from various physical distresses, but there is no one to complain to, as the big corporations carrying out these activities are too powerful. The type of dredging activities in the Someshwari river flowing through Durgapur, Netrokona, is a clear violation of the Bangladesh Balumahal and Soil Management Act, 2023, which prohibits sand and soil extraction from farmlands, damage to river routes, and environmental damage, and states such activity as a punishable offence (Soil Management Act, 2023). The machines that are being used around the clock, as it was permitted by the district administration, locally called “Bangla dredgers,” are also illegal to use (Hossain, 2023). As per the law, the dredgers can be used only after carrying out a hydrological survey (People’s Republic of Bangladesh, 2010; Dhaka Tribune, 2024), but no such action takes place, and every day about 2.1 million cubic feet of sand and pebbles are extracted (Rahman, Chakroborty, 2023). To end this illegal practice, the Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA) filed a writ petition with a High Court bench in 2015 (Public Interest Litigation (PIL), 2015), in response to which the High Court issued a rule upon the government asking why leasing out the sand quarries should not be made illegal and directed the local administration to regulate and monitor the dredging activities. Although policies exist for providing safe drinking water, the remote location of some hilly areas in Durgapur is not equipped with the resources to implement them; it is difficult to install deep tube-wells in hilly areas due to the stones. The authorities are informed and are trying to come up with a solution (Farash, 2024).

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Sometimes, river erosion can also occur due to heavy rainfalls. Those who own lands on the riverside, say 4-8 decimals, might lose up to 2-3 decimals in every flooding. If they keep losing parts of their lands in this way, one day they’ll lose their place to live.

-Resident of Kamarkhali

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### Economy

In Durgapur, Netrokona, the scarcity of employment opportunities is a significant economic concern. The overall economic situation in Netrokona district is unsatisfactory, with key sectors such as growth centers, vocational and technical schools, government offices, small-scale industries, bank branches, and government employment being few in number. This scarcity contributes to the overall lack of local employment opportunities. Coal extraction, agricultural work, small businesses, and daily labor are the primary sources of income for residents. Occasionally, individuals relocate to Dhaka to work as domestic assistants or in beauty parlors due to the shortage of local employment. Most families rely on the income of a single member, making it challenging to meet regular household expenses. In the past, there were some daily labor opportunities, but these have significantly decreased. According to a resident of Ranikhong village, households that own estates or land would receive assistance with household chores, including the planting of rice seedlings, from impoverished women, while men engaged in uprooting seedlings and cultivating the fields. During the monsoon, those unable to secure employment would seek work at relatively affluent households to earn a living. This daily labor, previously referred to as Din Hajira, was compensated, but currently, coal resources are depleted, and daily labor opportunities have diminished further. Job opportunities in rural areas have declined over the past 11 years since 2013, indicating a stagnation in non-farm economic activities, according to the preliminary findings of the Economic Census 2024 (BBS, 2024). Bangladesh has formulated its National Employment Policy in 2022, however, according to experts, it needs to be restructured, and a rigorous implementation plan that involves more ministries beyond the Ministry of Labour

and Employment (Zaman, 2025). Educational limitations also contribute to the employment challenge. A secondary-level education is often insufficient for securing work, and many locals are unable to continue beyond this stage due to financial constraints. Despite these obstacles, the tourism sector presents significant employment potential. Netrokona is surrounded by natural beauty and attracts thousands of tourists annually. However, the tourism industry remains underdeveloped, lacking proper planning, sanitation, and adequate tourist services and accommodation (The Financial Express, 2023). Residents emphasize the need for government investment in local infrastructure, such as roads and bridges, as well as targeted development in the tourism sector. Developing tourism can generate employment opportunities for young people, helping them avoid harmful activities and enabling them to contribute meaningfully to their families and communities. By participating in development-related sectors, the youth could not only secure their livelihoods but also play a vital role in building a better society and a stronger nation.



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These days, we don't get work opportunities. We are struggling a lot. Before, there was work. We used to extract coal from the riverside. Daily labor opportunities have also become scarce  
-Resident from Ranikhong”

## Recommendations from the People

### Healthcare

- Enhancing health and supporting infrastructure, with a particular focus on the construction of a bridge over the Someshwari River to reduce access barriers
- Ensuring that the health workforce, which includes physicians and nurses, is held to a high standard of accountability in the delivery of government healthcare services.
- Ensuring the consistent supply of medicines and support for the health personnel to healthcare facilities at the union level.



### Environment and Climate Change

- The construction of a dam to permanently resolve the issue of river erosion.
- Provision of secure drinking water and pertinent resources for all.
- Preventing the establishment of dredgers on the riverside and the large-scale sand extraction.

### Economy

- Investing in the construction and development of local infrastructure
- Emphasizing the creation of local employment opportunities, with a particular emphasis on the tourism sector, in order to address the issue of local opportunity gaps



## Findings

### Education

Interviews were conducted with guardians, students, instructors, and government representatives. The absence of electricity, inadequate teacher retention in rural schools, and inadequate opportunities for Information and Communications Technology (ICT) skill development are the primary causes of educational and skill development challenges in rural and Char regions. There is a significant number of students from the Char regions who have successfully completed their education. Nevertheless, a significant number of them enroll in local educational institutions for a period of 1-2 months, only to relocate to the city and subsequently become irregular in their attendance. Additionally, it was noted that the low payoffs and the presence of lobbying prevent numerous young people from obtaining these positions in the region. The quality of teaching is ultimately compromised as a result of the significantly reduced number of teachers in the schools. In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of their study materials, students frequently require private tuition in addition to their regular classes. Despite the abundance of educational institutions in Rajshahi Division, the rural regions are plagued by significant barriers in employment opportunities, infrastructure and transportation. Women are more deprived of primary education than men, and there is a disparity in access between rural and urban areas. Lack of awareness, early marriage and gender stereotypes are the fundamental issues contributing to this. The absence of uniform educational standards also has an enduring effect, as evidenced by the extensive range of educational levels. For instance, despite the fact that tertiary education is offered in public, private, and colleges administered by the national university, the latter's students frequently do not have the same level of access to education, skill development, and career opportunities as their peers. Rajshahi's education-related issues reflect the common challenges seen across the country but particularly highlight the teacher shortage in Char areas. The teacher shortage in char areas is worsened by the lack of facilities and



government support. Teachers face poor working conditions, limited accommodation and lack of incentives, making it difficult to sustain their professional journey there. The inadequate government attention to remote areas causes poor teaching quality and high teacher migration, further weakening education in these regions (Shaplaneer, 2020). The shortage of head teachers and poor teacher retention result from inadequate budget provisions for competitive salaries and incentives, as well as weak implementation of teacher recruitment policies (Prothom Alo, 2025). The persistence of lobbying in teacher appointments points to flaws in policy transparency and governance. Unequal standards in tertiary education reflect insufficient policy focus on quality assurance and resource allocation, especially between national university colleges and other institutions.



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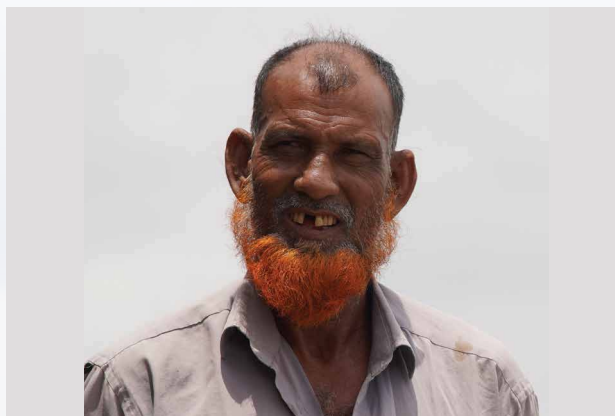
In rural areas, girls often get married off at an early age. They do not have the necessary awareness to educate their children, which contributes to the continued gender disparity in education. Another factor is the social stereotype. We still hear people say, “What good is there in educating girls?”

- A student of Rajshahi University

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## Healthcare

Doctors are primarily absent from the hospital of Char Ashariadah and only visit on a very rare occasion for a short amount of time. Residents have to seek treatment from the local quacks, as alternatively, they must travel to Rajshahi Medical College, which is located at a greater distance. In the event of an emergency, patients are transported to Rajshahi city by traversing the river. This necessitates the use of various types of vehicles, which can result in a substantial increase in commuting time. This can be life-threatening for high-risk patients. This has been an ongoing issue that has never been resolved, according to the residents of the Char Ashariadah union. Additionally, it was reported that the residents are unable to obtain the medications, despite the fact that the local government healthcare centers have a substantial supply. Healthcare service points are more accessible and diverse in the urban region, with both government and private institutions. Nevertheless, the quality of care provided by government hospitals is exceedingly substandard. Many tertiary-level government hospitals are overburdened with patients and are unable to provide comprehensive treatment for all. Additionally, there is a concern that the physicians are not delivering high-quality care; rather, they are preoccupied with their private practices. A medical center for students is located in the vicinity of Rajshahi University.



Despite the fact that it aims to facilitate students' access to healthcare, the providers frequently prescribe the same medication for all patients. This treatment is not only ineffective, but it can also result in harmful adverse effects if the incorrect medications are consumed. In the end, students must seek the services of private healthcare providers to address their healthcare requirements. According to young participants, mental health is also frequently overlooked, despite the high prevalence of mental health disorders, particularly among adolescents and young adults. This area requires attention due to the absence of mental health support mechanisms in educational institutions.

This report also highlights the issue of healthcare providers' absenteeism. This leads to the patients seeking healthcare directly from the district hospital. This renders the referral system ineffective. A BioMed Central (BMC) study has shown that 3 out of 5 patients seek healthcare from tertiary level facilities without being referred there (Deepto, 2024). The findings from this field visit revealed that the tertiary facilities are almost always overburdened. Apart from financial constraints limiting the resource capacities of these hospitals resulting from poor allocation and utilization of the health budget, a dysfunctional referral system worsens this situation even more.

The medical centers of the public universities often fail to provide the services they have been assigned to provide, and students are referred to other hospitals to avail those services. Both budgetary constraints and inefficient management have been found to be the underlying causes behind this failure (Shuvo, 2022). There exists no integrated policy or workplan common to these public universities to run these medical centers. The ineffectiveness of the mental health services, too, can be explained by this. A 2024 nationwide study conducted to assess the mental health of university students revealed that 55.9% of the students had poor mental health status (Ovi et al., 2024). Given such a poor situation, immediate formulation and implementation of mental health improvement measures targeted for university students should be initiated.

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I once went to Rajshahi Medical College for treatment. Upon arriving at the hospital, I saw there was a long queue of patients. I had to wait in the queue for 2 hours, and after that when it was my turn, the doctor didn't even listen to me properly

- A student of Rajshahi University

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## Economy

According to youth respondents from Rajshahi city, student employability is directly affected by a significant mismatch between the skills taught in tertiary education and those required in the real world. The absence of employment opportunities is a key economic concern across all the regions we visited, and Rajshahi is no exception. Compared to Dhaka, Rajshahi offers limited opportunities for students to participate in internships or apprenticeships, which restricts skill development and practical experience. Bangladesh's skill gap arises from outdated curricula, weak industry-academia collaboration, and limited technical training. Education often fails to align with market needs, leaving graduates unprepared for modern jobs (The Business Standard, 2025). ic and entrepreneurial potential remains largely untapped.



Insufficient vocational funding, lack of practical learning, and poor private-sector coordination further widen the gap between education and employability (The Business Standard, 2025). There are opportunities to develop entrepreneurial skills in various sectors in Rajshahi, particularly in agriculture and information technology, as noted by a government representative. However, the absence of a supportive environment, infrastructure, and favorable business conditions often discourages youth from pursuing entrepreneurship. The chars of Rajshahi, for instance, lack reliable electricity and well-maintained roads. More broadly, the business environment suffers from poor infrastructure, limited investment, and weak policy support. Chronic shortages of gas, electricity, and reliable transport hinder industrial growth, while stalled industrial parks and high land costs deter investors. Low policy prioritization and weak coordination among agencies further constrain development. Entrepreneurs, particularly women, face financing challenges and high transport costs, while limited marketing capacity and skill shortages restrict competitiveness. Without stronger infrastructure, improved access to finance, and robust entrepreneurship support systems, Rajshahi's industrial potential remains largely untapped (Chowdhary, 2024). Residents describe this situation as a state of discon-

nection. Agricultural laborers, for instance, encounter substantial obstacles in obtaining fair prices for their produce due to the presence of syndicates and intermediaries. The e-commerce sector in Rajshahi also holds latent potential, supported by abundant productive land and a large pool of qualified laborers. Potential export products, such as mango, silk, and jaggery, further strengthen this opportunity. However, e-commerce entrepreneurs face significant disadvantages, including lack of investment, inadequate supportive environments, insufficient leadership, and poor logistics. Rural e-commerce faces additional constraints, including low internet and smartphone penetration, limited digital literacy, weak demand, and inadequate logistical infrastructure, such as the absence of cold chains (The Financial Express, 2022). Limited funding restricts private investment in technology, distribution networks, and training programs. Systemic barriers, including low incomes, dense local retail networks, and poor transport infrastructure, reduce the economic feasibility of rural e-commerce (The Financial Express, 2022). Weak coordination between government, private sector, and local communities further slows scalable growth. Without targeted interventions to address these gaps, Rajshahi's economic and entrepreneurial potential remains largely untapped.

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The immense potential of establishing small, medium and large-scale industries in Rajshahi is due to its adequacy of skilled manpower and availability of fertile lands. But entrepreneurs often get discouraged when they cannot commercialize their products due to logistical and incentive-related barriers

- A student of Rajshahi University

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## Law and Governance

Bribes in the government offices for basic services and corruption in distribution of water related resources are major issues in the region. A youth volunteer told us, "In the government's initiative for providing water tanks, we had to secretly pay the local representatives and brokers to receive those. We got the water tank after paying. Government job holders or well-off families received water tanks, but those who needed them the most were deprived. Even if it is unfortunate, it's the truth.". In regular administrative work such as issuance of birth certificates, trade licencss etc. the locals have to bribe in almost every step throughout the process. Complaints regarding these bribes often go unaddressed.



On 27 May 2025, ACC raided the Nagorghata Union Land Office and caught an Assistant Union Land Officer, who was hiding bribe money in the dustbin. He was illegally charging informal money for routine land office services. (The Business Standard Report, 2025). Similarly, in Islamkati Union Land Office in Tala upazilla, over 6 thousand taka was illegally charged for land services officially worth only one thousand five hundred taka. (Sayid, 2024)



The question is why these problems are so prominent although Bangladesh does have strong anti-corruption laws and policies like The Anti-Corruption Commission Act (2004) and the National Integrity Strategy (2012) that collectively empower the ACC to impose investigations, prosecute corruption, and provide guidelines for transparency and accountability in the Public Offices. The persistence of bribery in local government offices takes place so prominently because the structure itself lacks transparency and accountability in the whole administrative process. This allows the officials to exploit their official positions for personal gain. The citizens also have a stake in it as they feel compelled to bribe the officials for faster services or think that bribery is the structure. Finally, the absence of an effective grievance redress mechanism discourages citizens from reporting these corruption practices, fearing threats to their lives or no such impact on their complaints. All these circular problems create a cycle of corruption.

It clears out that while policies are on paper, the failure lies in the implementation mechanisms. The legal frameworks are not being able to be effectively enforced due to political inference, insufficient resources and manpower for monitoring and finally a goodwill. Financial constraints (lack of staffing, lack of funds to carry out audits, or to train officials, or to set up accessible grievance channels) are one of the issues in the implementation process is not the primary issue; rather, it is the systemic failure to enforce the existing laws and policies to hold corrupt officers accountable that perpetuates the problem.

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If the Ghaat system is completely eliminated, then we, the 50,000 people of Ashariadah union will be saved”

- Resident of Char Ashariada

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## Recommendations from the People

### Education and Skills

- Appointing graduates from the char region in the local educational institutions with appropriate incentives in order to ensure retention.
- Ensuring electricity coverage in rural regions.
- Creating apprenticeships, part-time job opportunities and promoting industry academia collaboration to address the skill gap among tertiary level students.
- Establishment of ICT training centers to equip the youths with appropriate skills.



### Healthcare

- Ensuring strict accountability from the health workforce involved in government healthcare service delivery, including doctors, nurses etc to reduce absenteeism.
- Ensuring regular provision and strict monitoring of the distribution of medicines in the healthcare facilities.
- Establishing mental health support mechanisms in educational institutions

### Economy

- Providing incentives and training to promote the export of Rajshahi's specialties
- Promoting industrialization to create local job opportunities for the youth
- Designing special loan programmes and incentives to encourage youth entrepreneurship

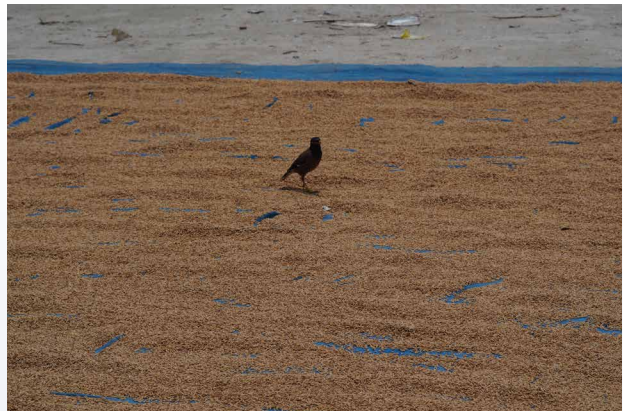


### Law and Governance

- Elimination of "Ghaat" system in the river routes.
- Reform lease policy through establishment of a realistic lease process, the formation of community based management committees, and transparent bidding.
- Strict enforcement anti-bribe laws in the government offices.



## Rajshahi in our Lense





# CHATTOGRAM

Insights from Chattogram Sadar, Teknaf and Cox's Bazar

Chattogram District is an administrative region in the Chattogram Division of southeastern Bangladesh. With its hills, sea, valleys, and forests, no other district in Bangladesh matches Chattogram in geographical diversity. The district is bordered by Feni District and the Indian state of Tripura to the north, Cox's Bazar District to the south, Bandarban, Rangamati, and Khagrachhari Districts to the east, and Noakhali District, along with the Bay of Bengal to the west. The island region of Sandwip is also part of Chattogram. Covering an area of 5,283 square kilometers, the district has a population density of about 1,497 people per square kilometer. The literacy rate stands at 76.7% (BBS, 2022). The region is home to notable institutions such as the University of Chattogram, the Military Academy and the Chattogram Export Processing Zone ((National Information Portal, 2025). Chattogram faces multidimensional issues in its varied regions. The government tertiary care providing hospital, Chattogram Medical College Hospital has a capacity of 2,200 patients, but the number of admitted patients usually ranges from 3,500 to 4,000 (Bangla Tribune, 2024). In the island regions, this resource problem becomes more dire. Saint Martin's Union, the coral island of the Bay of Bengal, has a population of about 11,000. Although the island has a 20-bed hospital, there is only one doctor available there. Patients often have to cross a 34-kilometer waterway to Teknaf, if they want to receive inpatient treatment (Rahman, 2025) In terms of

environmental issues, widespread plastic contamination, poor waste management and waterlogging are a few of the most significant ones. In Bangladesh, more than 800,000 tons of plastic waste are generated every year. A significant portion of Chattogram city's plastic waste flows into the Bay of Bengal through the Karnaphuli River, creating a serious threat to the environment, fisheries resources, and public health (Kaler Kantho, 2025). Despite being a port region and having immense economic importance, Chattogram has almost half a million unemployed people, which is the second highest in Bangladesh (Prothom Alo, 2025). These multidimensional problems of the region affect the general people significantly. Our findings from visiting different areas further delve into these issues.



## Findings

### Education

Affordability of costs of education is a major issue in the beach areas. Sometimes parents cannot pay for the costs of books and related materials, tuition and exam fees. Because of that, sometimes even though students are admitted to schools, they cannot appear in the exams. Due to this, a lot of people who are living in poverty drop out after class 5 or 6.



According to a young social worker, the number of dropouts is 100-150 every year in Hafeznagar. And for those who have completed graduation, lack of skills is a major issue which affects employability. Due to these factors, sometimes young people get involved in illicit activities. Even though there are training opportunities, scholarships and other initiatives, the people are not aware of them. A youth activist from Bakalia reported that the student teacher ratio is very high in the schools. Proper monitoring of the students and providing quality teaching becomes almost impossible when there is only 1 teacher for a class of 100 students. In Cox's Bazar, the schools lack skilled teachers and supporting equipment such as lab facilities. There is an inadequacy of educational institutions and skill development opportunities. In that region, students often drop out after class 10. Very few students make it to the higher education level. Similar issues persist in the hill tracts of Chattogram. According to a respondent, schools there have bare minimum facilities and there is no scope for extracurricular activities or skill development, making it a huge challenge for the people to access quality education. This contributes to widening the disparity in education between the urban and remote regions. The root causes of educational challenges in Chattogram's beach and hill tracts areas are primarily linked to financial constraints, lack of skill development and poor awareness of available support systems. The cause of poverty is closely tied to

limited localized employment opportunities. Even with abundant fish resources restricted fishing practices, dependency on middlemen, limited access to markets and absence of government support prevent local earning sources from effectively reducing poverty in the fishing community. This financial strain forces families to involve children in work rather than education (Rouf & Rabbani,2006). Poorly managed resource allocation and lack of precise data on educational needs further hinder effective planning and support for these marginalized regions. Overcrowded classrooms are primarily due to a shortage of qualified teachers, combined with a rising number of students enrolling in schools. Slow teacher recruitment and uneven distribution, tendency to avoid joining schools from remote areas exacerbate the issue. Additionally, limited school infrastructure and budget constraints restrict the ability to create more classrooms or hire additional teachers, further resulting in overcrowding. According to a validation report from the Asian Development Bank, the project completion report for the Chittagong Hill Tracts Rural Development Project did not conduct an outcome survey. The effectiveness of many development projects in the CHT is unclear due to lack of follow-up studies. Also, development projects have been designed with little input from indigenous communities, leading to initiatives that fail to align with the local needs and aspirations. Therefore, even with numerous skill development initiatives, the unemployment rate and skill mismatch persisted.

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In the schools that I have visited, I have seen that students are playing outside when the classes are ongoing. This occurs due to a lack of monitoring from the teacher. How can one teacher monitor every student when there are over 100 students in one class?

- Youth Activist from Bakalia

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## Healthcare

In Teknaf, awareness regarding antibiotic consumption is very low. In cases of normal fever, people often go to quacks or local pharmacies. They buy antibiotics to get healed quickly, at the cost of their immunity. This puts them at a major risk of developing antimicrobial resistance. The primary healthcare center in Teknaf is very well structured according to the locals. But it suffers from a shortage of workforce to provide treatment for everyone. The hospital also lacks an effective ambulance system. There are no funds available for maintaining the only ambulance in the hospital. Sometimes the doctors pay out of pocket for its maintenance, which is not a sustainable solution. Mental health overall is overlooked for the most part. According to a young respondent, suicide is a major cause of death for young people, adding to that is the social stigma around mental health, which gravely affects treatment seeking behaviour. Youths often cannot access mental health support, which pushes them to cope in other ways which are not healthy.



Along with AMR, this field report reveals the pressing issue of healthcare professional shortage in the health sector of Bangladesh. Only 1.1 doctors per 10,000 population (as opposed to 10 per 10000 prescribed by WHO) are available in the rural areas of Bangladesh and less than 20% of the health workforce serves the 70% of the population of the country that live in rural areas (Islam et al., 2024). So, both shortage and skewed distribution of healthcare professionals prevail in the rural areas. Although the Bangladesh Health Workforce Strategy 2024 has addressed the situation and set forth 11 strategic plans covering all the aspects crucial for an effective health workforce, visible outcomes are yet to be seen (Bangladesh Health Workforce Strategy 2024, n.d.). As far as mental health is concerned, less than 0.5% of the total health budget is allocated for mental health services, of which 67% is dedicated to mental hospitals. Moreover, only 0.49% of the total health workforce is trained to provide mental health services (Hasan et al., 2021). Along with this acute shortage, mental health professionals' distribution is also skewed- the

density of psychiatrists and psychiatric nurses is 5 times higher in Dhaka compared to the rest of the country. High social stigma, inequalities and several other socioeconomic factors further worsen the situation (Hasan et al., 2021). The COVID 19 pandemic has further worsened the mental health situation in Bangladesh (Haque et al., 2023). Finally, recent studies suggest that those injured in the July mass uprising had alarmingly high rates of Depression and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (Ahsan et al., 2025). All these issues significantly affect the overall mental health profile of Bangladesh.

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In my locality, there are lots of hospitals. However, the quality of care is dissatisfactory as we don't have highly qualified doctors here. Specialist doctors may visit once or twice a week, which isn't adequate for the healthcare needs. My friend's father died due to heart issues, just because he couldn't get proper treatment here.

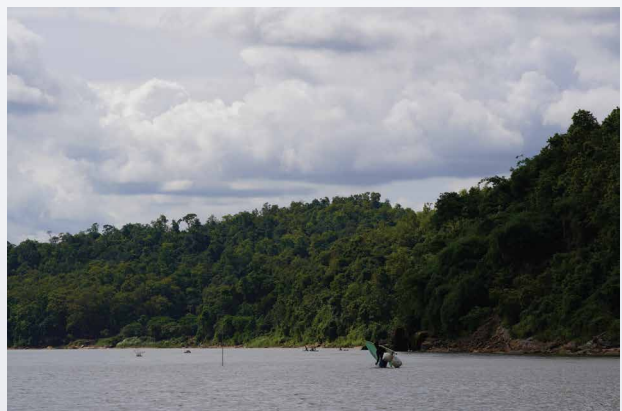
- A Student of Chattogram University

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## Environment

Scarcity of cyclone centers in environmentally sensitive areas like Teknaf is a major concern. According to a resident, when a storm comes, everyone must rush to the local shelter in a madrasa. But that madrasa infrastructure is so weak that just three waves could break it apart and wash it into the sea. That is why they usually try to stay at Shahabuddin Uttarpara's cyclone center. Transporting the elderly, women, and children to a faraway cyclone center becomes tough for the residents during times of storms. In the Hlishahar area, waterlogging is a major issue. Even with a minor amount of rainfall, the roads get completely submerged. This causes accidents and makes transporting emergency patients extremely difficult. Recently, a tragic incident occurred where a child lost their life after falling into an open manhole. A respondent from Noakhali shared that last year's floods

## Netrokona in our Lense





# RAJSHAHI

Insights from Tanore, Char Ashariyadah and Rajshahi City

Nestled in northern Bangladesh, Rajshahi is a city steeped in history, tracing its origins to the ancient settlement of Pundravardhana. Its strategic and fertile lands have witnessed the reigns of the Maurya, Gupta, Pala, Sena, Mughal, and British empires. The city's name, "Rajshahi," meaning "Land of Kings," is a testament to its regal past (National Information Portal, 2025). Encompassing 2,407.1 square kilometers and home to a population of nearly three million, the region is characterized by the vast Padma River to the south and lush mango orchards to the east, west, and north. Agriculture forms the backbone of the local economy, while Rajshahi is nationally renowned for its silk production, an industry formally supported by the establishment of the Silk Board in 1977. Other vital cottage industries include weaving, bamboo and cane craftsmanship, goldsmithing, blacksmithing, pottery, and woodwork (National Information Portal, 2025). Despite its rich heritage, Rajshahi faces significant contemporary challenges in education, healthcare, and governance that hinder its development and equity.

According to the Rajshahi District Education Office, there are a total of 1,057 primary schools across the nine upazilas of the district, including Rajshahi City Corporation. Of these, 389 schools currently lack head teachers (Khoborer Kagoj, 2025).

As a result, both decision-making and the normal teaching process in these schools are being disrupted. Rajshahi district has around 245 community clinics. These clinics used to provide villagers with access to medicine. However, for several months, the lack of medicine supply has caused severe difficulties for poor and rural communities (Hasan, 2025). Environmentally, Rajshahi is a drought-prone area and often suffers from riverbank erosion, often has grave consequences on the people living in the region. After crossing the Padma River lies Char Ashariadah, a 36-square-kilometer union in Godagari upazila of Rajshahi district. The area faces persistent annual river erosion, which continues to consume significant portions of land. In the current season alone, approximately 40 meters of land across four villages have been eroded, resulting in the displacement of at least 150 families (Abdullah, 2025). The multifaceted and interconnected array of problems affects the regular lives of the people living in different parts of Rajshahi. Our field visits to different parts of Rajshahi were aimed towards getting a deeper understanding of the challenges, aspirations and recommendations of the people.



persisted for over a month, and their community is still suffering from the resulting losses. As a result, waterborne diseases have increased alarmingly in the lower regions and the char regions of Noakhali. The distribution of government assistance was also hardly equitable. Economically, the agriculture sector has suffered greatly due to floods. But the farmers have not been compensated for it. For the char regions, riverbank erosion is a major issue. In these cases, government representatives take temporary solutions (such as using sand sacks, stones, etc.). These do not sustain in the long term. In Hafeznagar, a major issue is the lack of a central waste management system. The household waste of 1200 families is piled up on the roadside or in the open fields, which is creating significant health risks. Despite repeated advocacy, the locals do not comply with proper waste management processes. Even in the residential areas, people throw away their trash randomly. For a long time, household wastes would be dumped into the local canals; however, recent efforts by the local government have been able to put a stop to it. Unplanned urbanization is another major issue. A respondent from Brahmanbaria, currently residing in Chattogram, let us know that recently, just to expand the road, 64 trees have been cut down, without taking any compensatory measures. Repeated deforestation in unplanned urbanization is resulting in increased temperature and lower rates of rainfall.



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When a cyclone occurs, the whole house and everything in it is blown away. We are forced to take shelter at Shahabuddin Uttarpara’s school. The children are tossed around by the winds during cyclones, and we suffer greatly just to get there. If there are no vehicles available, we can’t even reach the shelter.

--A Fisherman from Teknaf.

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### Economy

The Bakalia thana of Chattogram is home to overpopulated slums, with residents migrating from various regions. Youths in this area face significant challenges in employment and skill development due to poverty and lack of familial support.



While Chattogram has potential exports including garments and manufactured goods, and hosts numerous industries primarily focused on export-oriented production, employment opportunities for local youth remain limited. A respondent from Lakshmipur, now living in Chattogram, highlighted that the scarcity of local work opportunities drives many to migrate to the Middle East or other countries, often for low-skilled jobs. Similar trends are observed in Teknaf, where some youths resort to illegal activities such as smuggling due

to the lack of localized employment options. Youth unemployment in Bangladesh is rising largely due to a persistent skills gap rather than short-term economic fluctuations (The Financial Express, 2022). Many young people lack the technical and vocational skills required for both white- and blue-collar jobs, leaving them unprepared for quality employment. Policy failures, including an undirected education system, insufficient integration of skill development into government planning, and lack of monitoring of vocational institutes' capacities, exacerbate the issue (The Financial Express, 2022). Limited access to funding restricts resources, technology, and manpower for effective training, while systemic challenges such as weak sector-specific training, low value addition in labor, and reliance on unskilled labor for exports further worsen youth unemployment (The Financial Express, 2022). Without sustained, targeted skill development, Bangladesh's growing youth workforce cannot fully contribute to economic growth or leverage the country's demographic advantage. Chattogram's coastal areas have an array of specialty goods, including fish and betel nuts, and tourism represents a major untapped economic sector. However, the lack of supporting infrastructure limits the potential to attract tourists. In Teknaf, a large community of fishermen relies on the Naf River for their livelihoods. These fishermen face immense hardships and financial struggles, partly because they are only able to set their nets once per day, making it difficult to cover regular expenses. Many families involve their children in fishing to meet education and household costs. The Naf River is their primary source of income, and fishing bans severely restrict their ability to earn a living. Fishermen along the Naf River face compounded challenges due to a prolonged fishing ban, security threats from the Myanmar-based Arakan Army, and lack of state support (The Business Standard, 2023). The ban, initially imposed for security reasons, has persisted for over eight years, depriving more than 5,000 families of their main income (The Business Standard, 2023). Boats remain idle and nets rot, leading to widespread poverty, food insecurity, and economic precarity. The absence of alternative livelihood programs prevents recovery and forces families into increasingly desperate situations. Without immediate intervention, these communities' traditional way of life and survival remain at serious risk.



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“If the Naf River is closed, we have no option but to starve or take poison. There is no other work here except fishing. We don't know how to dig soil, we don't know farming, we don't know anything other than fishing with nets.

-A Fisherman from Teknaf.

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#### Law and governance

Significant irregularities have been reported at the land office in Teknaf, where brokers allegedly extort money from citizens, with sums ranging from 10,000 to 100,000 Taka. Furthermore, residents face issues with irregular electricity bill calculations. In Hafeznagar, Chattogram, women's political participation remains critically low due to a general lack of political awareness. This environment prevents many women from voting comfortably. Despite the presence of women representatives at the parliamentary level, their representation in local, grassroots politics is still minimal. In the industrial areas, a significant portion of the workers are women. But in the factories, they have to work for more than 8 hours, which is not monitored. Many factories do not pay the workers on time. Reports from Dainik Bangla explore that in the coastal regions including Teknaf, local brokers often demand extra payments for general government office work. These include moving files and processing documents, reflecting the widespread corruption alongside harassment of land-service seekers (Dainik Bangla, 2023).



The Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006 (amended in 2018) is there as the law for the laborers, but in reality it is failing because of weak enforcement mechanisms, entrenched corruption, and inadequate factory inspections in the industrial zones. In Teknaf, the absence of strong oversight and digital monitoring system is allowing brokers to exploit the citizens freely. Somewhere, the monitoring system itself is either absent or being manipulated by the management. Inspecting authorities often lack logistical capacity to conduct regular visits. Moreover, factory owners frequently exploit the loopholes in the system and delay or sometimes avoid the wage payments (Yousuf, 2025). As a result, the policy's protective intent, to ensure fair working hours and timely payments, remains unimplemented, leaving the workers, especially women, vulnerable to further exploitation.



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Women at the grassroots level are often told that there are reserved seats for them in the parliament. Through this statement, women are barred from competing outside of the reserved seats. I have not seen any female MP candidate competing in the mainstream against male candidates. Even if that has happened, it is rare.

-Youth Activist from Bakalia

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## Recommendations from the People

### Education and Skills

- Introducing systems of including dropouts into the schooling system. This can be done through introducing lower fees for the poor households, and Friday or evening classes for children involved in labor.
- Creating awareness about the existing skill development facilities to ensure utilization.
- Establishing information technology training centers for youths to equip themselves with 21st century skills.



### Healthcare

- Ensuring strict accountability from the health workforce involved in government healthcare service delivery, including doctors, nurses etc to reduce absenteeism.
- Creating Awareness on Antimicrobial Resistance and Strictly Regulating the Sale of Antibiotics.
- Establishing mental health support mechanisms in educational institutions.



### Economy

- Providing subsidies to the vulnerable communities like the fishermen in Teknaf.
- Creating local job opportunities for youths through investing in eco tourism.

### Environment

- Improving the infrastructure of the cyclone centers in climate sensitive zones.
- Addressing waterlogging issues by properly planned drainage systems and reconstruction of the roads.
- Taking permanent and sustainable preventive measures and using good quality materials for river erosion problems.
- Law enforcement and awareness generation to ensure effective waste management.
- Planned urbanization to balance infrastructure development and environmental maintenance.



### Law and Governance

- Strict monitoring and legal action against brokers in the local land offices.
- Creating awareness among people about their electoral rights and encouraging women's participation in politics.
- Strict monitoring of work hours and salary payment in the industrial factories by the government.
- Addressing Political Disinformation through Digital Literacy and Awareness.

# Chattogram in our Lense



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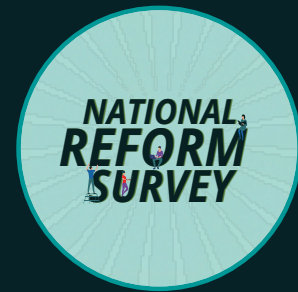




Findings from the  
**National  
Reform  
Survey 2025**

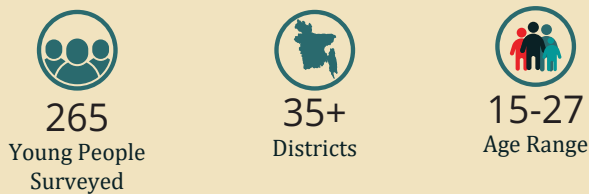


# Findings from the National Reform Survey 2025

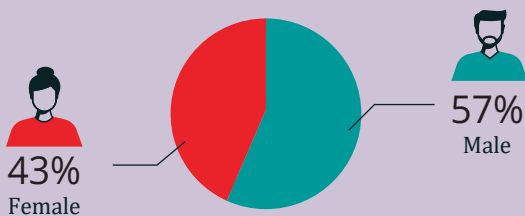


Young representatives from YPF have visited various regions across Bangladesh to engage directly with communities, gathering insights into their lived experiences, challenges, and aspirations as a part of the “One Land, Many Voices” initiative. Complementing these field visits, an online survey titled “National Reform Survey 2025” was conducted to capture youth perspectives and policy recommendations across five key sectors: education, law and governance, health-care, environment, and economy.

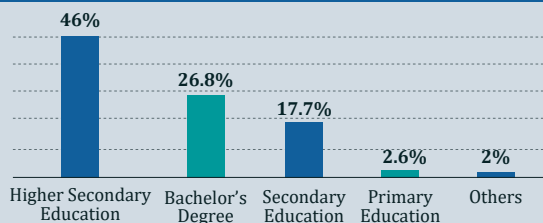
## Source of Data



## Gender Distribution

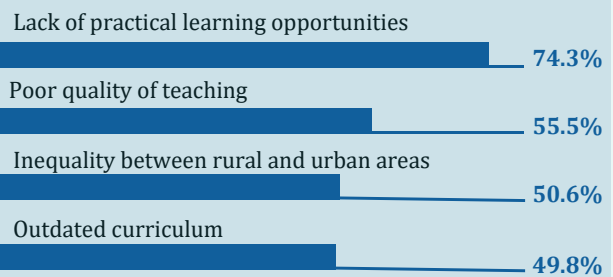


## Educational Attainment of Respondents



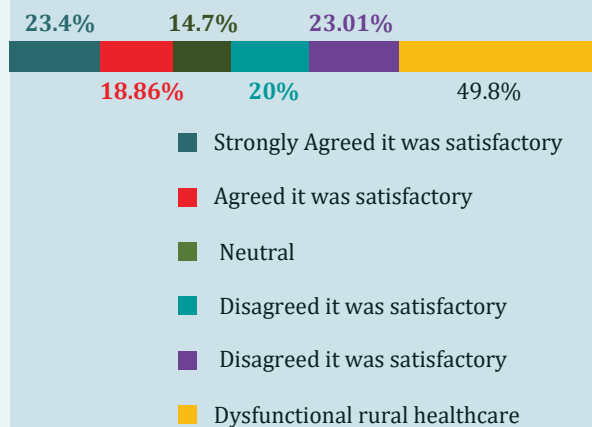
## Education

Key Challenges in Bangladesh's Education System  
Participants identified several pressing issues:



## Youth Perceptions of Job Readiness

When asked whether “Bangladesh's education system prepares youth for the job market,” responses were divided:



## Key Recommendations from Youth Respondents



Ensure proper training and better pay for teachers



Incorporate practical and vocational components into the curriculum



Increase education budget allocation to meet international standards, etc.

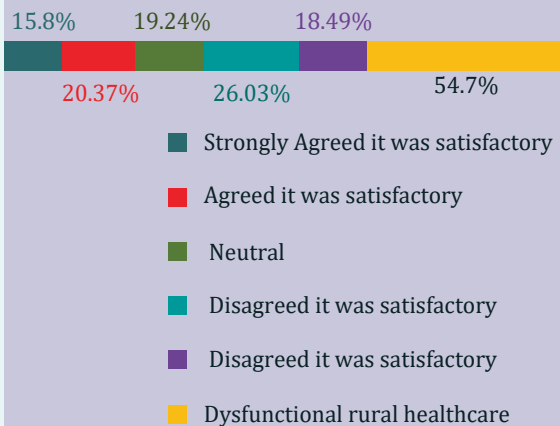
## Healthcare

Key Challenges in Bangladesh's Healthcare System  
Youth participants identified the following major issues:



## Perception of Government Healthcare Services

When asked about the quality of government-provided healthcare:



## Key Youth Recommendations



Increase accountability of government health workforce



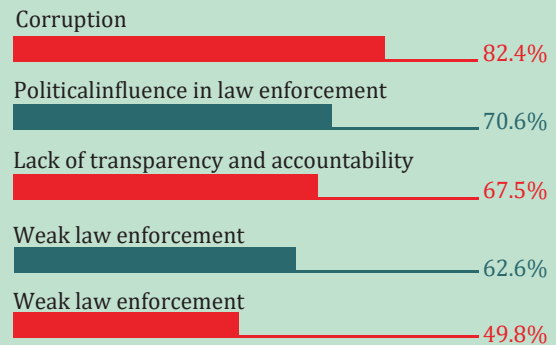
Revise salary and incentive structures for public providers operating in rural areas



Regulate prices of medicines and diagnostic tests etc.

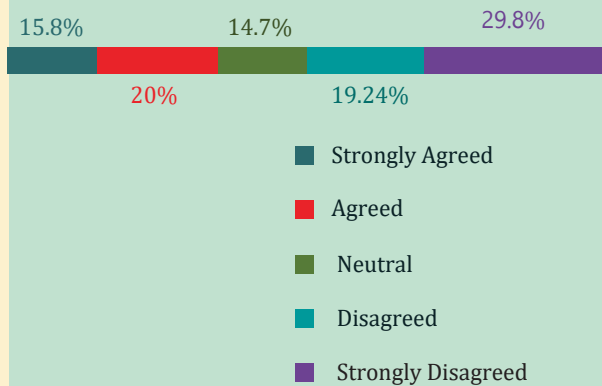
## Law & Governance

Key Issues in the Law and Governance Sector  
Youth participants identified several pressing concerns:

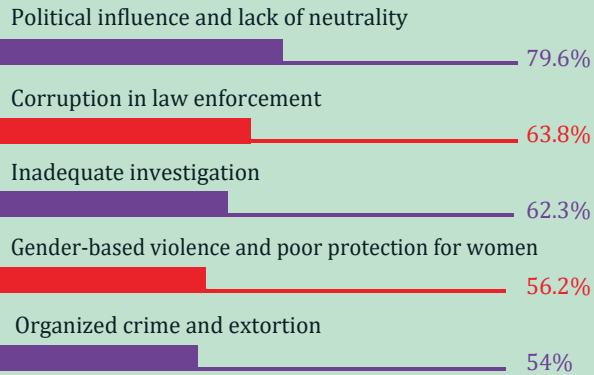


## Youth Perception of Law and Order

When asked about the statement, "Ordinary citizens feel safe in the current law and order situation in Bangladesh,":



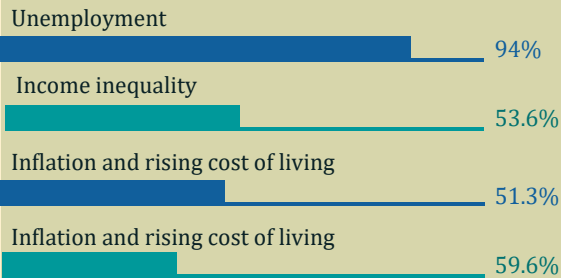
## Major Factors Affecting Law and Order



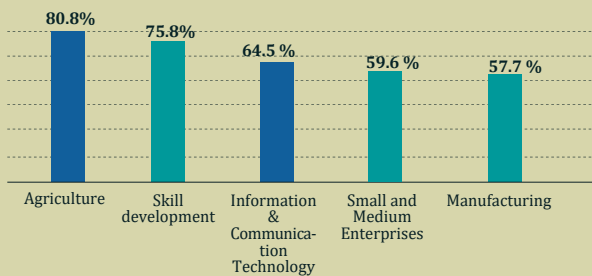
Note: "Over 50% of Respondents or Their Acquaintances Reported Paying Bribes for

## Economy

Key Economic Challenges According to the Youth

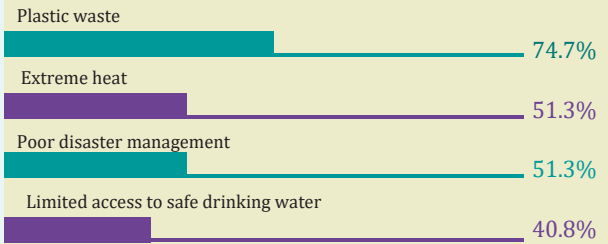


## Priority Sectors for Economic Growth According to the Youth



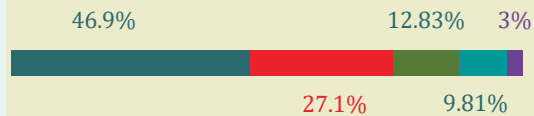
## Environment & Climate

Major Environmental Concerns



## Youth Perception of Environmental Degradation

When asked to respond to "Water, air, and soil quality in my locality have worsened in the last five years"



- Strongly Agreed it was satisfactory
- Agreed it was satisfactory
- Neutral
- Disagreed it was satisfactory
- Disagreed it was satisfactory
- Dysfunctional rural healthcare

## Key Recommendations from Youth Respondents



Promote recycling and waste segregation



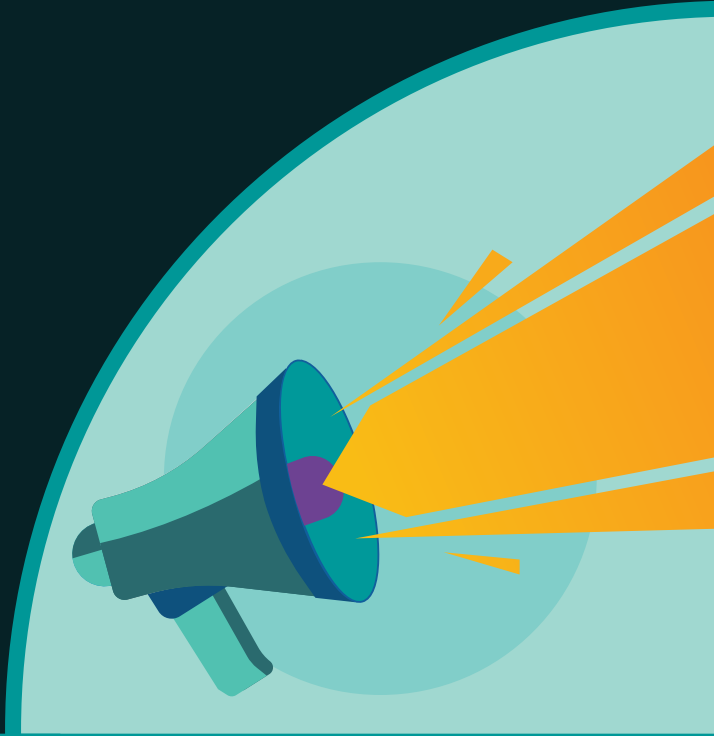
Encourage afforestation and green infrastructure



Enforce environmental protection laws



Develop sustainable waste management systems, etc.



# Experiences from the Field

Rifah Nanjiba Ridi  
Sifath Sahariar Kiam  
Shamima Tahera

Momtahina  
Ibnath Tisha





On a sweltering afternoon, I crossed the Nil Dumur ghat and arrived at Gabura, a tiny village at the edge of the Sundarbans. Unlike other villages, Gabura has no fields, grand homes, or paved roads—only the harsh reality of survival. A 23-year-old girl embodies this struggle. Her eyes were heavy with fatigue, her face etched with sorrow. She had endured five miscarriages. Each loss brought fear and uncertainty, yet she continued fighting to sustain her family. Her story reflects the hidden battles of many girls here which is shaped by salty water, lack of healthcare, and child marriage. Access to medical care is a constant challenge. Sometimes, a week passes without a doctor at the local health complex. Villagers must travel far to Munshiganj, Shyamnagar, Satkhira, or Khulna for proper treatment. Many women are denied care simply because the journey is costly, exhausting and time consuming. Life in Gabura is shaped by scarcity and hardship. Motorcycles are not only main transport but also the last-resort livelihood. Roads are risky, unfinished, and nearly impassable during rainy days. Traveling from one end of the village to the other revealed the harsh reality of a local rider's life whose monthly income is seven thousand taka, nothing remains at the end of the month for medical care or other basic necessities. All his income disappears entirely on feeding his family, repaying loans, and repairing storm battered homes. With tears in his eyes, he whispered, "Festivals like Eid barely reach our doors and even fleeting moments of joy vanish before they can be cherished." Yet amidst the hardship, Gabura holds fragments of hope. Small opportunities, targeted support, and thoughtful intervention could turn these sparks into lasting change. Between rivers, the Sundarbans, and the resilience of its people, life here is fragile but not defeated. Gabura reminds us that even in struggle, a new dawn is always possible.

### Rifah Nanjiba Ridi

Lead - Policy Network Management Team  
Local Guide, Satkhira

After going on the field visit, I realized that without getting close to the ordinary people of remote areas, it is impossible to truly understand their struggles, challenges or hopes and aspirations. Although many infrastructures have been built under government initiatives, such as community clinics to deliver services to the people, these remain visible only on paper. Due to corruption and various irregularities, people are unable to enjoy their benefits. At times, it is natural disasters and at other times it is the corruption, mismanagement and negligence of officials at different levels that trap the dreams of marginalized communities in a cycle of suffering. However, times are changing. I was deeply moved by the awareness and unity among the youth in remote areas regarding the realization of their rightful entitlements. I discovered that although many villages in Bangladesh still lack electricity, there is no shortage of the light of knowledge among our young people. Their creative thoughts about society and the country will help us move forward by leaps and bounds. By incorporating the voices of people living in every corner of Bangladesh into the pages of policy, we are sowing the seeds of a better tomorrow where every person in the country can live in peace, free from hardship and enjoy all the rights and services they deserve. On this journey toward positive change, I remain grateful to the farmers, fishermen, day laborers, students and homemakers in the remote areas who extended their support to us.

### Sifath Sahariar Kiam

Deputy Lead, Grassroots Network  
Local Guide, Rajshahi





I, Shamima Tahera, being born in a lower middle-class family always dreamt of serving my own Country for betterment. My mom was a child bride and I was the firstborn of a teenage pregnancy. Now, I don't regret what happened with my mom; rather I feel strongly encouraged and empowered to work for girls like them, boys who are yet to join the pavilion. The start, the tiniest start - I would say is YPF, and this 'One land Many Voices' project was the very first project I worked with YPF. It was a dream come true moment, seeing myself actually working for people who are not empowered, people who need help. There were many memorable experiences. I didn't write those experiences at all, despite being a diary person, because they will be in my heart, they will be preserved in my brain forever. I will recall those memories whenever I will be out of my orbit of moving forward, whenever I need them. That whole journey for me was, to myself kept telling my brain, 'Yes, Miles TO GO YET'. However, before concluding one particular experience, I would like to share that while talking with people of Satkhira, I have seen dreams in their eyes. I have seen the trust they put on my words. They truly believe, "Yes, we can reform Bangladesh". I think that's one of the biggest achievements to gain the trust of people. So, with that, I would like to make a concluding remark that is whispering in my ear from neurons, "Don't Stop. Miles to go....."

**Shamima Tahera**  
Policy Envoy, Grassroots Network  
Local Guide, Satkhira

I firmly believe that if we truly want to understand the situation of grassroots people, all we need to do is go to them and talk to them. And that belief became even stronger after my field visit for "One Land, Many Voices". During our field visit, when we get the opportunity to interact with the Youth of Actionaid Youth hub, every youth there knows why they are here, what changes they want to bring. They are not only working with people's problems but are also actively working to solve them. They leave no stone unturned in their efforts to improve the lives of people. Their patience and determination were really inspiring for me.

On the other hand, I witnessed the struggle individuals face in leading a fulfilling life, struggling to survive, and struggling to enjoy their basic rights. The most heartbreaking moment was hearing the cry of a mother who lost her child due to the negligence of our administration. Even after losing her child, she is still fighting because she doesn't want any other mother to feel the pain like her.

This visit allowed me to see the stark class differences within our society more vividly. The difference was not only visible in the living conditions but also in the environment, in the resources available to them, and in the means through which they get them. This was an eye-opening experience for me.

Field visit is the most powerful way to connect with people, also a way to reach out to them, that's what I felt in this whole field visit. Thank you, Youth Policy Forum, for giving me this opportunity, for helping me to widen my point of view. We need more scope like this to connect with people; that way, we can get to know more about our people.

**Momtahina Ibnath Tisha**  
Lead (Environment and Climate Change Team)  
Local Guide, Chattogram





## Collecting the Voices that Policy Often Overlooks

In Bangladesh, the journey of grassroots voices reaching the high ceiling of Policy making is kind of a journey that hardly reaches its destiny. With a commitment to documenting the lives, hurdles and everyday struggles of marginalized communities, we began our initiative, One Land, Many Voices.

Among the many places we visited under this project, Gabura in Satkhira was our first field location. The beauty of Satkhira slowly unfolded before us as we travelled toward Gabura. The stretches of water from ponds glimmering between the betel-nut, palm, and date trees seemed like a gentle blend of the natural landscapes of Arab and Bangla. Yet as we moved farther south, toward the last human settlement before the Sundarban, the struggles of the people grew ever more visible.

Through dialogues with the local people of Gabura, it became clear that the residents lack access to drinking water due to high salinity, proper transportation system, functioning schools, hospitals, electricity or avenues for stable livelihoods. Their Union Health Complex stands as a broken structure and its usefulness erased by the absence of doctor or nurse. Unemployment recurs every monsoon when brick kilns shut down, pushing many men toward gambling, initially as time-pass and later as addiction. Life there is harsh for everyone, whether man, woman or child. Yet, the burdens on women are disproportionately heavier. They face child marriage, early pregnancy, miscarriage, gynecological complications caused by saline water and persistent domestic violence on top of the economic hardships shared by all.

This is not just the story of Gabura. Similar conditions have been observed across other regions as well, except some anomalies. Our visit to the remotest border of Durgapur (Netrokona), Shah Porir Dwip (Cox's Bazar), Char Asharidaha (Rajshahi) or the slum of bakalia (Chittagong) taught us similarly about those areas. We collected their voices, heard their stories and consolidated their struggles, challenges and recommendations in this report. Although, it would be unjust to claim that our report fully captured their reality as no words can truly encompass the depth of their struggles.

The responsibility now lies with us. We must continue to press against the high ceiling of policy making through sustained advocacy so that these voices, often unheard and unseen, secure their rightful place within national and local level policies.

### **Muhammd Mujtaba**

Lead of Policy Advocacy  
Youth Policy Forum



# The Missing Link in Bangladesh's Development: Local Ownership

Bangladesh has long relied on a top-down style of policymaking. The pattern is familiar. Experts in Dhaka study a problem, read the right books, write a clean policy, and assume it will work everywhere. But lived reality rarely follows that script. Local problems carry layers of social, environmental, and political complexity that no desk in the capital can fully capture. Without local ownership, even the most polished policy becomes nothing more than another official document.

My first trip to Satkhira under the OLMV project made this painfully clear. I knew water scarcity existed, but I never imagined entire communities still depending on ponds and seasonal rain as their only source of drinking water. Years of conventional interventions, from government to large NGOs, produced activities and projects, yet they did not shift the core problem. The missing piece was genuine local leadership and community-driven problem-solving. Development theory often calls this the principle of subsidiarity, which argues that decisions should be made at the most immediate and capable local level. Satkhira is a textbook case of why this matters.

But local ownership alone is not enough when the governance structure does not support it. Rajshahi taught me that lesson. People in Kanapara Char were stuck with an exploitative ghat system. They had to pay for almost anything

Bangladesh has long relied on a top-down style of policymaking. The pattern is familiar. Experts in Dhaka study a problem, they carried across the Padma River. When they tried to raise their voices together, they could not reach the right authorities. They lacked procedural knowledge, political access, and the resources needed to navigate the system. In public administration terms, this is a classic information asymmetry problem. Citizens may mobilize, but without an enabling state structure, their efforts cannot turn into institutional change.

Solving these local challenges demands a dual approach. The government must actively welcome feedback loops from communities and treat them as partners rather than passive recipients. At the same time, our projects and programs must build local capacity in a way that respects existing realities. You cannot hand people a finely crafted iron sword and expect them to fight with it when they have only ever used wooden ones. You start with what they know, strengthen their skills, and help them create tools that make sense in their own context.

This is how local knowledge and national governance can finally work in sync to produce lasting solutions.

## Sad Ebne Walid

Lead of Policy Initiatives  
Youth Policy Forum