Reform Roadmap

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Executive Summary

This policy brief underscores the critical need for increased investment in Bangladesh's education sector, currently only 1.7% of GDP – far below UNESCO's recommendation. Moreover, simply increasing the budget does not ensure that the money will be properly allocated to address Bangladesh's education needs. It is very important to ensure proper utilization of the budget and that the relevant authorities have the capacity to manage and spend these funds with transparency and accountability. Due to lower budget the lack of resources in the schools has become another pivotal factor behind the learning crisis. Lack of adequate classrooms, laboratories, libraries, multimedia facilities, and teaching aids also inadequate teachers' salary hamper the delivery of quality education. To address these issues the lack of effort by the government is visible. To improve the situation, this brief advocates for increased budget allocation, decentralizing budget control, enhanced transparency and some more. Implementing these strategies will enable Bangladesh to elevate educational quality and strengthen its global competitiveness.

Introduction

Education is fundamental to a nation's development, economic resilience and social progress. A well funded and efficiency managed education system is the cornerstone of a progressing society. However, in Bangladesh, a limited budget allocation for education -around 1.7% of GDP restricts the country's capacity to provide quality education for all. Despite advances in enrollment rates, inadequate funding constraints improvement in teachers' salary and training, infrastructure, curriculum enhancement worsened by inefficient budget execution practices that restrict the effective use of the allocated funds.

The goal of this policy brief is to advocate for increasing the budget in the education sector with specific recommendations on improving budget execution. This brief highlights the urgency of aligning Bangladesh's education budget with international standards.

Problem Statement

The current education budget for education is significantly below the required level. The current allocation of 1.69% of GDP leaves educational institutions without sufficient resources, contributing to overcrowded classrooms, inadequate salary of school teachers and outdated learning materials. These issues are particularly pronounced in rural and underserved areas. The education budget for Bangladesh in FY24 was 12% of the total budget, or 1.69% of GDP. This is lower than the recommended minimum of 4-6% of GDP and 20% of the national budget by UNESCO for any country. 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 *(Ministry of Finance, 2024)*

The execution and utilization of allocated resources for education remains inadequate to the needed level. It was found that government agencies responsible for executing the education budget often fail to fully utilize their allocated funds. Notably, fund leakages and mismanagement are particularly evident in the distribution of education related social safety net programs and the implementation of development projects. Also a high percentage of the budget is mostly spent on the last trimester of each fiscal year. For example, between 2011-2016, MoE never spent more than 50% of the total allocated amount in the first eight months (July to February) of the fiscal year. Furthermore, a significant percentage of the expenditure was made only in June, the last month of the fiscal year (e.g., 45% in 2014). The situation for MoPME is also not very different *(Bangladesh Education Sector Public Expenditure Review 2021, World Bank).*

The budget allocation is mostly focused on infrastructure rather than the developmental expenditures. Development expenditure as a share of total expenditure decreased from 29% in FY2022 to 25% in FY2023. This highlights a lower priority in the development of the education sector. Similar to the allocation of the revised budget, the majority of the actual expenditure was catered towards operational expenses over development expenditure.(MoF,2024). Budget utilization to enhance the quality of education, teachers' competency, funding for research and development has been less prioritized. The operational costs dominate spending, with minimal investment in development.

Bangladesh's budgetary policies and priorities will need to significantly change to address these challenges is key to propelling Bangladesh to a higher stage of development through enhancement and advancement of its human capital.

Analysis of the issues

An analysis of Bangladesh's education budget reveals two critical issues; inadequate funding levels and inefficient budget execution. Despite recent improvements in enrollment, Bangladesh's education sector faces persistent funding challenges that limit progress. While the expenditure on education as a share of GDP has been less than 2% between FY2016 and FY2025, the revised budget allocation has remained less than 12% in FY2024. The new FY2024-25 budget proposes an allocation of Tk 94,710 crore for the education sector, an increase from the Tk88,162 crore in the revised budget of the outgoing financial year. Even though in nominal terms, the budget increased, allocation as a share of GDP has become the lowest allocation in the last 16 years. Over the past decades, the education budget has constantly hovered around 2% of GDP, which falls below the allocation in several other Asian countries. According to Global Education Monitoring Report's comparison of GDP spending in 2020, Bangladesh allocated 2.09% of its GDP towards education, whereas

Nepal allocated 4%, India 3.1%, Sri Lanka 2.2%, Bhutan 7.36%, Afghanistan 5.6%, Maldives 5.2% and Pakistan 2.6%. It should also be highlighted that among other LDCs, Bangladesh was the third lowest country among 38 LDCs in terms of average education expenditure as a percentage of GDP from 2016 to 2023 *(The World Bank, 2024)*.

Poor funding in government primary schools across the country causes poor infrastructure like congested classrooms, shortage of efficient teachers, and access to co-curricular activities, which are barriers to quality education(The Business Standard, 2023). Countries like Vietnam, Taiwan, Cuba, Bhutan, and South Korea have given the education sector the highest priority to ensure quality education over time. According to recent data, Cuba consistently allocates one of the highest percentages of its national budget to education (around 10% of its GDP), resulting in high literacy rates and a strong educational system(World Bank), whereas Bangladesh spends only 1.69% of its GDP in the education sector.

A closer look at budget execution practices, as detailed in World Bank analysis reveals additional barriers. **Complex administrative processes** and **delayed fund releases** mean that funds are not fully utilized within the fiscal year, leading to resource shortages and programmatic interruptions. These inefficiencies limit the impact of allocated funds, making it difficult for schools to implement
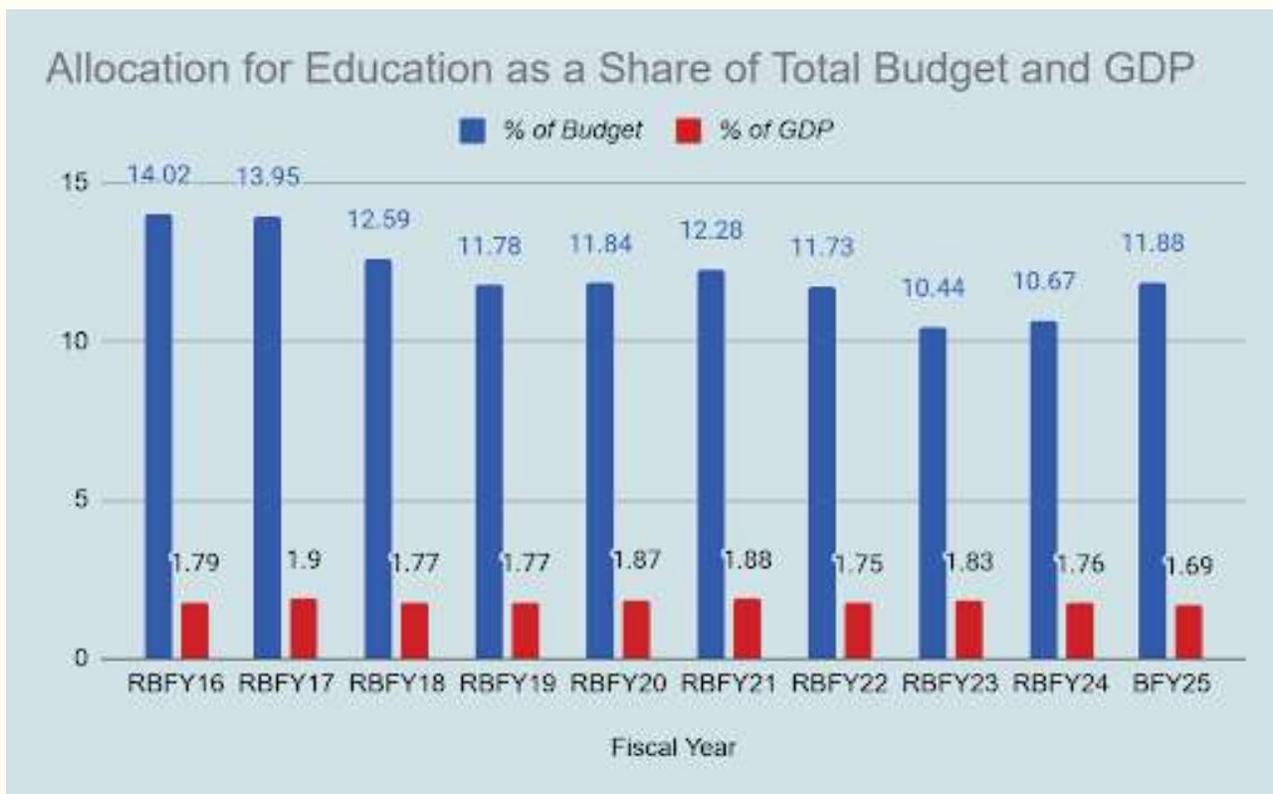
Source: Author's illustration based on data from the Ministry of Finance (Ministry of Finance, 2024).

necessary improvements. Several factors contribute to disproportionately high expenditure towards the fiscal year's end. These include slow budget release due to delays in ADP approval, coordination issues and AOP approval for line ministries. Manual fund location, particularly within MoPME, further exacerbates this issue.

Development expenditure as a share of total spending fell from 29% in FY2022 to 25% in FY2023, with most funds allocated to non-development expenses, only BD 15,769 cr went to development(MoF), a 10% decline from the previous year. This imbalance hampers efforts to improve education quality in the post-pandemic era.

Policy options

1. Increase Budget Allocation to 4% of GDP: Gradually increase the education budget to meet UNESCO's minimum recommended level. Starting with 2.5% by October 2025. This approach will address resource gaps, allowing for improvements in school infrastructure, teacher salaries, learning materials, research allocations.

   - **Pros:** Supports SDG-4 goals, improves quality and accessibility and aligns global benchmarks. It will stabilise the education system conformity with the pre-pandemic status. In 2019 a study by World Bank found that, at the division level, higher spending appears to be associated with higher learning outcomes and vice versa. It is seen that results are either in "low spending-low outcome" or "high spending-high outcome" categories, indicating a positive relationship between spending and learning outcomes at the divisional level.

   - **Cons:** May require budget reallocations from other sectors and face initial resistance due to limited fiscal space.

2. Focus on Developmental Spending: Shift larger portions of the budget from operational to developmental spending to enhance infrastructure, technology access and teacher training. Public spending in the development of education has a positive and significant impact on economic growth in the long run. By employing Cointegration technique it is observed that a one percent increase in public expenditure in education contributes 0.34% increase in GDP per capita in the long run *(Mukit Dewan, 2012)*

   - **Pros**: Addresses long-term educational quality by improving learning environments, supporting teachers and equipping students with digital skills.

   - **Cons:** Immediate operational needs may compete with developmental priorities.

3. Enhance accountability and budget execution: Implement measures such as decentralized budgeting, improved monitoring and transparency practices. This would empower schools to utilize funds more effectively addressing local needs directly. Good governance and transparency are essential across all government institutions. However, persistent fraud remains despite the efforts of bodies like Economic and Financial Crimes Commission(EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission(ICPC). To improve effectiveness, these institutions must be strengthened and empowered to resolve cases more efficiently.

   - Pros: Increase budget efficiency, reduces waste and ensures funds reach intended projects.

   - Cons: Requires significant administratives reforms and capacity building.

Recommendations

1. Enhance Budget Execution Efficiency: Streamline fund release mechanisms, reduce bureaucratic delays and improve inancial management to ensure timely and full utilization of allocated resources.

2. Strengthen Transparency and Accountability: Establish independent audits, public reporting and monitoring mechanisms to track fund utilization. Enhanced accountability will reduce risks of misallocation and improve resource alignment with educational goals.

3. Decentralized Budget Control: Provide local schools and educational authorities with increased autonomy over budget execution, allowing them address specific needs and align spending with local priorities.

4. Improving teaching quality with targeted budgetary measures: To reach the agenda of ensuring quality education by 2030, ensuring skilled teachers and adequate human resource is crucial. With teaching personnel being the largest education expense, budgets should prioritize increasing salaries of school teachers. Investing in-service training and making teaching an attractive career for young talent are essential to enhance productivity and education outcomes.

5. Build Financial Management Capacity: Offer training to financial managers within the MoE and at the institutional level. Improved financial management skills will enhance budget planning, execution and reporting.

6. Patronaze more in-depth policy research scrutinizing public expenditures and education service delivery: The researches

should analyze and focus on tracking fund flows from the central level to schools, identifying delays, leakages and their impact to service delivery. Quantitative service delivery survey using nationally representative school samples is recommended to enhance accountability and transparency.

Conclusion

Investing in education provides long-term economic benefits, reduces poverty and promotes social stability. With a large youth population, Bangladesh has a unique opportunity to develop a skilled, adaptable workforce that can drive economic progress. The proposed recommendations offer a structured approach to achieve sustainable improvements in educational quality and equity, positioning Bangladesh to thrive in a competitive global landscape.

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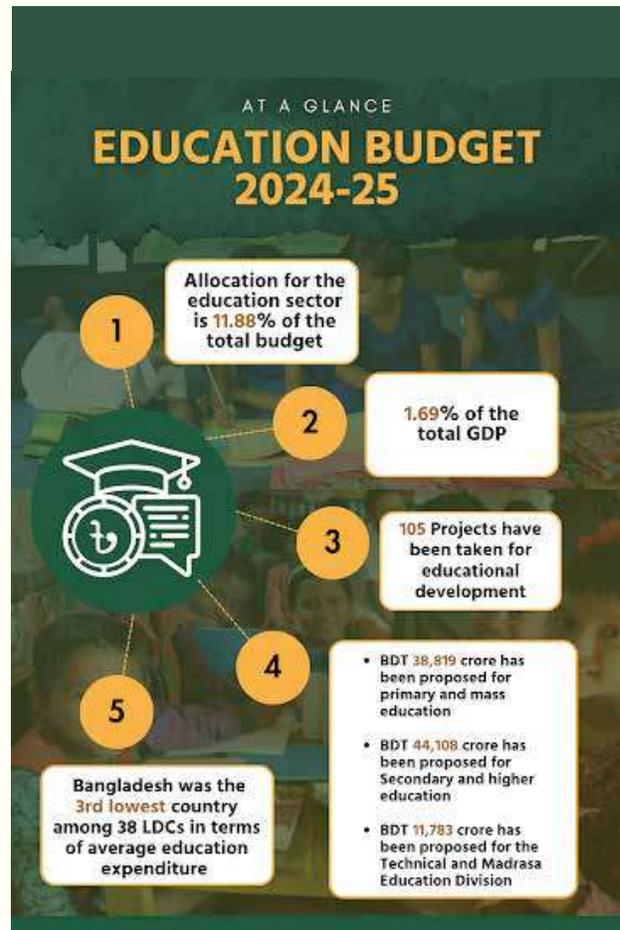
Source: Author's illustration based on data from the Ministry of Finance (Ministry of Finance, 2024).

Investing in Education Should Start with Teachers: The Case for Raising Salaries

Anika Nasrin

In discussions on educational reform, teachers often become a focal point, heralded as heroes. However, although much celebrated in rhetoric, they frequently find themselves sidelined in policy and practice. Eventually, they get treated as a convenient scapegoat to common people whenever policies disappoint. Despite being central to national development, the teaching profession in Bangladesh suffers from a plethora of issues that determines its quality and effectiveness. Low salaries and inadequate incentives compared to excessive workloads, and a lack of career advancement deter many talented individuals from entering or remaining in the field. If unaddressed, these challenges will continue to erode the quality of education and hinder the nation's socio-economic progress.

Pay, Prestige or Infrastructure- What plays the role?

Although there is no doubt about the prestige the profession holds. However, in terms of profession, prestige is often interpreted by the salary. Thus, improving teacher pay increases the status of teaching in a country. Additionally, if teachers are paid in the top 20% of a country's earnings distribution, they will likely attract top grads. If they are underpaid, then teaching will attract either the less competent or individuals using teaching as a temporary job.[1]

Of course, the education field is not the only sector of Bangladesh economy in which salary increases fail to keep pace with the ever-rising cost of living. But this scenario has increasingly come under the spotlight in the way it affects the teaching profession. As seen in the average salary of a primary school teacher in our country. The average salary of a primary school teacher is only $170.02, which is approximately $62 less than the average monthly per capita income of the country. Teachers are successful when teacher policies are designed and implemented in a manner that attracts high-ability individuals and prepares, supports and motivates them to become high performing teachers. However, such motivation gets dismissed by the economic reality of low pay. Compared to other government employees, school teachers rank low on the salary scale. They are often placed on the same pay grade as clerical staff, which is nowhere near the compensation and benefits enjoyed by doctors, engineers, or civil service officers.

The budget allocation is mostly focused on infrastructure rather than the developmental expenditures. Development expenditure as a share of total expenditure decreased from 29% in FY2022 to 25% in FY2023. This highlights a lower priority in the development of the education sector. Similar to the allocation of the revised budget, the majority of the actual expenditure was catered towards operational expenses over development expenditure.(MoF,2024). Budget utilization to enhance the quality of education, teachers' competency,

Teachers, in general, are relegated to the category of third-class employees when it comes to pay, with some of the lowest salaries in the world. Picture this: an assistant teacher at a non-government high school, covered by the Monthly Pay Order (MPO) scheme, takes home just Tk12,500 a month—with 10% sliced off for retirement benefits. In government primary schools, a teacher earns Tk 19,000 per month. Meanwhile, an assistant teacher at Grade 13 on the government pay scale earns Tk17,500. For those teaching at government-run secondary schools, salaries align with the 10th grade of the national pay scale, offering basic pay between Tk16,000 and Tk 38,640, alongside a 45% house rent allowance, a full festival bonus, and a Tk1,500 monthly medical allowance. Although The inflation rate has increased sharply in the last couple of years, standing at more than 9%. However, our primary school teachers are still getting paid according to the national pay scale 2015, with no adjustment to their salaries according to the inflation.[2]

The salient point here is that despite the requirement of a three-year degree or honors certification, primary and secondary teachers often earn less than other jobs that only require a high school diploma. This striking pay gap further diminishes the appeal of teaching as a profession. Even within the education sector, there is an inequality in

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earnings and job security. Government teachers generally enjoy higher job satisfaction due to job security and additional benefits like house rent, medical allowances, and provident funds. In contrast, non-government schools operate under less favorable conditions, creating a significant income gap that ultimately impacts motivation and performance.

On the other hand, initial teacher pay (and frequent subsequent increments) tend to be based on factors that are not key to improving student's learning — educational qualifications and years of experience. Most observed characteristics of teachers, such as educational qualifications, pre-service education and experience (beyond the first few years), do not predict how effectively teachers will help students learn, what is often termed the "value-added" that teachers provide. This is not because qualifications and experience are not critical — they are — but their quality is often too low to influence student learning positively.

Of course, high pay alone will not magically improve student learning, but low pay neither attracts high-quality individuals to teach nor secures the outcomes they want. Poor working conditions and remuneration cause many teachers to quit within two years. Nowadays, well-educated graduates do not want to work in schools for a long time.[3] Thirty one percent of the government primary school teachers have no Bachelors (Honours) degree.[4] This indicates that the sector is struggling to attract individuals with higher education. The problems compound even more by lack of infrastructure and incentives. Poor facilities, long commutes, and limited support systems deter teachers from serving in remote communities. While the government offers some allowances, such as "hill allowances" for those in hard-to-reach areas, these measures have done little to improve conditions. Teachers often find themselves isolated, without adequate tools or networks to make a meaningful impact. In the last budget, the government allocated around 2% of its GDP to the education sector, considered quite low by global standards. Furthermore, most of this spending goes toward developing educational infrastructure, with very little directed toward increasing teachers' salaries. But critics argue that it is a flawed approach that will not yield little long-term benefits.

Learning From Regional Success

Top countries like Finland, Japan, and Singapore recruit and hire skilled teachers because they pay well compared to other difficult jobs and their career advancement opportunities through career ladders. For instance, Singapore's service professional development and career plan includes a career framework for promotion, an appraisal system, and a recognition and financial compensation system. When teachers enter the profession, they can choose one of three career tracks based on their initial assessment. The teaching track is for teachers who want to stay in the classroom, mentor other teachers, lead curriculum innovation and so on. The leadership track is for teachers who want to move on to leadership positions in the school or Ministry of Education. The specialist track is for teachers who want to develop deeper knowledge and skills in a specific discipline and assume leadership roles in the ministry that focus on curriculum development and evaluation. Singapore's Enhanced Performance Management System is a holistic appraisal tool that involves planning (for teaching goals, innovations in instruction, school improvements, and personal and professional development), regular support and coaching to the teacher, and an intensive performance evaluation.[5]

Bangladesh can also learn from Vietnam, a country often compared to us for historic and economic similarities. According to UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report 2023, Vietnam's primary education ranked highest among low, middle-income countries. The secret behind this is Vietnam's commitment to development through investing in education. Its provinces are required to spend 20% of their budgets on education. Policies are updated to improve curriculums and teaching standards as needed.[6]

Exploring the Evidence Based Policy Options

Addressing the issue of low teacher salaries in Bangladesh is crucial for improving educational outcomes and retaining quality educators. Here are some relevant policy options, and a holistic analysis of the most appropriate policy given the

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country's current context:

1. Increasing teacher salaries through regular budget revisions to align with infation and provide better living standards. But while such a policy can motivate teachers to remain in the profession, it demands signifcant government spending, potentially straining other sectors.[7]

2. Offering special incentives, such as increased salaries or housing allowances, to teachers working in rural areas to potentially address the shortage of qualified teachers in remote areas and improve educational access and quality for marginalized communities. However, high administration costs and monitoring can pose challenges.[8]

3. Linking professional development opportunities with financial rewards for participation and successful completion. However, this can impose a risk of limited participation if incentives are perceived as insufficient.[9]

4. Leveraging Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Initiatives for Teacher Funding can quickly raise salaries in targeted schools, but risks creating disparities and reducing government oversight.[10]

Recommendations

Given the current context and assessing all the pros and cons of each policy option, a combination of incremental salary increase and rural incentive can balance sustainability, equity, and feasibility, aligning with Bangladesh's financial constraints and educational priorities. Why This Combination?

Sustainability: A government-led approach ensures long-term sustainability and systematic alignment with national priorities, making the change stable and predictable.

Equity Focus: Addressing disparities in teacher retention and motivation through rural allowances can ensure educational quality improvements across the country, including disadvantaged areas.

Feasibility: Gradual budget allocation increases are more realistic given Bangladesh's inancial constraints compared to large-scale performance pay reforms or complex PPP models.

This dual-focused approach emphasizes equity, predictability, and incremental progress while aligning with Bangladesh's socioeconomic and educational needs.

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Bridging the Gap: Strengthening Industry-Academia Collaboration for Workforce Development in Bangladesh

Md. Nafis Al Zamee

Executive Summary

Innovation, economic growth, and worker preparedness are all hampered by Bangladesh's academia-industry divide. This policy brief addresses this problem, examining the key reasons for why academic training has failed to translate into industrial placements for students. Following this, we propose a number of solutions, including formalising partnerships between industrial employers and educational institutions, encouraging internships, and providing funds for cooperative research. By enhancing these ties, Bangladesh may better satisfy industry demands, combat graduate unemployment and skills gaps by equipping graduates with real-world experience, and set itself up for long-term economic success. Only then can we see the country enhance its competitiveness against the international economic and labour market
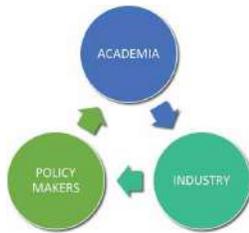
Introduction

Both employment rates and productivity are impacted by the widening skills gap between university graduates and industry demands in Bangladesh. Bangladesh's economy is increasingly shifting toward knowledge-intensive sectors, demanding technical proficiency. However, a lack of cooperation between academic institutions and businesses leads to a workforce that is ill-prepared, and employers report having trouble hiring qualified workers.

This policy brief's objectives are to examine the importance of developing closer ties between business and academics, pinpoint existing gaps, and suggest measures that encourage cooperation. Improving employment, encouraging innovation, and assisting Bangladesh's shift to a more knowledge-based economy all depend on resolving this challenge *(Uddin, Khan, Uddin, & Solaiman, 2015)*.

Problem Statement

The primary issue is that Bangladeshi industries and academic institutions don't coordinate well, which results in graduates who are frequently unprepared for the workforce.The Labour Force Survey *(LFS)* 2022 found that the unemployment rate among graduates was 12% by the end of 2022, the highest rate across all educational levels*(Ahmed, Sen, Ali, & Islam, n.d.) (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2022)*.Employers frequently complain that graduates lack critical skills, which raises training expenses and reduces output *(Ahmed, 2017)*.

There are currently insufficient formal frameworks to facilitate industry-academia collaboration, and the skills gap is not sufficiently addressed by current policies. Although employable education is emphasised in the National Education Policy, there are no particular methods for incorporating industrial demands into academic courses *(Bangladesh Ministry of Education & Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics, 2019).* This disparity hinders industries' capacity to innovate and maintain their competitiveness in the global market, in addition to limiting employment prospects for recent graduates. To close this gap and provide a more unified strategy for skill development, effective governmental interventions are required.

Analysis of the Issue

There are several reasons why academia and industry in Bangladesh are not connected. Outdated curricula that prioritise academic knowledge over practical skills are one of the main problems. Numerous educational programs have failed to adapt to the quickly changing needs of the industry, leaving graduates without the skills that companies seek *(Tahmid, n.d.)*.

Second, students are deprived of crucial practical experience due to the absence of organised internship programs and industry placements. There are very few internship opportunities, and those that do exist are frequently unstructured and informal. Only 30% of Bangladeshi graduates do internships prior to entering the workforce (Bangladesh Ministry of Education & Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics, 2019), compared to

60% in nearby nations like India and Malaysia, whose academic programs incorporate structured internships (Chan, Yeap, Taahir, & Remie, 2020)(Choudhari & Parmar, 2023).

In contrast, countries such as Malaysia have successfully implemented industry-academia partnerships, aided by government policies that require internships and collaborative research *(Grapragasem, Krishnan, & Mansor, 2014)*. This strategy has boosted innovation in industries including manufacturing and technology and decreased unemployment among recent graduates *(Peyala et al., 2023)*. Similar frameworks might be adopted by Bangladesh, enabling industry and academic institutions to collaborate in order to bridge the skills gap and promote economic development.

Policy Options

1. **Formalise Industry-Academia Partnerships:** By means of curriculum development, industry-funded research, and joint advisory committees, universities and industries can formally collaborate.

   Advantages: Produces graduates who are prepared for the workforce; - Matches academic programs to industry demands.

   Drawbacks: The need for time and money, as well as possible opposition from conventional academic institutions.

   Feasibility: High; this strategy has proven effective in other developing nations with government backing *(Chan, Yeap, Taahir, & Remie, 2020)(Choudhari & Parmar, 2023*).

2. **Expand Programs for Internships**: Mandate university curriculum to include organised internships or industry projects, particularly in technical and vocational disciplines. Businesses who take part in these initiatives may be eligible for tax.

   Advantages: Increases employability by offering real-world experience.

   Drawbacks: Logistical obstacles may make implementation difficult.

   Feasibility: Medium; infrastructure and coordination are needed to match students with relevant industries, despite the fact that it is effective*(Chan, Yeap, Taahir, & Remie, 2020)(Choudhari & Parmar, 2023)*.

3. **Fund Industry-Driven Research Grants:** Encourage businesses to collaborate with academic institutions on research initiatives that tackle particular economic issues by introducing government grants.

Advantages: Encourages creativity and meets regional industrial demands.

Drawbacks: Initial investment expenses and the possibility of uneven industry distribution.

Feasibility: High; research investment has a history of promoting innovation in economies such as Malaysia's *(Grapragasem, Krishnan, & Mansor, 2014)*.

Recommendations

- **Establish a Framework for National Industry-Academia Partnerships:** Create official advisory committees at universities with representatives from important companies to make sure that courses meet the needs of the labour market. In order to comply with industry requirements, these committees ought to periodically assess scholarly material and recommend revisions *(Tahmid, M n.d.) (Bangladesh Ministry of Education & Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics, 2019)*

- **Mandatory Internship Programs for Graduates:** Create a systematic, national internship program to give students practical experience. To solve logistical issues, this might be put into practice using government subsidies or tax cuts for businesses taking part in these initiatives (*Khan, Kabir, & Ajefu, 2019*).

- **Offer Research Funding for Collaborative Projects:** Government grants ought to facilitate industry-university collaboration on research, promoting innovation that is suited to regional requirements. A sustained cycle of research and application can be established by using this money to encourage industry to participate in projects driven by academia*(Grapragasem, Krishnan, & Mansor, 2014) (Peyala et al., 2023)*.

Policymakers, academic institutions, and industry stakeholders must work together to implement these proposals. The results could boost economic growth, greatly increase the employability of graduates, and put Bangladesh in a competitive position in the globalised knowledge economy.

Conclusion

Building stronger ties between academia and business is crucial for Bangladesh's workforce development and economic advancement. Bangladesh may better match education with the demands of the labour market by putting in place organised collaborations, internship programs, and research funding. By filling in existing gaps, these policy initiatives give students applicable skills and produce a workforce prepared to meet the demands of the contemporary economy. Making these ties and setting up Bangladesh for long-term economic success require quick action. These suggestions have the ability to make Bangladesh a more inventive and competitive economy, as evidenced by the accomplishment of such programs in nations like Malaysia and some regions of India *(Uddin, Khan, Uddin, & Solaiman, 2015).*

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Outperformed Yet Overlooked:
Women In STEM and A Holistic Look at Policy and Progress

Anika Nasrin

For generations, the issue of women's professional underrepresentation in Bangladesh has remained persistent. This prompts that age-old debate, whether women are naturally more risk-averse or less inclined to enter competitive jobs like STEM. Or whether this inclination is nothing more than a social construct? While both sides of the argument—nature versus nurture—hold weight, it's the latter one that requires deeper scrutiny.

Beyond Numbers

Bangladeshi women have made a major breakthrough in economic empowerment through the garment industry. But despite making up more than 90 percent of the workforce, women are not in the leading role. This could be due to the inadequacy of technical and digital skills to lead innovation in the sector, as well as the capacity to overcome structural barriers like violence, discrimination, exploitation, and physical and mental harassment.

The same scenario is seen even in schools. The case is even worse in the rural areas. While female school enrollment in Bangladesh has risen over the years, rural schools remain under-resourced, and the quality of education is uneven at best. Factors like violence, child marriage, societal prejudice, and inadequate teacher support continue to hold rural girls back, making participation in STEM careers particularly challenging. This troubling landscape mirrors a broader trend: South and West Asia have the world's lowest proportion of women in STEM, with Bangladesh at the bottom at only 14% women in STEM and Structural Challenges. Female students in our country prefer humanities over science. This pattern persists in higher education, where only 8.06% of female students are enrolled in science departments at public universities, and the numbers are even lower for engineering, technology, and medicine. In contrast, fields like arts and humanities see significantly higher female participation.

In fact, Bangladesh ranks among the lowest globally, with only 14 percent female researchers in STEM subjects, while Pakistan, China, and Sri Lanka stand at 30 percent, 34.5 percent, and 35 percent, respectively. A study on women in STEM in Bangladesh highlighted that in 2017, only 20.70% of the faculty at BUET (Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology) were female, while Jagannath University had a relatively higher proportion of female faculty at 38.50%.

A Role-Play of Multiple Correlates

This discrepancy, in many ways, can be traced to two possible factors: nature or nurture, or more specifically, the intersection of both. And sometimes one is a result of another. Research suggests that the answer may lie not just in individual traits, but in the cultural frameworks within which men and women are raised. Boys are often encouraged to take risks, tackle challenges head-on, and thrive in competitive settings. Meanwhile, girls are socialized to be more cautious, more collaborative, and less likely to seek out high-stakes situations. This division, often rooted in early childhood teachings and reinforced by family, peers, and educational systems, plays a pivotal role in shaping career choices and success in competitive fields.

A Stanford University study underscores this dynamic by suggesting two key factors at play. First, in mixed-gender competitions, men often outperform women. Second, regardless of their qualifications, women are less inclined to enter competitive environments to begin with. Why? Men tend to exhibit higher levels of overconfidence, while women, despite equal capability, are more averse to competition. This is not a question of ability, but of mindset—one shaped over a lifetime by societal expectations and personal experience.[11]

A report titled "Women's Experiences in College Engineering" says that women do not drop out of engineering programmes due to lack of aptitude; rather, this is influenced by women negatively interpreting their grades and having low self-confidence. However, many of these women express that some school factors, e.g., competitiveness, lack of support, discouraging faculty and peers, cause them to rethink their career path. Such aspects serve as a precursor to their underrepresenta

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[11] *Niederle, Muriel and Lise Vesterlund(2007). "Do women shy away from competition? Do men compete too much?" Quarterly Journal of Economics 122 (3); 1067-1101*

tion in the corporate world. But surprisingly, studies proved that girls are equally prone to taking risks as men when placed in an all-girls group, indicating that gender differences in risk-taking preferences are related to the gender mixture of the experimental group.[12]

Does this mean we should abandon co-ed schools in favor of single-sex education? Of course not. But it does suggest that the environments in which women are placed—whether in the classroom or the workplace—play a signi icant role in determining their success. Understanding the environments where women thrive provides valuable insight into how we can reshape educational and professional settings to better support female participation, especially in male-dominated ields like STEM. Here are some actionable strategies that could make a difference:

1. **Introducing female role models:** Introducing female role models to campus or offering advice is crucial to encouraging and making them feel welcome in STEM fields. If a student can't look at a successful individual in their field and think, "that could be me", the chances of them succeeding in the field are significantly less**.**

2. **Special Mentorship Programme:** Having a female mentor can be a huge motivating factor since it allows students to picture themselves in that role or in something comparable. Because that feeling of "belonging" is a direct factor that increases the retention rates of women in STEM.

3. **Career counseling followed by the mentorship programme:** Having a female mentor can be a huge motivating factor since it allows students to picture themselves in that role or in something comparable. Because that feeling of "belonging" is a direct factor that increases the retention rates of women in STEM.

4. **Reducing the intimidation factor:**
   yet very significant strategy that can help reduce the gap. Instead of starting with advanced programming and writing intense code from the beginning, they can make the curriculum more generalized for those who have no prior experience in this subject. Such initiatives can vary from institution to institution. For example, the CS course at Harvey Mudd College was separated into two portions. One for people with no prior experience, and another for everyone else. These strategies dissolved any challenges that female students might have faced, such as a lack of prior coding knowledge. Dartmouth focuses on addressing societal challenges rather than building complex code from the beginning. As a result, female students were more motivated to learn the skills necessary to tackle these challenges by integrating problem-solving approaches.[13]

Policy Action: A Dual Focus on Bias and Confidence

Currently, the STEM curriculum in Bangladesh remains largely gender-neutral in theory but fails to account for the unique challenges that women face when pursuing STEM subjects. For example, many women drop out of engineering programs not due to lack of aptitude but because of a lack of self-con idence that overshadows their ability in every part of their performance— from academics to career everywhere. In order to blur these gap some effective policies are critical in fostering women's interest and success in STEM disciplines.

1. **Gender-sensitive Curriculum Design:** Such as using female role models in STEM, and promoting hands-on, application-based learning from the outset. Programs like Harvey Mudd's introductory CS course, where students with no coding experience are given equal footing, should be adopted across public and private universities.

2. **Addressing Gender Bias in Hiring and Advancement:** A report by UNESCO highlights that women are often overlooked for promotions in favor of men, despite having similar qualifications. Moreover, the lack of family-friendly policies in the workplace deters many women from pursuing long-term careers in STEM fields.

3. **Corporate-sponsored internships and fellowships:** Private companies can collaborate with universities to offer paid internships and fellowships to women in STEM, providing both financial support and practical work experience. This initiative could help create a pipeline of female talent in technical fields like IT, engineering, and data science.

4. **Strengthening Public Awareness and Gender Advocacy:** Despite the pressing need for more women in STEM, there is still a lack of widespread public awareness about the opportunities and rewards of pursuing careers in these fields. Many girls and young women are unaware of the career possibilities in technology and science, or they believe that these fields are not "for them."

5. **Establish women-only incubators and accelerators:** The government should encourage the development of women-only STEM incubators or accelerators, where women can collaborate, innovate, and receive specialized training and support. These platforms could also connect women with

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[12] Niederle, Muriel and Lise Vesterlund(2007). "Do women shy away from competition? Do men compete too much?" *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 122 (3); 1067-110

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Conclusion

It's a reality that can, and must, change. To change the gender disparity in STEM, policy action must target both the elimination of biases in academic and professional environments and the fostering of con idence in women to take risks. Bangladesh must look into a holistic, multi-faceted approach to policy reform. By addressing the systemic barriers that women face, providing targeted support at every stage of education and career, and fostering a culture of inclusivity, the country can unlock the full potential of its female talent. Through evidence-based actions and a collective effort, Bangladesh can inspire more women to enter and thrive in STEM, ultimately reaping the bene its of a more diverse and innovative workforce. In order to blur these gap some effective policies are critical in fostering women's interest and success in STEM disciplines.

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Healthcare & Wellbeing

Reducing Out-of-Pocket Healthcare Expenses for Low-Income Populations in Bangladesh:
for Equity and Universal Health Coverage

Nawjesh Kabir

Executive Summary

Bangladesh's healthcare system is heavily burdened by high out-of-pocket (OOP) costs creating significant financial strain for low-income families and limiting healthcare access. Key findings reveal that high pharmaceutical expenses, limited public healthcare funding and dependency on costly private services are primary drivers of this issue. Recommendations include expanding subsidized health insurance for vulnerable groups, introducing price caps on essential medications and increasing public health investments. These targeted strategies would alleviate financial hardships, promote equitable access to healthcare and support Bangladesh's goals for universal health coverage (UHC) which can eventually build a more resilient healthcare system.

Introduction

Bangladesh's healthcare financing structure predominantly relies on out-of-pocket (OOP) spending which accounts for 73% of total health expenditure, one of the highest rates in South Asia. This financial burden particularly affects low-income households driving many into poverty through catastrophic health expenditures (CHE). High costs for essential medicines, diagnostics and limited public healthcare access exacerbate this issue impacting both individual well-being and economic stability. Addressing this issue is essential for achieving universal health coverage (UHC) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) benefiting all stakeholders, including the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MOHFW), healthcare providers and non-governmental organizations. This document outlines the critical need for policy reform. It reviews past interventions and explores sustainable solutions. These include publicly subsidized health insurance models to reduce OOP expenses and ensure equitable healthcare access for Bangladesh's most vulnerable populations.

Problem statement

A significant challenge for Bangladesh's healthcare system is reducing the burden of high out-of-pocket (OOP) expenses which disproportionately impact low-income populations. Studies reveal that OOP expenses push many households into poverty especially due to high pharmaceutical and diagnostic costs that are largely borne by patients themselves (Murphy et al., 2019). Evidence from other low and middle-in come countries (*LMICs*) shows that reducing OOP costs through subsidized health programs and effective insurance models significantly improves healthcare access and equity *(Bolongaita et al., 2023)*. Yet, Bangladesh's healthcare policies currently lack strong prepayment mechanisms such as robust public insurance systems or effective price regulation of private healthcare both of which have been successfully implemented in other LMICs *(Yee et al., 2024)* .

Key gaps in the current approach include inadequate public health funding *(5% of the national budget, below WHO's recommendation of 15%)* and minimal regulation on the costs of essential medical services and drugs *(Jalali et al., 2021)*. Addressing these gaps with targeted policies that prioritize financial protection for low-income groups would support Bangladesh's progress toward more equitable and sustainable healthcare access.
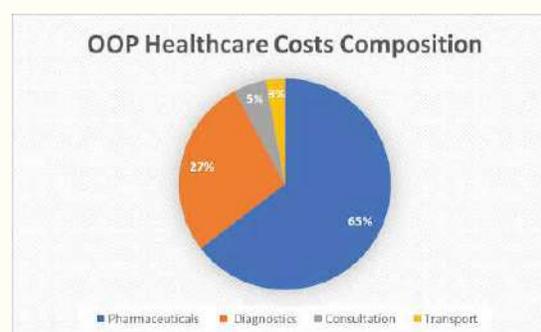

Figure: OOP Healthcare Costs Composition

Analysis of the issue

One major factor contributing to the high OOP burden is the insufficient allocation of public funds to health with only 5% of the national budget allocated to healthcare, far below the World Health Organization's (WHO) recommended 15% (Yee et al., 2024) . This limited funding restricts the availability of free or subsidized public healthcare, driving many individuals to seek services from private providers where costs are unregulated and often prohibitively high. Additionally, pharmaceutical expenses comprise about 64.6% of household OOP spending due to minimal price controls on essential drugs and the predominance of brand-name pharmaceuticals which increases costs (Bolongaita et al., 2023) . Historically, Bangladesh has introduced limited interventions to reduce OOP costs. These include the Shashtho Shurokhkha Kormoshu chi (SSK) which provides health insurance to low-income households in select districts. Another example is university health insurance schemes.
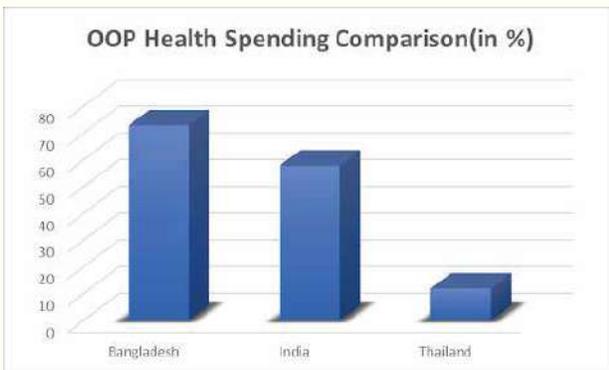
Figure: OOP Healthcare Costs Composition

However, these programs are limited in reach and impact due to funding and implementation constraints, and they have yet to achieve nationwide coverage. In contrast, countries like Thailand and India have implemented sucessful health coverage models that could inform Bangladesh's policy. Thailand's Universal Coverage Scheme relies on government -funded insurance and capitation payments, successfully lowering OOP expenses to approximately 12% of total health expenditure. India's Ayushman Bharat scheme similarly aims to reduce OOP spendi ng by expanding insurance coverage and leveraging strategic purchasing of healthcare services (Murphy et al., 2019).

Bangladesh's healthcare system also suffers from a rapidly growing private healthcare sector with limited regulation leading to inflated costs for consultations, diagnostics and treatment. Patients often resort to private providers due to insufficient public healthcare infrastructure, especially in rural areas, further increasing their financial burden. Expanding government-subsidized insurance programs, strengthening price regulation for vital medications and increasing public health financing are all necessary to address this

problem. By studying successful models and implementing similar strategies Bangladesh could significantly reduce OOP costs, enhance access to affordable healthcare and support socioeconomic stability for its most vulnerable populations.

Policy option

Policy Scenario	Projecte CHE Reduction (%)
Current	25
Expanded Insurance	15
Price Regulation	12
Increased Public Funding	10

Figure:Projected impact on catastrophic health expenditure (CHE) reduction

1. **Expand Subsidized Health Insurance Programs:**
   Expanding government-supported health insurance schemes to cover more low-income populations including informal workers and rural communities could significantly reduce OOP expenses.

   Pros: This option directly targets financial barriers, lowering healthcare costs and increasing access for vulnerable groups. Success stories like Thailand's Universal Coverage Scheme and India's Ayushman Bharat highlight substantial reductions in catastrophic health expenditures (CHE) with improved health outcomes (Bolongaita et al., 2023).

   Cons: High financial investment is required potentially straining Bangladesh's health budget which is currently only 5% of the national budget (Murphy et al., 2019). Ensuring effective implementation in underserved areas may also be challenging.

   Feasibility: High, if funding sources are identified such as taxes or reallocation within the national budget.

   Potential Impact: Expanded insurance coverage could lead to a notable reduction in CHE, lifting many households above the poverty line and enhancing overall public health
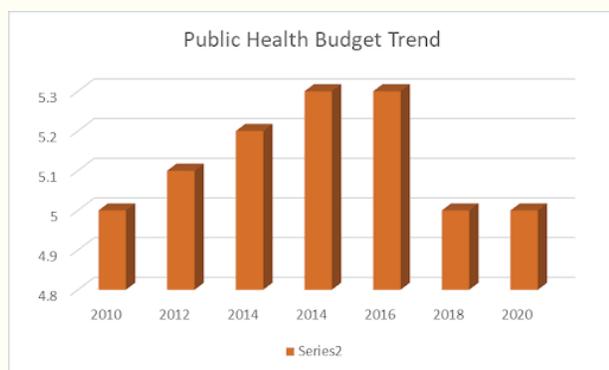
Figure: Figure: Public Health Budget Trend

2. **Regulate Pharmaceutical Prices and Essential Services:**
Introducing price caps on essential drugs and diagnostics could lower costs for the most-used health services which constitute a large portion of OOP spending.

Pros: This policy would reduce OOP spending without new infrastructure costs and could improve affordability, particularly for medications (Jalali et al., 2021).

Cons: Implementing effective regulation and enforcement may meet resistance from pharmaceutical companies and private healthcare providers. Adequate oversight mechanisms would also be necessary to ensure compliance.

Feasibility: Moderate; it requires robust regulatory frameworks and government oversight.

Potential Impact: By making essential drugs and diagnostics affordable, this option could reduce OOP by a significant margin, thus protecting households from excessive healthcare expenses and promoting equitable access.

3. **Increase Public Health Funding and Infrastructure:**
Increasing the budget allocation for public healthcare to expand infrastructure would improve the availability of low-cost services particularly in rural and underserved areas.

Pros: Strengthening public health infrastructure lowers dependence on costly private providers and increases access to essential services. This investment can improve long-term health equity (Yee et al., 2024).

Cons: Infrastructure projects require substantial inancial investments and long-term commitment, and the impact may take time to materialize.

Feasibility: Moderate to low; substantial funding and long-term

Recommendations

1. **Expand Subsidized Health Insurance**

- Focus on extending government-backed health insurance to low-income groups, rural communities and informal workers to alleviate financial burdens.

- Evidence from Thailand's Universal Coverage Scheme and India's Ayushman Bharat demonstrates the effectiveness of such insurance in reducing catastrophic health expenditures (CHE) and improving healthcare access for vulnerable populations (Murphy et al., 2019).

2. **Implement Price Controls on Essential Drugs and Diagnostics**

- Introduce maximum price caps on essential medicines and diagnostic services to tackle high pharmaceutical costs which make up 64.6% of household OOP expenses

- Price regulation would make essential healthcare services more affordable and accessible (Bolongaita et al., 2023).

3. **Increase Public Health Funding**

- Raise public health budget allocation from the current 5% to approach WHO's recommended 15% of GDP to improve healthcare infrastructure in underserved areas.

- Enhanced public healthcare facilities would reduce reliance on private providers and provide long-term inancial relief to households (Jalali et al., 2021).

4. **Combine Immediate Relief with Long-Term Equity Goals**

- Adopt a multifaceted strategy that ensures immediate financial relief through price regulation and insurance expansion while focusing on long-term health equity through sustained public funding.

- These measures would support sustainable development, reduce financial strain and ensure equitable healthcare access for Bangladesh's most vulnerable populations.

Conclusion

Reducing out-of-pocket (OOP) healthcare expenses is vital for Bangladesh's journey toward universal health coverage (UHC) and socioeconomic stability. With OOP costs constituting around 73% of total healthcare spending, the inancial burden on low-income families is unsustainable driving many into poverty and limiting access to essential care. Immediate action is essential. Expanding subsidized health insurance, regulating the costs of essential drugs and increasing public healthcare funding represent a comprehensive and sustainable solution. If these measures are adopted it would protect vulnerable populations from catastrophic health expenditures ensuring more equitable healthcare access and foster long-term economic resilience. This balanced approach could transform Bangladesh's healthcare landscape, improving lives and supporting national development goals.

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The Role of Medicine Cost Control in Reducing Financial Burden for Healthcare Costs in Bangladesh: Policy Solutions for Affordable Medicines

Nadira Anjum

Executive Summary

Bangladesh faces a high portion of out-of-pocket expenditures, which is 73%, disproportionately affecting low-income households and hindering progress toward Universal Health Coverage (UHC). Pharmaceutical expenses account for 64.6% of this burden, The lack of medicine availability in public healthcare facilities. drug prices driven by marketing costs of pharmaceuticals, and inadequate price regulation are key contributors to the financial strain. The policy interventions suggested here are: Introducing a standardized quality testing of drugs, establishing a separate drug price control authority, introducing a pharmaceutical benefits scheme, and strengthening the public healthcare facilities. These measures require significant investment and collaboration among stakeholders but are essential to reduce healthcare out-of-pocket costs, improve equity, and safeguard the economic stability of Bangladeshi households.

Introduction

Bangladesh has one of the highest out-of-pocket expenditures for healthcare costs, which is 73%, the second highest in South Asia. (World Health Organization, 2021). The high OOP is one of the major barriers to achieving Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for Bangladesh. This rising OOP is hindering the continuous poverty reduction efforts by the Government of Bangladesh and pushing numerous families into poverty. 4.7% of the population incurred catastrophic expenditure at the 10% threshold and around 9.5% of people experienced catastrophic expenditure at the 25% threshold level (World Health Organization, World Bank, 2019, 41). A 2021 report from the HEU of the MOHFW shows that due to the increased OOP, 16.4% of patients could not access the healthcare they needed. *(Health Economics Unit, 2021)*.

Problem statement

In Bangladesh, the majority (64.6%) of the total OOP is attributable to the purchase of pharmaceutical items. 11.7% of OOP on laboratory

charges, and 10.8% on doctors. (Health Economics Unit (HEU), (MOHFW), Bangladesh, 2023). The poorest households allocated 9.97% of their total expenditure to out-of-pocket spending on medicines, almost twice as much as the wealthiest households, who spent 5.86%. 71% of all households spent more than 10% of their entire disposable income on medicines. This portion of total household expenditure spent on medicines varies largely among the income groups, displaying notable disparity in financial burden due to medicine costs. 23.8% of the poorest households spent more than 20% of their disposable income on pharmaceutical costs, compared to 12.1% of the wealthiest (Serván-Mori et al., 2022). As pharmaceutical costs account for the largest share
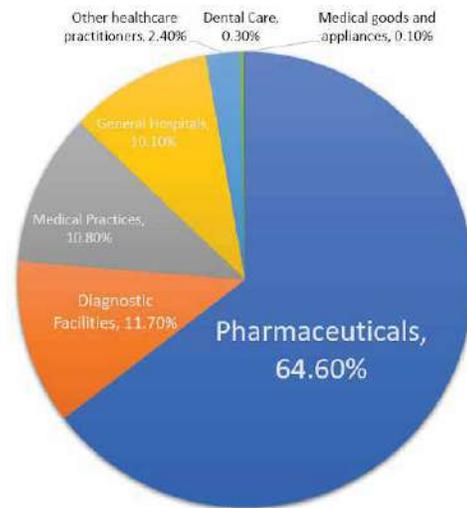
Figure 1: Components of the total OOP in Bangladesh
Source: Bangladesh National Health Accounts 1997-2020

of out-of-pocket expenditures in Bangladesh and disproportionately impact lower-income groups, it is crucial to prioritize the development and implementation of policies aimed at reducing the financial burden of drug expenses. This policy brief examines the key factors driving high out-of-pocket expenditures on medicines and offers policy recommendations to alleviate the financial burden of drug costs.ented in other LMICs (Yee et al., 2024).

Key gaps in the current approach include inadequate public health funding (5% of the national budget, below WHO's recommendation of 15%) and minimal regulation on the costs of essential medical services and drugs (Jalali et al., 2021). Addressing these gaps with targeted policies that prioritize financial protection for low-income groups would support Bangladesh's progress toward more equitable and sustainable healthcare access.

Analysis of the issue

Poor Preparedness and Availability of Medicines in Public Healthcare Facilities:

- In publicly funded healthcare facilities, medicines are intended to be free of charge. However, a recent study examining 61 medicines found that availability in public health facilities was significantly lower compared to private facilities, with mean availability rates of 37% in public facilities, 63% in private retail pharmacies, and 54% in private clinics. Medicines listed on the Essential Medicines List (EML) were slightly less available than non-essential medicines across all sectors. Furthermore, medicine availability varied by the level of care: tertiary facilities had the highest availability (49%), followed by secondary care facilities (39%) and primary care facilities (33%). Since not all patients have access to tertiary care facilities, this suggests that individuals relying on primary care facilities have significantly less access to medicines (Kasonde et al., 2019). The public funding for production and procurement of medicines by the government is limited, which leads have poor preparedness and availability of medicines in the public sector *(Bonilla-Chacin et al., 2020).*
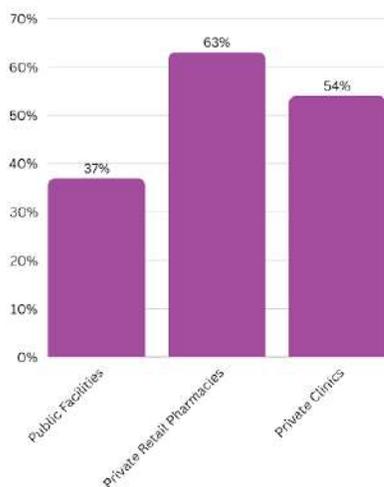
- There were also statistically significant differences in the availability of medicines for different types of diseases. NCD medicines were less available (mean 27%) than infectious disease medicines (mean 48%) and uncategorized medicines (68%) in public healthcare facilities. (Kasonde et al., 2019). NCD disease burden is increasing in our country and it is costly as the medicines for NCD have to be taken for a long term. Studies indicate that households affected by NCDs face double the healthcare costs of those without NCDs (Molla et al., 2017). While private healthcare facilities offer greater availability of NCD medicines than district hospitals, patients often face a significant financial burden due to its high out-of-pocket costs. private healthcare facilities offer greater availability of NCD medicines than district hospitals, patients often face a significant financial burden due to its high out-of-pocket costs.
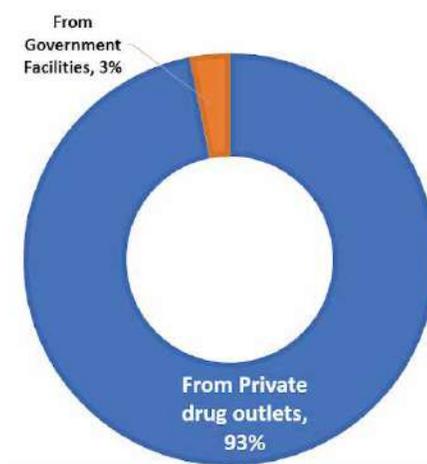
Figure 3: Percentages Of Patients Obtaining Drugs From Government And Private Facilities
Source: (Bonilla-Chacin et al., 2020)

Lack Of Regulation, Proper Policies, And Implementation Of The Existing Policies:

The National Drug Policy of 1982 had a list of a total of 150 essential drugs, whose prices would be fixed by the government by a formula. However, the approach to price regulation underwent a significant shift in 2016. Initially, in the original drug policy, essential medicines had the same prices for all manufacturers, determined by a ixed formula. By 2016, manufacturers could negotiate separate prices with regulators based on their cost submissions during brand approval. Therefore, being on the essential medicines list now has little impact on pricing. The 2016 policy also mandates the government to regulate drug prices and requires all retail drug prices to be published on the DGDA's website. This has not happened. (Khan et al., 2024).

Figure 2: Mean Availability Of Medicines Across Facilities
Source: (Kasonde et al., 2019)

Pharmaceutical Companies Marketing Practices:

In Bangladesh, a significant portion of medicine prices in the market is due to marketing costs. According to a 2024 paper, marketing costs usually consist of 40-50% of the total drug prices. Some people including doctors have the wrong perception that better prices mean better quality drugs, however, this perception has been disproved by available testing methods and pieces of evidence. The drug prices of the medicines of the same chemically identical formulations have a difference of almost 16%-200% in their market prices. One of the problematic circular reasons behind high drug prices is that the bigger companies maintain these prices and the perception of 'higher quality' for their drugs by initially setting high prices. They can then afford to promote these drugs by spending higher marketing costs and bribing doctors, which leads to increased drug sales and profits. This, in turn, allows them to allocate more resources for further marketing, perpetuating the cycle. Some of them also use their influences with the regulator and work back from the price they set at first to adjust API and other costs to make it add up to the final price. *(Khan et al., 2024)*
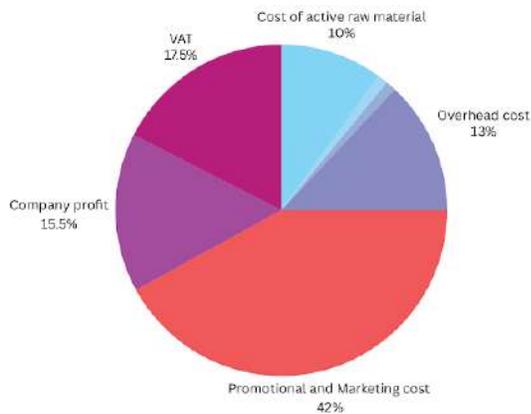
Figure 4: A Breakdown Of A Drug's Price Into Its Cost Components Data
Data Source: (Khan et al., 2024)

Policy Options:

Increasing Capacity of Public Healthcare Facilities:

Strengthening the capacity of public healthcare facilities, especially the primary and secondary healthcare facilities to store and provide medicines, common NCD medications, and other facilities to encourage people to utilize these facilities. Increasing the public funding for drug production, procurement and distribution by the government is also crucial. The public primary healthcare facilities must be strengthened in capacity and support so that they can become a reliable place for healthcare for populations of all income levels and geographical areas.

Standardized Quality Testing for drugs:

Introduction of standardized quality testing for all drugs by DGDA, where the standards for efficacy and safety of ingredients will be compared to an original branded product, and all drugs in the market have to meet these standards to be in the market. Bioequivalence testing is a globally standard practice for drug quality certification and can be introduced to ensure that all drugs in the market meet a specific quality standard. It will have several positive implications for drug quality assurance and for controlling aggressive marketing of pharmaceutical companies and controlling drug prices in the market. Bioequivalence testing, a globally standard test for drugs, should be introduced to ensure quality and efficacy *(Khan et al., 2024)*.

Implementing this will have several benefits:

- The testing will make sure that all drugs in the market have the same level of efficacy and quality, and the pharmaceutical companies can no longer sell their products at an inflated price claiming their products are of superior quality.

- The public will also feel safe choosing drugs from lower-priced brands, and by using the quality certificate from DGDA, the lower-priced brands can promote their medicines. This will help reduce aggressive marketing on the brand's part, helping to reduce drug prices.

However, DGDA currently lacks the resources, infrastructure, and skilled manpower needed for regular quality control and monitoring. Strengthening DGDA's capacity will be essential to implement and sustain this initiative. Despite these challenges, standardized quality testing is long overdue. Introducing this testing would help to regulate these pharmaceutical company's unethical marketing practices and reduce the financial burden of high drug prices on the public**.**

A Separate Drug Price Control Authority:

A separate entity could be established to regulate the prices of drugs, whose objective would be to conduct studies and set formulations for setting drug prices and to implement the existing policies taken to control drug prices. This authority needs to be separate from DGDA and will act as an overseer for drug market price control, identify shortages and needs for drugs, and advise the government on policies regarding drug prices and production. Our neighboring country, India has a such authority named the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA), which plays a major role in setting drug prices. *(Syed Abdul Hamid, personal communication, September 23, 2024)*

Establishing a similar entity in Bangladesh would require legislative

action, but it is essential to achieve effective control over drug prices and ensure equitable access to affordable medicines for all. Establishing a similar entity in Bangladesh would require legislative action, but it is essential to achieve effective control over drug prices and ensure equitable access to affordable medicines for all.

Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme:

In the long term, a financial protection mechanism will help reduce the burden due to pharmaceutical costs. A pharmaceutical benefits scheme, where a third-party payer reimburses the costs for prescribed medicines, can help in reducing financial strain due to drug purchase, regulating the overuse and overprescribing of drugs, and controlling the sale of unprescribed over-the-counter medications. For the low-income population groups, this can be done as part of healthcare financing protection programs like SSK and the reimbursement for drug costs can be done with or without patient copaymen. (Bonilla-Chacin et al., 2020). Australia has a Pharmaceutical Bene its Scheme (PBS), that subsidizes the cost of prescribed medications, making them more affordable for Australian residents, particularly for those with chronic conditions or low income. However-er, introducing this will require a massive level of administrative and technical support and coordination between various stakeholders. Despite these challenges, a PBS would play a crucial role in ensuring affordability, regulating drug sales, and ultimately reducing the financial burden of pharmaceuti-

Recommendations

The best course of action would be to implement all three suggested reforms, listed in brief below:

- Introduction of Standardized quality control tests that are required for a medicine to be available in the market after increasing capacity, resources, and manpower for DGDA.

- Formation of a separate authority for setting formulas for regulating drug prices and implementing the price regulations by drug policies.

- Increasing the public procurement of drugs and enhancing the capacity of the public facilities to make them more accessible to the people.

Conclusion

Decisive, firm, and radical measures are necessary to shield the general population from financial hardship due to drug and healthcare costs. While the policies proposed here demand bold and new actions, such interventions are imperative in a country with OOP

expenditures as high as ours. With the growing burden of chronic diseases requiring long-term medical care, timely, evidence-based, and transformative measures are crucial. These reforms are not just about improving healthcare access; they are vital to safeguarding the health, quality of life, and economic, social, and mental well-being of the population. Taking bold steps today will pave the way for a more equitable and sustainable healthcare system for future generations.

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Bangladesh's Fight Against Non-Communicable Diseases:
What Could Be Better

Samia Zaman

Executive Summary

Bangladesh is a developing nation where various health issues plague its poor and hardworking population. Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are majorly responsible for the population's decline in health as the majority of the DEA. There is a gap in the Bangladeshi government's policy implementation and more when it comes to NCD management despite many achievements. This policy brief addresses these gaps and provides recommendations for establishing proper NCD management.

Introduction

Non-communicable diseases are diseases that are not spread through infection or through other people, but are typically caused by unhealthy behaviours.[3](Non-communicable diseases,2018) The most common NCDs in Bangladesh are: cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, cancers, and chronic respiratory diseases.[3]*(Non-communicable diseases,2018)*

In the whole world, more than 80% premature deaths occur from non-communicable diseases, accounting for 71% of the deaths in the world per year. This problem is not a rich country problem as more than 85% of these premature deaths occur in lower and lower-middle income countries. In 2019, 70% of the total deaths in Bangladesh was from non-communicable diseases. There were 13.14 million cases of diabetes in 2021. In Bangladesh, the impact of diabetes on productivity loss and the broader economy looms large, and poses a substantial risk to the country's future prosperity.[4]*(Afroz et al, 2020)* So it is clear that NCDs have great impact on people's health and finances in Bangladesh.

In the backdrop of all these issues, this document explores how Bangladesh is currently dealing with problems caused by NCDs and how it can improve its response to the problems.

Problem Statement:

In 2019, noncommunicable diseases accounted for 70% of all fatalities in Bangladesh. In 2021, there were 13.14 million cases of diabetes. Diabetes has a significant influence on productivity loss and the larger economy in Bangladesh, posing a serious threat to the country's future development.[4](afroz et al ,2020)

Government and non-governmental agencies such as MOHFW, WHO, International Centre for Disease Control and Research in Bangladesh (icddr,b), Centre of Excellence for Non-Communicable Diseases and Nutrition (CNCDN) are sponsors of many programs designed to combat NCD. MoHFW) developed the National Strategy for the Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases. With the World Health Organization's Global Action Plan for NCDs, Bangladesh introduced the Multisectoral Action Plan (2018–2025) to coordinate efforts across health and non-health sectors.[5](WHO,2019)

Although GoB and other organizations have taken several initiatives including Package of Essential Noncommunicable Disease (PEN), NCD corners, Essential drug list, Health, Population and Nutrition Sector Program (HPNSP) to manage prevalent NCDs, there exist several challenges in non-communicable disease control including NCD management protocol implementation, availability of drugs, diagnostics etc[5](*WHO,2019*). District health information software (DHIS2) is not effectively providing monthly service provision data and tracking indicators. Awareness for NCD screening at community clinics and NCD corners in Upazila Health Complex (UHC) are operational in 66 upazilas and 31 districts but needs scaling up nationwide. NCD is prioritised in documents, however little implementation of the lofty objectives takes place.In Bangladesh, NCDs are estimated to account for 67% of all deaths.[1](*Rawal et al,2019*)

There is a lack of facilities, equipment and sufficient staff. Due to centralization there is limited access to services. There is a poor health information system. Tobacco use remains high among adults and teenagers.[1](*Rawal et al, 2019*)

3. Analysis of the Issue

The non-communicable diseases in the nation account for over 67% of all deaths.In addition, the minister stated that about 50,000 new patients are added to the list every year, and that about 20% of the population has hypertension, 10% has diabetes, and up to 20 lakh individuals have cancer in the nation.[6](67% of all deaths in Bangladesh due to non-communicable diseases, 2022)

Changes in food and lifestyle, obesity, tobacco use, contamination of the environment, and medication abuse are all contributing factors to the rise in NCDs.[6](67% of all deaths in Bangladesh due to non-communicable diseases, 2022)

The lack of Financial risk protection is more pronounced among households with NCDs than those without NCDs. Concerted efforts are required to ensure FRP for all families, particularly those with NCDs.[7](Rahman et al, 2022) Poor management of allocated funds for NCD management, profit based private healthcare Sector and inaccessibility of needed care stemming from it, lack of coordination between governing bodies, risks stemming from lifestyle encouraged by urbanised, consumerist, capitalist lifestyle etc are key reasons behind the lack of success of the government's NCD management policies.

Policy Options :

A conscious society can overcome the challenge of non communicable diseases with a sound national policy and education. Based on the current landscape of Bangladeshi healthcare policy implementation and its many gaps, the following recommendations to mend those gaps are made:

- Screening for NCDs should be increased by providing certain incentives such as discounted charges which are part of insurance claims, workplace screening drives, itness requirements for jobs etc.

- Healthy lifestyle education should be part of school curriculum for adolescents.

- Strengthening patient tracking and referral systems using a unique health ID is a must. NCD corners have contributed substantially to increase NCD awareness, deliver NCD care and provide referral services[1](Rawal et al, 2019)

- The government should ensure coordination of all health agencies in addressing the issue of NCDs. Since awareness of NCDs is needed across all sectors and all of society is affected by it, all types of professionals and institutions should participate in NCDs management's preventive stages.

- The government should start task shifting within its health cadres in order to accommodate the changing needs for long-term monitoring. The majority of studies showed improved health outcomes when it was compared with usual healthcare, including reductions in blood pressure, increased uptake of medications and lower depression scores. Factors such as training of MPHWs(Multi Purpose Health Workers), provision of algorithms and protocols

for screening, treatment and drug titration were the main enablers of the task-shifting intervention[2](Joshi et al, 2014)

Recommendations

As Bangladesh aims to reduce premature deaths from NCD by one-third in 2030[5](WHO,2019), several reforms need to take place which include but is not limited to-

- Strengthening and capacity building PHC facilities of NCDs and MIS

- Ensuring access of essential drugs available to NCD patients maintaining equity thus preventing cost escalation and establish equitable payment mechanisms

- Earmarking health taxes to prevent incidence and prevalence of NCDs

- Effective screening, surveillance and monitoring programs in the community level

- Devising sociodemographic factor standardised interventions appropriate for Bangladesh with regular and necessary evaluation against preset benchmarks

- Task shifting within its health cadres in order to accommodate the changing needs for long-term monitoring and treatments

- Efficient management of allocated funds

Conclusion:

Non-communicable diseases(NCDS) are a huge driver of constraints of the health system in Bangladesh. Although the Bangladeshi government has taken steps in addressing NCD management, factors like gap in policy implementation, lack of facilities, equipment and suf icient staff, limited access to services, poor health information system make it difficult to achieve an NCD-free future. But efforts to accomplish such a goal should never be stopped. To combat noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), a national policy and education are needed. Incentives like discounted medical fees for insurance claims, workplace screening drives, and itness requirements can increase screening for NCDs. Adolescents should be educated on healthy lifestyles, and patient tracking and referral systems should be strengthened. The government should coordinate health agencies, involve professionals and institutions in NCD management, and shift tasks within health cadres to accommodate changing needs for long-term monitoring.

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Bridging the Mental Health Treatment Gap:
Community Based Approaches for Better Access and Service Delivery

Anas Ahsan Mostofa

Executive Summary

Bangladesh faces several significant challenges regarding mental health, including a huge treatment gap, inadequate facilities, scarce human resources, and poor funding. Community-based mental health approaches, such as the introduction of lay mental health professionals and scaling up the World Health Organization's (WHO) mhGAP initiatives, can address these issues. Evidence from various lower-middle-income countries with similar socio-demographic features highlights the effectiveness of such initiatives. Strengthening the referral system and the management information system (MIS) is crucial in this regard. Political commitment, enhanced public-private coordination, and increased funding based on evidence over time can address these issues and help to pave the way to a healthier Bangladesh for the future.

Introduction

Mental health has become crucial in today's fast-paced, stressful world, affecting people all around the world across all demographics. According to WHO, in 2019, 270 million people globally were living with a mental disorder, with anxiety and depression as most common. Mental disorders contribute to 1 in 6 years lived with disability worldwide. Severe mental health conditions reduce life expectancy by 10 to 20 years (World Health Organization: WHO, 2019). Bangladesh, too, is facing a heavy burden of non-communicable diseases, with mental disorders including a remarkable share of it. This document aims to portray the existing scenario of mental health in Bangladesh, identify its challenges and propose some community based mental health interventions to improve the overall mental health landscape of the country.

Problem statement

According to the last mental health survey conducted in 2019, around 18.7% of adults have some kind of mental disorder, and COVID-19 pandemic has further worsened the situation *(Hasan et*

al., 2021). A nation-wide cross sectional study conducted on the adult population during the pandemic found prevalence of anxiety and depressive symptoms to be 33.7% and 57.9% respectively, which is much higher than the pre pandemic rates *(Banna et al., 2020)*.

According to the last mental health survey conducted in 2019, around 18.7% of adults have some kind of mental disorder, and COVID-19 pandemic has further worsened the situation *(Hasan et al., 2021)*. A nation-wide cross sectional study conducted on the adult population during the pandemic found prevalence of anxiety and depressive symptoms to be 33.7% and 57.9% respectively, which is much higher than the pre pandemic rates *(Banna et al., 2020)*.

There exists a huge treatment of 92.4% *(Hasan et al., 2021d)*. Furthermore, only 10% of the affected population seek healthcare services *(Huque et al., 2023)*. High social stigma further worsens the health seeking behavior of the affected population.

Figure name: Challenges in mental health :Bangladesh perspective

Analysis of the issue

There are several factors that contribute to the huge treatment gap in mental health. Each year, less than 0.5% of the total health budget is dedicated to mental health, 67% of which is spent on existing mental health hospitals. Mentally ill patients account for only 4.2% of all the inpatient units (Hasan et al., 2021). This can be attributed to scarcity in inancial and human resources dedicated to mental health, which leads to the under-providing of mental health care services both in terms of quality and quantity from the supply side.

Moreover, only 0.49% of the total health workforce is trained to provide mental health services, and there are only 0.16 psychologists dedicated per 100,000 population. There is currently only one institute for mental health in Bangladesh, namely, National Institute of Mental Health and Hospital (NIMH). In addition to this, there is a 500-bed mental health hospital and 31 community psychiatric inpatient units and 50 outpatient mental health facilities. Along with the very scarce mental health workforce,facilities and poor allocation, there exists no multidisciplinary coordination between psychiatrists, psychologists and psychiatric nurses who are supposed to work as a team when providing mental health services, and no guidelines exist to bring them under the same umbrella, rendering the mental health service delivery even more inefficient. *(Hasan et al., 2021)*

Policy Options

Considering the inadequacies of mental health processes in Bangladesh, particularly shortage in mental healthcare workforce, scanty facilities and poor financing - implementing community based mental health interventions in low-resource settings like Bangladesh can significantly reduce the existing huge treatment gap and improve the mental health service delivery across the country.

Even though the Mental Health Act 2018 addresses several important aspects of mental health issues in Bangladesh, it does not focus particularly on community based interventions(Karim & Shaikh, 2021c). There is no specific guideline for community mental health interventions in Bangladesh (Faruk, 2022). The primary healthcare facilities in Bangladesh do not provide mental health services as well. Although NIMH introduced mental health training to primary health care physicians and health workers in 1981, community based follow up is near non-existent, particularly in rural areas (Hasan et al., 2021). The latest WHO advocacy strategy for mental health, brain health and substance use also stresses the importance of primary health care and community-based service networks to increase access to essential interventions and care for mental health conditions. (WHO Advocacy Strategy for Mental Health, Brain Health and Substance Use, 2024)

To strengthen community based mental health services, several policy measures can be taken, they are as follows:

Introduction of lay mental health professionals:

Given the acute shortage and skewed distribution of mental health professionals, introducing lay health professionals will improve mental health service delivery across the country. Lay mental health professionals deliver services at the community and primary healthcare settings, making mental health services accessible in rural areas of Bangladesh.

There have been successful implementations of introducing community mental health workers in lower-middle income countries. The Friendship Bench (FB) project is an evidence-based intervention developed in Zimbabwe to bridge the mental health treatment gap. This intervention has been developed over 20 years of community research in Zimbabwe. In 2016, a randomized control trial found the friendship bench project to have a significant positive impact on depressive symptoms compared to the control group. *(The Friendship Bench | Centre for Global Mental Health, n.d.)*

In Bangladesh, BRAC, in collaboration with Mental Health Unit of Non-Communicable Disease Control (NCDC) and the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) have conducted pilot projects to assess the outcome of community mental health services through paraprofessionals. Research findings suggest that these pilot projects significantly raised mental health awareness, reduced depression and stress while improving well-being in various aspects of health *(Mental Health Pilot Intervention Shows Promising Results* at the Community Level, n.d.).

The advantage of such initiatives is that these are particularly effective in low-resource settings like Bangladesh. However, training of these professionals needs to be effectively tailored according to the sociocultural determinants and perceptions of mental health in a given population, along with continuous monitoring and supervision to evaluate the impact of training in the implementation process.

Furthermore, in order to have successful community based interventions, it is crucial to establish a functioning referral system and a strong management information system (MIS) to ensure maximum utilization of the limited resources in every stage of the healthcare system.

Implementation of Mental Health Gap Action Plan (mhGAP) program on a national scale:

In 2017, the Mental Health Gap Action Program was launched in Cox's Bazar by DGHS in response to the Rohingya humanitarian crisis with the intent to integrate mental health in primary health care settings, with the support of WHO,NIMH and NINS (National Institute of Neurosciences). Significant improvements were observed in the trainees both in terms of assessment and treatment of mental health

conditions. *(Momotaz et al., 2019)*

In Ethiopia, this mhGAP was piloted for 3 three years and it showed significant results in managing mental health conditions in the primary care level. Such piloting projects were also conducted in Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Jordan which produced similar positive results of these interventions. *(Momotaz et al., 2019)*

Challenges in implementation of mhGAPs include proper assessment of cultural determinants and perceptions of mental health so that the programs could be tailored accordingly to ensure its cultural competence. The sustainability of such programs depend on the technical support available for implementation. (Momotaz et al., 2019)

COMMUNITY BASED INTERVENTIONS ON MENTAL HEATLTH

1. Introduction of lay mental health professionals

2. Implementation of mhGAP on a national scale

3. Establishment of functioning referral system and Management Information System

Recommendations

1. Introduce community mental health workers and primary mental health counselors in primary health care settings. The community health workers' focus population will be the entire population in the community whereas the primary mental health counselors will focus on individuals or groups.

2. Establish proper community mental health guidelines based on which community based mental health interventions will function.

3. Scale up mhGAPs on a national scale to properly integrate mental

health services in primary health care settings.

4. Strengthening the referral system and management information system (MIS) for the effective functioning of the community based interventions

5. Increase public private interventions to ensure proper implementation and scaling of mental health interventions

6. Increase funding on mental health with time based on the results of the pilot projects implemented.

Conclusion

Mental health is a serious concern for a developing country like Bangladesh, with an existing huge treatment gap, insufficient mental health facilities, inadequate and skewed distribution of human resources and poor funding to mental health. In this situation, it is important that Bangladesh focuses on community based mental health interventions like introduction and training of lay mental health workers and scaling up of mhGAP programs to reduce the existing treatment gap and improve the overall mental health service delivery across the country. To maximize the outcome of such interventions, supporting systems like the referral system and the management information systems should also be enhanced. The government of Bangladesh and other stakeholders should also focus on increasing funds for mental health and better public private coordination. Political commitment of the government is also necessary to address such issues as different complex bureaucratic procedures and socio demographic components are involved in the successful implementation of such initiatives. To utilize the demographic dividend of Bangladesh in the coming years, mental health must be one of the topmost priorities of the country at this moment.

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Law & Governance

From Vested to Public Interest: A Roadmap to Depoliticization of Bangladesh's Public Service

Asif Khan Ullash

Executive Summary

The public service in Bangladesh is severely politicized, which erodes efficiency, accountability, and merit while fostering corruption and public mistrust. Restructuring the Bangladesh Public Service Commission (BPSC) for openness and autonomy, instituting merit-based promotions, and fortifying the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) by rescinding the 2013 amendment are some of the measures required to address this. Accountability requires enforcing a stringent code of conduct and updating laws shielding public employees from scrutiny.

Technology integration can improve efficiency and transparency even more. Examples include blockchain for evidence integrity, arti icial intelligence (AI) for case tracking, and digital platforms for procurement and whistleblowing. A professional, responsible governance framework for sustainable development can be established and public services depoliticized with the help of these policies, which are backed by strong political will and civil society advocacy.

Introduction

A man, showing images of dead bodies to the former home minister on the phone, complaining- only one person is typically killed or injured by a bullet, while the others remain unharmed. What does this scenario reveal about him? Is he a gangster or a political operative? In fact, he is a government law enforcement officer whose duty is to serve and protect the nation and its citizens (Daily Sun, 2024). Above scenario is the ultimate form of politicization of public service and Bangladesh is stuck in this entirely politicized system.

Ensuring good governance and accountability is the first step towards a just and democratic society. Public institutions in Bangladesh serve political purposes rather than operate in people's interests. Politicization of bureaucracy, partisanship of judiciary, domestication of Election Commission, and utter lack of accountability have failed us to be an equitable state. Total overhauling is a long term process but for now, at least

measures to reform the institutions and governing system must be taken to build a more transparent and accountable state.

Problem statement

Liaison between public servants and public representatives is essential for the country's overall development and the smooth running of governance. However, that relationship should be in the country's interest, not in the interest of any political party or individual. But this is not always the case, most of the time government employees consider themselves part of the ruling party, rather than a servant of the people. Following independence, every succeeding administration let civil bureaucrats participate in political activity. Many civil servants joined the political parties immediately after retirement.

Bureaucracy is typically seen to be split between groups that support the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and the Awami League (AL). The ruling party's allies receive promotions, and opposition sympathizers are frequently placed on Officer on Special Duty (OSD), the general norm of public services in Bangladesh. On February 8, 1992, the BNP government promoted 654 officials, and 51 civil personnel received forced retirement. Bangladesh Awami League (AL) came to power in 1996 and continued the process of politicization till 2001. 355 officials were promoted by the AL government in 2001 for political reasons, depriving many competent officials (Jahan & Shahan, 2008). Over time this politicization has reached such a level that the executive arm of the government has become an extension of the ruling political party.

By prioritizing political loyalty over merit, the public service fails to function impartially, creating an environment where inefficiency and corruption thrive, thereby depriving the country of its overall development, good governance, and people's fundamental rights.

Analysis of the issue:

Political in luence leads to a concentration of power, creating opportunities for corruption at multiple levels. Administrative decisions on public projects, such as infrastructure development and healthcare programs often involve inflated budgets due to

"kickbacks" for political allies. Public procurement is estimated to constitute around 20% of Bangladesh's GDP, yet a large portion of these contracts are awarded to politically connected entities with the sole intention of the blatant dissipation of funds by authorities and contractors, certain politicians, bureaucrats, law enforcers, and criminals (World Bank Group, 2010). The Ministry of Public Administration has reported inflated costs in nearly 30% of government projects, often attributed to political interference. Apart from these institutionalized corruptions, politicization affects the lives of people on a micro level by preventing the citizens from accessing resources and concurrently accessing justice. Such a system creates power-hungry kingpins like Benazir, Matiur, Aziz, Haroon, etc, who are ready to go to any level to sustain the regime and also make the lives of ordinary people miserable by creating severe economic and power disparity in the society.

It is purported that public employees' promotion is based on their Annual Confidential Report (ACR), which consists of eight sections totaling 100 points. The performance appraisal report is created by the report initiating officer and the countersigning officer based on a few indicators included in it. These are the theoretical components that make up the promotion process. In reality, political ideologies including political color, batch cultures, OSD, deprivation, superseding, overlapping, nepotism, and favoritism drive promotions. (Rahman, 2017, 140-148)

As "party loyalty" is the main guiding principle for advancement, the newly recruited and promoted civil servants do not feel interested in improving their capabilities and are not able to ensure effectiveness and efficiency in providing social services to the citizens. In addition, they cannot be made accountable because, in politicized administration, both politicians and bureaucrats work with closer allies. The bureaucracy is growing unproductive and inefficient without professionalism, justice, and impartiality.

Bangladesh has institutionalized the politicization of public service as a result of the government's careful consideration of the Public Service Commission's (PSC) makeup. Since its founding, there has been a complete lack of transparency in the selection of the Commission's chairman and members; they are chosen based on political considerations in the hopes that they will recruit supporters of the ruling party.

The roots of the structure of South Asian bureaucracy lie in the Indian Civil Service (ICS) during the British period. The ICS bureaucrats were considered the "steel frame" of the British Empire because they were hierarchically disciplined, strictly rule-bound, politically neutral, and meritorious. However, the inherited "steel frame" of the bureaucracy has been dismantled and collapsed in South Asia over time because of over politization. (Rahman, 2017, 169-171)

Recommendations:

Eradicating this long standing system will not be easy. However, this politicization can be reduced to a great extent by taking some steps

- **Restructure Bangladesh Public Service Commission:**

  Since its inception, Bangladesh Public Service Commission has been working for political gain rather than the interest of the state. Starting from the appointment of the chairman of this commission, there are allegations of politicization at every step, and there are also allegations of corruption and incompetence at various times. Qualification and competence shall be the only consideration in the selection of the Chairman and other members of this Commission. To guarantee fair recruitment, promotions, and disciplinary measures, this commission ought to have complete authority. For this commission to function without political influence and maintain operational transparency, necessary legal safeguarding should be provided.

  An independent commission, free from political influence, can establish a fair and impartial executive body. However, achieving this will be challenging, as political parties often have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. Active engagement from citizens and civil society, acting as a strong pressure group, will be crucial in driving this reform forward.

- **Transparent performance based promotion system:**
  The ACR-based evaluation system is relatively robust and impartial in principle. However, in practice, it doesn't guarantee that a civil servant with a strong cumulative ACR score and requisite seniority will receive a promotion in due time. Politicization has even influenced ACR writing, with assessments often reflecting partisan loyalties rather than objective performance. Establishing an independent committee under the supervision of the Bangladesh Public Service Commission (BPSC) to oversee the entire process of performance appraisal, promotion, and posting could ensure greater transparency and shield the process from interference. Those responsible for issuing ACRs must be held accountable for their evaluations, with every remark justified and auditable. Such measures would incentivize civil servants to prioritize ethical conduct, efficiency, and innovation, fostering a system based on meritocracy rather than favoritism.

  Resistance to these reforms may come from civil servants and their political allies who benefit from the current and their political allies who benefit from the current system. However, with the BPSC's full autonomy and legal safeguards, the commission is well-positioned to implement strict disciplinary measures to eliminate such

promotion, and posting could ensure greater transparency and shield the process from interference. Those responsible for issuing ACRs must be held accountable for their evaluations, with every remark justified and auditable. Such measures would incentivize civil servants to prioritize ethical conduct, efficiency, and innovation, fostering a system based on meritocracy rather than favoritism.

Resistance to these reforms may come from civil servants and their political allies who benefit from the current system. However, with the BPSC's full autonomy and legal safeguards, the commission is well-positioned to implement strict disciplinary measures to eliminate such resistance and uphold these reforms.

- **Reformation and enforcement of code of conduct for public servants:**

Although Bangladesh has a National Integrity Strategy in place but when people like Benazir receive the Integrity Award, question arises as to what kind of integrity the strategy is actually upholding (Hossen, 2024). The updated code of conduct would legally bind public servants to refrain from engaging in political activities or showing loyalty to any political party. Thus, they will have clear guidelines for their responsibilities and boundaries. The public service would become a more moral, open, and effective organization with a revised and strictly enforced code of conduct and will encourage accountability and guarantee that public workers behave in the citizens' best interests.

- **Overhaul and Strengthen Anti-Corruption Commission:**

It goes without saying that the Anti-Corruption Commission is a completely failed institution due to systemic weaknesses and political interference. The Anti-Corruption Commission Act was amended in 2013, which severed the commission's authority, especially when it came to opening investigations on public officials. This amendment provides a safety net for corrupt officials by requiring prior government consent before looking into high-ranking officials. The fundamental goal of the ACC is undermined by such a clause, which essentially gives public servants carte blanche (Islam, 2014). Revocation of the 2013 amendment is necessary to restore the ACC's legitimacy and efficacy. It is essential to give the ACC complete operational and financial autonomy in order to shield it from political influence and make certain that the appointment of its leaders is done in an open, merit-based manner, free from political interference.

Existing laws that give public employees excessive protection are a significant barrier to accountability. For instance, public officers cannot be prosecuted for acts they perform in their official capacity without first receiving government approval, according

to Section 197 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC). Laws that place a higher priority on accountability and openness must take the place of such laws. The same laws that apply to citizens must apply to public personnel, and their official immunity should only be granted for legitimate acts carried out in the public interest.

Existing laws that give public employees excessive protection are a significant barrier to accountability. For instance, public officers cannot be prosecuted for acts they perform in their official capacity without first receiving government approval, according to Section 197 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC). Laws that place a higher priority on accountability and openness must take the place of such laws. The same laws that apply to citizens must apply to public personnel, and their official immunity should only be granted for legitimate acts carried out in the public interest.

With these reforms, the ACC will emerge as a symbolic institution capable of addressing the deep-rooted corruption that undermines Bangladesh's governance and development. Implementing these changes will require strong political will and advocacy from civil society.

- **Incorporation of technology and innovation:**

Integrating technology and innovation can revolutionize governance in Bangladesh by enhancing transparency, accountability, and efficiency.

Developing an AI-driven system for tracking corruption complaints, investigations, and outcomes and using blockchain technology to ensure the integrity of evidence during investigations. Once uploaded, the data cannot be tampered with, ensuring credibility in legal proceedings. This system would ensure transparency and accountability by maintaining real-time updates accessible to oversight bodies.

Create a secure, anonymous digital platform where individuals and officials can report corruption with legal protections. AI can be used to prioritize cases based on severity. E-recruitment and e-procurement systems, strengthened by blockchain and AI, can ensure transparent hiring and tendering processes.

Conclusion:

Depoliticizing Bangladesh's public sector is essential to reestablishing accountability, effectiveness, and public confidence. Public service that functions as a neutral, professional organization serving the public interest can be established by minimizing political influence through the implementation of a completely autonomous BPSC, a merit-based promotion system, a strictly enforced code of conduct, and an independent ACC. Bangladesh may

guarantee that its public service serves as a solid basis for impartial, efficient governance, which is essential for the nation's long-term growth, by fostering the rule of law through implementing these policies.

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Strengthening the Enforcement of Article 27 in Bangladesh
– Equal Protection of Law

Jihad Ali

Executive Summary

All citizens of Bangladesh, irrespective of their colour, gender, religion, or ethnicity, are guaranteed equal protection of law by Article 27 of the Constitution. However, its implementation is hampered by structural issues like societal inequality, judicial inefficiency, and poverty. Access to justice is severely hampered for marginalised groups, such as women and ethnic minorities, and anti-discrimination laws are still not well enforced. This paper examines the challenges and suggests increasing public awareness, implementing anti-discrimination legislation, reforming the court, and extending legal aid. In order to protect constitutional rights and guarantee justice for all individuals, these challenges must be addressed.

Introduction

The constitution of Bangladesh guarantees equal protection of law under Article 27. Every person of the Republic is entitled to this right regardless of their race, gender, religion, birthplace or ethnicity. But this article is not being implemented to the extent it is supposed to be. Although everyone is entitled to be treated equally in the eyes of the law, discrimination among different groups and ethnicities still exists. This is basically for the existing discrimination and inequality in the society also. This needs to be addressed as it amounts to violation of the fundamental rights of some groups of people. For example, the violation of rights of different ethnic communities.

Problem statement

Though the constitution of Bangladesh guarantees equal protection of law, numerous challenges are faced in its enforcement:

1. **Socio-economic Barriers:** Poverty and lack of basic legal knowledge prevent marginalised groups and communities, including women, ethnic minorities, and the poor, from accessing proper justice. So, the access to justice is said to be easy but the way is not simple for all. For example, research shows that indigenous communities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts face systemic exclusion in accessing justice mechanisms.[14]

2. **Judicial Bias and Inefficiency:** The judicial system of Bangladesh has some serious issues of its own. Case backlogs, corruption in different stages of a proceeding, and limited resources weaken the judiciary's ability to enforce equality. For all these issues, the equal protection of law that is guaranteed is systematically hampered. The appointment of judges is also an important factor here as the process is more of a political appointment.[15]

3. **Discrimination in Practice:** Popular examples of unequal treatment in legal proceedings and in court disproportionately affect vulnerable communities, destroying trust in the legal system gradually and in the end, they lack confidence of getting proper justice from the court of law.

Analysis of the Issue

The enforcement of Article 27 faces several interconnected challenges:

1. **Structural Inequities**

   Bangladesh is not a developed country and a big portion of the people are still living under the poverty line. The lack of

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[14] *Uddin, M. (2015). Exclusion in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Oxford University Press, 946, 7221.*

[15] *Ferdous, SR. BIAS: A DEVIL IN JUSTICE in Asian Affairs, 2007, academia.edu*

affordable legal aid undermines proper equitable access to the legal system and judiciary that harms the fundamental rights of many citizens of the Republic. While initiatives such as the National Legal Aid Services Organization (NLASO) exist, their reach is limited, particularly in rural areas where it is needed the most. Also, lack of legal awareness is an important factor in this case.[16]

2. Judiciary Overload

The judicial system is held to be the only weapon that upholds any citizen's right if it is violated but the problem starts here. Approximately 4.2 million cases were pending in Bangladeshi courts as of 2023 and there is only one judge for at least 94,444 persons![17] Such delays disproportionately harm economically disadvantaged litigants who cannot afford prolonged litigation.[18]

3. Cultural and Gender Disparities

This is a true generalised statement that women and minority communities suffer more from the system and they are treated differently and sometimes like they are not humans. Women and minorities frequently experience unequal treatment, as evidenced by data showing underrepresentation in legal professions and judiciary appointments. This will not be false to say that gender bias also a common factor in case of legal proceedings and then victim blaming is very common in our society that we start to judge a woman in a rape case without going for the criminal.[20]

4. Policy Implementation Gaps

Bangladesh has been trying to cope with international standards and that is why we have almost ratified all the international treaties and conventions but when it comes to women or minorities there is a huge gap and exception. Despite ratifying international treaties like CEDAW and ICCPR fully, domestic legislation often lacks the teeth to ensure full compliance. And the reason behind this is not so well furnished or logical but societal. For instance, provisions of the Anti-Discrimination Act 2022 remain underutilised and there has been no discussion to advocate for proper implementation of such an act. [21]Now is the time we need to focus on proper implementation of the act so that an equal society is made.

Policy Options

1. Expand Legal Aid Services

- Increase funding and coverage of NLASO, focusing on marginalised regions and communities.

- To inform the target people different kinds of initiatives can be taken.

- Train paralegals to offer localised support.
  Make the process of accessing legal aid easier and less time consuming.

2. Judiciary Reforms

- Introduce digital case management to reduce backlogs.
  Ensure the justice appointment system is less politically in luenced.

- Enhance accountability mechanisms to minimise corruption within the judiciary.

- Make the judiciary more inclusive and open for all.

3. Anti-Discrimination Act

- A proper anti-discrimination act is mandatory.

- Proper implementation of Article 27 to be ensured.

- An anti-discrimination council to be introduced that would work as a taskforce.

4. Public Awareness Campaigns

- Implement nationwide legal literacy programs to empower citizens with knowledge of their constitutional rights.

- Reach the rural area people and communities to engage them in different legal literacy workshops.

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Recommendations

1. **Strengthening Legal Aid**

   - Expand NLASO's operations by partnering with NGOs to bridge resource gaps. This collaboration could enhance the reach and efficiency of free legal aid programs.

   - Digitalize the legal aid service system so that it becomes more accessible.

   - Maintain an easy and timely process to operate the whole system. The delay that happens because of the monthly meeting of the district legal aid committee should be reduced by remote operation.

2. **Judiciary Overhaul**

   - Enforce existing anti-discrimination laws rigorously and establish oversight committees to monitor compliance.

   - Introduce an anti-discrimination council that will work remotely to look over and a helpline that will record any case of discrimination and report.

3. **Empowering Vulnerable Groups**

   - Enforce existing anti-discrimination laws rigorously and establish oversight committees to monitor compliance.

   - Introduce an anti-discrimination council that will work remotely to look over and a helpline that will record any case of discrimination and report.

4. **Empowering Vulnerable Groups**

   - Launch targeted programs aimed at educating women and minorities, especially in the indigenous communities, about their rights under Article 27.

   - Partner with NGOs and Organizations that work for the rights of people to establish a landmark example and promote successful cases to keep the trust of people in the judicial system.

   - Promote equal rights of minorities and ethnic groups through mass media and online media to create public awareness.

5. **Expand Legal Aid Services**

   - Ratify the international treaties that are concerned with such matters gradually deterring the social challenges.

   - Adopt models from countries like India, where Public Interest Litigations (PILs) have proven effective in addressing systemic inequalities[22] and promote the equal rights of people nationally.

Conclusion

Ensuring equal protection of the law is not only a constitutional mandate but a moral imperative. Addressing the barriers to its enforcement will foster a more just society, reduce systemic inequities, and enhance public trust in the legal system. Implementing these recommendations can transform Article 27 from a principle into a reality for all citizens of Bangladesh. Beside increasing public awareness, the Government needs to shed light on robust enforcement mechanisms to ensure proper equality before law.

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Reforming Public Procurement in Bangladesh:
Tackling Corruption and Enhancing Transparency

Mehedi Hassan

Executive Summary

Effective Public Procurement in Bangladesh is vital to national development. However, the vulnerability of the system rises due to corruption and malpractice. In spite of the introduction of the e-GP system in 2011, it failed to reduce corruption. Monopolization of the system, favoritism, frequent single-bid contracts, leaking of valuable data related to contracts, and political interference are some key challenges for the system. A system that handles 40% of the national budget and 80% of the Annual Development Programme (ADP) expenditures needs to function properly to enhance its effectiveness. This policy brief evaluates current challenges and proposes a few targeted reforms to bolster the system, including mandating e-GP, independent audits, and anti-corruption enforcement.

Introduction

Public procurement is one of Bangladesh's most crucial sectors, managing a significant portion of the government development budget and directly influencing economic growth and public trust. Hence, a structural system was a key priority. To do this, Bangladesh initiated the public procurement reform in 1999 to address inefficiencies and corruption. Later, the Public Procurement Act 2006 and Rules in 2008 were enacted. Following that, with the aim of enhancing transparency, efficiency, and competitiveness in the public procurement process, the e-GP was introduced in 2011, led by the Bangladesh Public Procurement Authority (BPPA). However, despite these initiatives, it fails to deliver the objectives since corruption persists in the system due to political meddling, lack of transparency, and system monopolization. This brief will evaluate these obstacles and propose some feasible reforms for the refinement of public procurement in eradicating corruption.

Problem statement

Any corruption or mismanagement in a system that is responsible for approximately 40% of the national budget and 80% of the Annual Development Programme (ADP), amounting to a total of $30 billion, illustrates a big concern for Bangladesh[i]. In addition to that, the procurement system is full of corruption, lack of transparency, market monopolization, collision among politically connected

contractors, etc. Despite the data showing that 70% of public procurement in the country is managed through e-GP, saving 600 million annually, the problem is that 99.62% of contracts are valued under 25 crore taka, highlighting most of the high-valued contracts are bypassing the system[ii]. Additionally, practices such as bribery, monopolization by politically connected contractors, and collusion among officials undermine transparency and fairness. The Daily Star reported about 31% of the surveyed bidders provided gifts of more than USD 300 to procuring officials, 62% of bidders admitted to offering gifts above 25,000 taka, and some even offered them trips to award the contract in their favor.[iii] Due to these practices, inefﬁcient bidders get contracts that result in inefficiency, delays, and substandard project outcomes that cost a loss of 1.5% of the GDP.[iv] The current system fails to ensure transparency, enforcement of laws for corrupt officials, independent audits, etc. contributing to these hurdles in public procurement.

Classification of contract packages by value for the Period

| Classification by Contract Value	Percentage of Works	Percentage of Contract Value
0-25 Core	99.62%	78.64%
26-50 core	0.27%	10.11%
51-75 core	0.06%	3.96%
76-100 core	0.03%	3.36%
100 core	0.02%	3.92%

Source: Transparency International Bangladesh

Policy Options

To reduce the corruption in public procurement system, three policy options are worth considering:

01. Expanding the e-GP system for all government contracts:

One of the key approaches is to mandate the use of the e-GP system

Percentage of Single Bid by Year
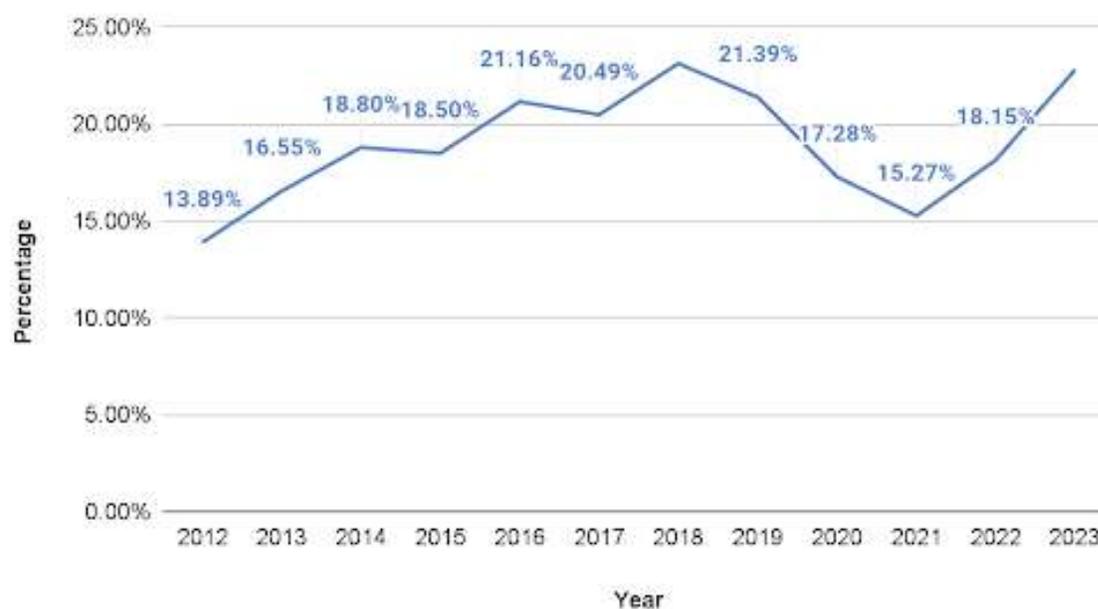
Source: Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB)

for all government contracts regardless of its values to eliminate the options for bypassing high-value contracts. Additionally, the system must be required to publish all the tender notices in local newspapers to get the attention of the wider audience. However, it will need to scale up the Bangladesh Public Procurement Authority's capacity and functionality to support a larger volume of contracts.

02. Implementing Strict Anti-Corruption Measures and Penalties:

Another feasible option to tackle corruption in public procurement is to take action against the corrupt officials. The key reasons that the current system fails to function properly are corruption and malpractices such as bid rigging, collusion, political influence, unauthorized information sharing, bribery, etc. The public procurement system needs to deal with these challenges in order to effectively function. An independent audit committee is necessary to scrutinize the cases of corruption. The contractors doing malpractices shall face penalties including fines, contract bans, or even criminal charges, serving as a deterrent to potential offenders. Most importantly, political interference must also be curbed to ensure the system operates transparently. Whereas this option could enhance transparency and accountability of the system to curb corruption, implementing these measures would require strong political will from the ruling party to function properly.

03. Encouraging Greater Competition by Dismantling Monopolies:

Data from Transparency International Bangladesh shows that a

significant portion of contracts are awarded to single bidders, mentioning the top 5% of bidders who are dominating the market, creating a monopoly. In local contracts, 70% of them are allocated to the local bidders with the influence of the politically affiliated bidders. In many cases, some bidders withdraw from participating in contracts for fear of the political leaders. Hence, to prevent market monopolization, policies should focus on creating a just system without the influence of politically affiliated bidders as well as it should encourage smaller and less established firms to participate. Promoting competition would break the established monopolies, although maintaining a broader vendor pool may involve higher administrative efforts and costs.

Recommendations

Mandatory e-GP System Use:

Ensuring all government contracts regardless of high or low value are submitted in the e-GP system and published in the local media for transparency. This will make it easier for the system to not only track down all the records but also ensure all contracts are open for all.

Implementation of Strict Anti-Corruption Penalties:

Ensuring strict penalties for those involved in malpractices or corruption to distort the procurement system should undergo strict penalties. A dedicated independent audit committee should be enforced to monitor the procurement process and initiate investigations if any suspicious activity is identified.

Implement Conflict of Interest Regulations to Mitigate Political Influence:

The system should establish policies to oversee any politically affiliated entities receiving any advantages in contracts. Officials and contractors should be required to reveal any conflicts of interest to prevent favoritism. The politically connected contractors should be monitored closely before awarding any contract.

Promotion of a Competitive Environment to Dismantle Monopolies:

Encouraging broader participation in the procurement system can enhance competitiveness. BPPA should reduce the influence of large entities in the system, ensuring a balanced environment so that small firms can also apply for contracts. The politically influenced monopoly should be tackled effectively with strict penalties. It also needs to ensure that the system is accessible to diverse and capable vendors.

Conclusion:

Corruption in public procurement is a major concern for Bangladesh. A large percentage of the development budget is mishandled for these malpractices by increasing the cost, time, and quality. With the enforcement of mandatory e-GP use, establishment of independent audits, and ensuring strict anti-corruption penalties, the government can lessen corruption, boost economic efficiency, and establish public trust. These reformations are necessary to effectively use the development budget to ensure sustainable development.

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Enhancing Indigenous Rights and Cultural Preservation
through the Revision of Article 23A in Bangladesh

Jihad Ali

Executive Summary

Article 23A of the Constitution of Bangladesh recognizes the cultural preservation of indigenous communities, minor races, ethnic sects, and tribes. Despite its noble intent, significant gaps in implementation and legal enforcement undermine these communities' rights. Structural discrimination, socio-political marginalization, and lack of robust legal frameworks exacerbate these challenges. This brief critically evaluates the limitations of Article 23A and proposes actionable solutions to ensure effective cultural preservation. Key recommendations include strengthening legal frameworks, promoting community-driven cultural programs, and fostering partnerships with NGOs and international organizations. Immediate reforms are essential to uphold indigenous rights and sustain Bangladesh's cultural diversity.

Introduction

Throughout Bangladesh, there is a rich number of indigenous communities with different traditions, languages, and cultural practices. Article 23A of the constitution guarantees the preservation of these unique cultures, concentrating the need for legal safeguards and systematic action. However, indigenous communities face different kinds of systemic challenges, including land displacement, cultural assimilation, and lack of institutional support. The failure to operationalize Article 23A undermines the constitutional commitment to pluralism and inclusivity. This brief aims to provide an actionable roadmap for revising Article 23A to address these challenges effectively.

Problem statement

Despite constitutional recognition, the indigenous communities of Bangladesh face structural barriers and challenges to the right of cultural preservation:

1. Legal Ambiguities:

Article 23A states the preservation and safeguarding of the cultural rights of the indigenous peoples but lacks clarity on enforcement mechanisms, leaving cultural preservation largely symbolic rather than actionable.[23] Whereas this is supposed to be more operative than symbolic with proper mechanism and upgradation.

2. Socio-Economic Marginalization:

To take a community a step forward or move them from the line they are currently on, education plays a great role navigating the community while eradicating poverty. But in this case, poverty and inadequate, inappropriate education systems erode the transmission of indigenous knowledge and traditions.[24]

3. Political Underrepresentation:

To be an independent citizen or a rightful citizen of a country there are some basic rights, one of which is the right of being included in the decision-making process so that they can work to promote and protect their cultural rights as well as other rights that are fundamental in some cases. Indigenous groups remain excluded from decision-making processes that affect their rights.[25]

4. Cultural Erosion:

A community is mainly based in a specific place or a piece of land in an area that impacts them in different possible ways, thus the land is important for that particular community, their culture, heritage and their history all along. Land loss due to industrialization and infrastructure projects, such as those in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, threatens the survival of indigenous languages, heritage and culture.[26]

5. Policy Gaps:

When a policy is taken under the constitutional law of a country, it becomes a mandate for the country and govern-

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ment to work more for the better outcome. Provisions under Article 23A are not harmonized with international instruments like ILO Convention 169 or the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).[27]

Analysis of the Issue

1. Structural and Legal Deficiencies

- Though it is bookish, current legislation lacks actionable provisions to implement cultural preservation, leaving indigenous communities reliant on NGO support.[28]

- Land rights are inadequately protected in the indigenous and minority areas, with frequent violations resulting in forced displacements, limiting indigenous communities' ability to practice traditional livelihoods and heritage.[29]

2. Cultural and Linguistic Decline

- Culture is conformed with a great part of it coming from language and its use. Indigenous languages face extinction as education systems prioritize Bangla, with limited indigenous language curricula in schools and to some extent those schools lack proper educational materials.[30]

- The professions and traditions of a community bears a specific importance for them and has some of their own meaning for it. Loss of ceremonial and traditional practices is accelerating due to industrial encroachment.[31]

3. Socio-Political Marginalization

- The political and social participation of a community represents its contribution in the development and integrity of a country. Indigenous groups represent less than 1% of political office holders, limiting advocacy for policies that address their unique challenges,[32] thus their cultural rights never reach the place it needs to be.

- There is another notion of concern that needs a heads up, discrimination in public administration further alienates these communities from policy-making,[33] thus their right to equal opportunity is sometimes harmed in such ways.

Policy Options

1. Legislative Reform

Revise Article 23A to include clear, enforceable provisions that define cultural preservation and mandate government action with proper implementation of the policy with a proper mechanism and responsible authority to ensure the cultural rights of indigenous communities.

Align domestic laws with international conventions like the UNDRIP and ILO 169 for the betterment of the official government works and processes.

2. Community-Driven Initiatives

Establish cultural preservation councils led by indigenous leaders and youths to protect and promote languages, traditions, and artifacts for the next generation.

Provide incentives for cultural programs, such as festivals, workshops, and exhibitions that can spread the culture and people can ind the diversity.

3. Institutional Strengthening

Create a national taskforce on indigenous rights under the Ministry of Cultural Affairs whose main focus is preservation and protection of culture and heritage. There could be a body under the ministry to oversee the function of the task force and guide them.

Increase funding for NGOs and CBOs working on indigenous issues to enhance their working capacity so that they can tackle down grassroots issues.

4. Education and Awareness

Develop multilingual curricula incorporating indigenous languages and histories which will not only preserve the cultures but also create a diverse education system. Launch nationwide campaigns to promote indigenous culture and counter stereotypes and run a national week for preservation of culture of indigenous communities.

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Recommendations

1. Legal Protections

Revise Article 23A to include actionable mandates for protecting indigenous land, language, cultural practices and anything relating to the cultural affairs of any indigenous community[34] with proper implementation measures.

Implement policies that ensure indigenous consultation on any project affecting their communities which will also work as the mandate of inclusivity.[35]

2. Institutional Reforms

Create a dedicated Indigenous Affairs Commission to oversee implementation of cultural preservation initiatives while also having a task force which will mainly work in grassroots and report to the commission directly.[36]

Strengthen local government institutions to ensure indigenous representation and participation and make a platform that will solely work to protect and reach their voice to the Commission.[37]

3. Public Awareness and Advocacy

Partner with media outlets to highlight indigenous stories and cultural achievements and promote these events nationally on mass media and social media to create a positive mindset of the mass people and combat stereotypes.

Organize training for civil servants on the cultural and legal rights of indigenous communities so that in any situation they understand the importance of their values and take decisions accordingly.[38]

Conclusion

Revising Article 23A to prioritize enforceable cultural preservation in the context of Bangladesh is a critical step toward realizing the constitutional promise of equality and diversity and there is a chance of backlash from the side of major communities. This can be assured that policymakers, civil society, and international organizations can take a collaborative approach to address gaps and empower indigenous communities while advocating with the government for better mechanisms. By investing mainly in legal reforms, institutional support, and public awareness, Bangladesh can safeguard its indigenous heritage for future generations.

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Effective Digitalization of Government Services: **Enhancing Accessibility, Transparency, and Accountability**

Arman Mohsin Yamin

Executive Summary

Bangladesh's recent revolution has inspired new hope for positive governance changes. The most immediate reforms the cabinet must take on is reforming government services, which still suffers with clear corruption and inefficiencies that come from traditional reliance of human resource based physical processes. In this policy brief, we recommend that government agencies create a consolidated, digitized citizen database to help curb corruption as well as provide better access and service delivery through automation. This reform will take the load out of citizen shoulders, reduce bribery opportunities and will bring Bangladesh at par with global principles on digital governance. To assist in this transition towards a more transparent and efficient service system, we provide a roadmap for digitalization — based on experiences across the world.

Introduction

Governance in Bangladesh stands at a pivotal point following a transformative period marked by popular demand for a change in service delivery mechanisms. Right now, a large volume of government services is still reliant on citizens being in one position at the right time inside government workplaces which can draw In to extreme corruption and laxness from workers. The necessary physical presence comes with demands for bribes and harassment, which is dampened by a lack of trust. According to Transparency International (2019), three out of every five Bangladeshis are bribed when trying to access basic services.

In this article a framework is proposed to digitize the government services under one citizen database that operates and interlink all the public service systems. The objective here is to create a platform that improves accessibility and ensures avoiding corruption and also delays in service provision which leads to better public services for the citizens. Through

examples from other nations and research resources, this piece sets forth the challenges, opportunities, and practical implications for building in Bangladesh a digital public service infrastructure.

Problem statement

The public service sector in Bangladesh is riddled with inefficiencies and corruption, crippling millions of citizens from accessing these very basic services. This service is not only time consuming but also a burden on a common man. Even beyond the direct costs of travel and delays, citizens experience coercion to pay bribes for services that should be available at no charge. The studies of the World Bank demonstrated that using digitized governance can reduce corruption opportunities through minimizing face-to-face transactions and providing an automated digital trail (World Bank, 2021). For a country like Bangladesh, where most citizens are demanding a change in governance, making the shift to digital services is vital for delivering adequate service and restoring their trust.

In Bangladesh, one of the biggest shortcomings in providing government service is lack of transparency as every department keeps its own records, thus a citizen finds it difficult to get through all services. As an example, a person will need to provide the same documents for national ID, driver license and land ownership certificate from different departments. These records can be digitized and kept in a well-integrated digital database, making both access to the data much easier and allowing officials to focus on providing services rather than simply sorting through mile-high stacks of administrative paperwork.

Analysis of the issue

Bribery in public services is a common phenomenon in most developing countries. Countries such as Estonia and

Singapore have introduced digital citizen databases leading to greater transparency and higher citizen satisfaction rates. Through its X-Road digital framework, Estonia provides access to citizen services, and reduces administrative costs while saving government officials time along with citizens too (*Bali, 2021*).

Such a citizen database in Bangladesh could also enable citizen access to records online, thereby avoiding intermediaries and the corruption that takes place when they demand bribes. Such access resonates with the underlying philosophy of Open Government Data (OGD), which is now being implemented in several countries to improve transparency and curb corruption. When records are digital, it automatically creates an audit trail, which makes it easier to find anomalies in service delivery.

In addition, access inequality remains a problem with rural populations losing days of work because they must travel great distances to government offices. In a nation where an even higher proportion of people lives in the countryside, remote access functionalities are an important requisite which a digitalized service system can fulfill; thus making it possible to bridge this urban-rural divide.

But that being said it is worthy to mention that without major reform, such a digital system will meet hurdles in Bangladesh. These mainly include inadequate facilities in the countryside, a low level of digital literacy among citizens and possible opposition from local government leaders that live well off of the status quo. Moreover, spending heavily on IT infrastructure and training will be needed to make well-functioning digital services available for all citizens.

Policy Options:

1. Implement Interoperable Systems Across Departments

This approach would focus on enabling seamless data sharing between departments through standardized, interoperable systems, rather than consolidating all data into one database. This option reduces the need for citizens to repeatedly provide information across services, as it improves communication between departments.

Pros: It helps in expediting process timelines, reducing the need to enter the same data again and again, more quality in service.

Cons: Requires complex coordination and alignment across departments, which may be costly and challenging to implement.

Feasibility: Moderate; Strong governance structures would be needed to manage data-sharing protocols

2. Partial Digitalization with a Pilot Citizen Database:

A second option involves introducing a digital citizen database in urban areas for the government to assess before full national deployment. This would enable modifications based on what was noticed did not work in smaller, controllable units.

Pros: Reduces corruption in selected areas, lower initial costs compared to full-scale implementation.

Cons: Limited impact in rural regions, potential digital divide, partial reduction in inefficiency.

Feasibility: Moderate; partnerships with private companies could help reduce infrastructure costs.

3. Full Digitalization with Nationwide Citizen Database:

This would be the most ambitious of all, and involve a full digital citizen database allowing remote access to virtually every government service in the country. Such a system would cut our dependence on physical offices and enhance the process of getting services, allowing citizens to access services directly without any intermediary.

Pros: Significant reduction in corruption, enhanced accessibility, full-service transparency.

Con: High initial setup cost, infrastructure challenges, requires digital literacy programs and administrative training.

Feasibility: High, especially if phased in with urban pilots that can serve as models for broader adoption of the system

Recommendations:

Full Digitalization With Nationwide Citizen Database is by far the best option, as indicated in the analysis. This ambitious strategy has the highest potential for curbing corruption and increasing access to services. Key actions include:

1. **IT Infrastructure and Cybersecurity Investment:** To develop a holistic database, an extensive IT infrastructure is required, with secure servers, backup systems, encryption to secure sensitive citizen data.

2. **Awareness and Training:** Digital literacy level is largely low in Bangladesh, thus only training the government departments will not be sufficient, citizens must also be trained.

3. **Collaboration with International Experts:** Bangladesh can benefit from international expertise and assistance, learning from countries like Estonia, Singapore, and India, which have successfully implemented digital governance systems. Collaboration with global institutions such as the World Bank could also assist in channeling investments required to establish digital infrastructure.

4. **Regulatory Structure and Oversight:** The need for regulations to govern data, privacy, and accountability will loom large. Some form of oversight should be put in place to ensure that both the of icials and citizens do not misuse this system

Conclusion:

Digitalization of government services has reached a level in Bangladesh where it is no longer an alternative but rather the necessary course for ef icient and transparent governance. Within the transition from cumbersome and corruption-prone procedures to a secure digital mechanism lies an opportunity for Bangladesh to rise to citizens' greater expectations for public services that are easy-to-access, equitable and trustworthy. In the long run, starting and maintaining a centralized nationwide citizen database will need money and work to cultivate digital literacy within society but the pay off with transparency, ef iciency and public trust is worth it. Corporating this into our foreign policy would not just bring Bangladesh in par with the international best practices, it would also serve as a huge signal of our seriousness to a corruption-free, citizen-friendly governance.

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Environment & Climate Change

Towards a Safer Bangladesh: Policy Solutions for Disaster Preparedness and Resilience

Ayeasha Shiddika

Executive Summary

Bangladesh, prone to severe natural disasters like floods, cyclones, and potential earthquakes, faces significant vulnerabilities due to its geographical and climatic conditions. Despite progress in disaster management, gaps remain, particularly in infrastructure resilience, community awareness, and support for marginalized groups. The recent 2024 floods highlighted the country's urgent need for stronger preparedness and response systems. This brief recommends enhancing early warning systems, retrofitting critical infrastructure, and implementing gender-sensitive policies to reduce disaster impact. Adopting these strategies will enable Bangladesh to build a more inclusive, resilient disaster management framework that better protects its people and infrastructure

Introduction

Bangladesh, with an area of approximately 147,570 square kilometers and a population of nearly 140 million, is highly vulnerable to natural disasters. (Bennett & Daniel, 2002) According to the Global Climate Risk Index 2023 by Germanwatch, Bangladesh ranked 7th among the countries most affected by climate change between 2000 and 2022. (Department of Environment, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, 2023) Cyclones are a frequent occurrence, and since independence, Bangladesh has endured severe cyclones and floods, including major events in 1991, 2007, and 2009. More recently, in 2024, the country faced two disastrous floods in May and August. While earthquakes have not been as frequent, Bangladesh's geographical position places it at high risk, particularly in cities like Dhaka, where a major earthquake would turn the whole city into debris in no time.

Natural disasters in Bangladesh result in significant losses, including loss of life, economic impact, and extensive agricultural damage. The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) reports that agricultural losses from climate-related disasters averaged nearly $720 million annually from 2015 to 2020 silient and effective disaster management system. (The Financial Express, 2024). Moreover, UNISDR conservatively estimates that about 14% of Bangladesh's GDP is at risk from natural disasters each year, with an annual economic loss of 1.8% of GDP. This could rise to 2% by 2050 and potentially 9% by the century's end (Forest Department, n.d.).

Given the severe impacts, building a resilient disaster management system should be an immediate priority to safeguard against escalating threats and future losses.

Even though disaster management in Bangladesh has improved over time, the current system remains insufficiently prepared to manage crises effectively. This brief seeks to address the gap between drafted policies and their real-world implementation, identifying areas for improvement to help establish a resilient and effective disaster management system.

Problem statement

Despite significant progress in disaster risk management (DRM), critical gaps persist, leaving many disaster-prone areas underserved and vulnerable. The country's strides in structural and nonstructural disaster management measures remain limited by the lack of comprehensive preparedness across all levels, which exacerbates risks for marginalized populations.

The National Plan for Disaster Management (NPDM) 2021-25 aligned with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR) and Standing Order on Disaster (SOD) focuses on four principles: preparedness, early warning, emergency response, and recovery to enhance disaster resilience at all levels. *(Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief, 2021)*

However, during times of disaster, there is still room for improvement in fully realizing these key principles. Current policies, such as the National Plan for Disaster Management (NPDM), establish guiding principles but lack enforcement mechanisms, particularly in infrastructure resilience, resource allocation, and community engagement. Moreover, disaster response often fails to address the specific vulnerabilities of low-income and densely populated areas, where risks are highest. This policy brief identifies key gaps in current practices—including inadequate disaster-resilient infrastructure, limited community awareness programs, and insufficient support for marginalized groups—and calls for a more integrated, resilient disaster management framework to protect Bangladesh's most vulnerable populations and critical infrastructure.

Policy Analysis

Bangladesh is highly vulnerable to natural disasters, particularly foods and earthquakes, necessitating robust and well-planned disaster risk management (DRM) measures.

The August flood in Bangladesh, the worst since 1988, exposed the country's vulnerability to natural disasters, a reality made even more concerning by its geographical location. In eastern areas like Feni, loodwaters reached second-floor levels, displacing 4.5 million people and causing extensive damage to homes, farmland, and infrastructure. (*ReliefWeb, 2024*) The Bangladesh Water Development Board reported that three kilometers of river embankments in Parshuram and Fulgazi upazilas were damaged, with delayed repair work starting only in late September due to funding issues. (*The Daily Star, 2024*) The floods buried 200 hectares of Aman paddy fields, while overall crop damage across 200,000 hectares threatens a national rice shortage, according to the USDA. The economic toll reached Tk 14,269.68 crore, with 74 lives lost and 50,000 homes damaged. (*The Daily Star, 2024)*

Mismanagement was witnessed in three stages of the disaster. Although the Meteorological Department had forecasted short-term loods in early August for the north, north-central, and southeast regions, no preparations were made in advance. Given the political situation in the country, the early warning was not acted upon, leaving communities vulnerable and unprepared when the floods arrived. (*The Daily Star, 2024*)

During the flood, the lack of governance at the community level became evident. Managing everything solely from the central level proved ineffective, emphasizing the need for stronger administration at the local level. Although people from across Bangladesh and student volunteers came forward to help, they encountered communication challenges that made it difficult to get aid to the most vulnerable areas. (*The Daily Star, 2024*)

In the post-flood phase, even a month later, rehabilitation was will further enhance recovery efforts after natural disasters. not completed. Many people remain homeless, and farmers face difficulties in restoring their fields, highlighting the need for stronger disaster preparedness and a quicker government response.

Bangladesh's location near the tectonic boundaries of the Indian, Eurasian, and Burmese plates makes it highly vulnerable to earthquakes, which are difficult to predict and can be very destructive. (*Ahmed, 2020*) Bangladesh's tectonic framework and history show a significant likelihood of severe seismic events, as the region has seen devastating earthquakes before. An earthquake with a magnitude of 7.5 on the Richter scale could destroy up to 72,000 buildings and result in $6 billion in structural damages, while a

hypothetical earthquake of magnitude 8.5 in Chittagong could cause irreversible damage to 140,000 buildings (Shaw, Mallick, & Islam, 2013). Unlike loods, earthquakes strike without warning, making disaster risk reduction measures essential to mitigate damage.

Dhaka, the hub of national activities, is highly vulnerable to earthquakes. The city's infrastructure is often unplanned, with buildings constructed without adhering to safety codes. The process of removing these structures is slow due to a lack of sufficient manpower.(*Molla & Sharma, 2015*)

Together, these realities underscore Bangladesh's urgent need for comprehensive disaster preparedness to protect its people and infrastructure from the mounting threats of climate change and seismic activity. Bangladesh could adopt Japan's disaster management strategies, including advanced early warning systems, strict building codes, and community preparedness programs. By investing in better technology, training communities, and enforcing stronger building regulations, Bangladesh can improve resilience to floods and earthquakes. Strengthening coordination among authorities and establishing fnancial mechanisms like disaster insurance .

Policy Options

For Floods:

01. Upgrading and Strengthening Flood Infrastructure

Enhancing existing flood protection infrastructure, such as embankments and drainage systems, can mitigate the impact of floods. Despite challenges like high upfront costs and slow implementation in urban areas, this approach significantly reduces long-term disaster-related losses.

02. Community-Based Flood Preparedness Programs

Implementing community-based disaster preparedness programs in flood-prone rural and urban areas can educate local populations on flood response and recovery. These programs are cost-effective but require sustained engagement and overcoming regional resistance. They foster a culture of preparedness, reducing risks and enhancing local resilience.

For Earthquakes:

01. Retro itting Buildings to Withstand Earthquakes

Retrofitting existing buildings, particularly in urban areas, to meet seismic safety standards is essential. While costly and time-intensive, this approach can save lives and minimize economic losses during earthquakes.

02. Public Awareness and Training on Earthquake Preparedness

Public awareness campaigns and earthquake drills in schools, workplaces, and communities can significantly enhance preparedness. These measures are relatively low-cost but require consistent implementation and monitoring.

Inclusive and Resilient Disaster Management Policies

01. Focusing on Gender-Sensitive Approaches

Women, particularly in rural areas, face greater risks during both floods and earthquakes. Policies that ensure women have access to resources, protection, and leadership roles in disaster response and recovery foster inclusivity and resilience. Empowering women strengthens community recovery and enhances overall disaster management outcomes.

Recommendations

For Floods:

01. Strengthen Flood Infrastructure
Prioritize the retrofitting and upgrading of embankments, drainage systems, and other flood protection infrastructure to minimize damage during floods. Strict enforcement of building codes in lood-prone areas is essential to ensure infrastructure resilience.

02. Act on Early Warnings
Implement robust systems for acting promptly on flood early warnings to reduce loss of life and economic damage. This includes better coordination between authorities and communities for evacuation and resource mobilization.

03. Community Engagement and Preparedness
Foster local-level preparedness by educating communities on flood risks and response strategies. Strengthening the effectiveness of local government bodies, such as municipal administrations, can enhance the coordination and implementation of disaster preparedness programs. Initiatives like community-based disaster drills and training programs can further boost flood resilience.

For Earthquakes:

01. Retrofitting Urban Buildings
Retrofit existing buildings in urban areas to meet seismic safety standards. Enforce stricter building codes to ensure new constructions are earthquake-resistant, reducing potential casualties and damage.

02. Public Awareness and Training
Conduct public campaigns and training on earthquake preparedness, including evacuation drills and first aid. These initiatives can save lives by improving readiness in the face of unexpected seismic events.

Promoting Inclusive Disaster Management

01. Address Gender-Specific Vulnerabilities
Ensure disaster management policies are inclusive by addressing the unique vulnerabilities faced by women. Involve women in decision-making processes, provide access to resources, and prioritize their safety and well-being during and after disasters. Empowering women in disaster response strengthens recovery efforts and builds long-term resilience within communities.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Bangladesh's exposure to frequent natural disasters highlights the urgent need for improved disaster management. The devastating floods and potential earthquake risks underscore the vulnerabilities faced by millions of people. Strengthening early warning systems, retrofitting infrastructure, and implementing gender-sensitive disaster policies are critical steps to mitigate the impacts of future crises. If these r ecommendations are adopted, Bangladesh will be better prepared to protect its people, minimize economic losses, and ensure a more inclusive and resilient response to disasters. Timely action is essential to safeguard the country's future and build a robust framework for disaster resilience.

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Strategic Optimization of Urban Heat Island
Mitigation in Bangladesh's Urban Areas

Jannatul Ferdous Esha

Executive Summary

This policy paper examines Bangladesh's urban development and climate change adaptability, focusing on urbanization trends, challenges, and strategies. The unplanned development of cities caused a noticeable higher temperature in urban regions than its surroundings or urban heat island. Extensive removal of natural surfaces and use of higher heat retention materials used for urban development reduces heat evaporative and transformative rates, modify the local climate, airflow and atmosphere and thus, cause UHI. Urbanization issues like housing, land use, migration, and secondary city development are analyzed, with emphasis on addressing the growing urban poor and slum dwellers. Challenges in sewage, sanitation, and waste management are detailed, alongside case studies and recommendations. The paper stresses inclusive development, climate-resilient policies, inter-ministerial collaboration, and community engagement to enhance urban resilience and manage migration amidst escalating climate threats.

Introduction

The modern era is characterized by rapid industrialization and urbanization, with cities housing over half the global population and generating 80% of the world's GDP. Urban Heat Island (UHI) effects are localized increases in temperature in urban areas compared to their rural surroundings. Contrary to the widespread assumption that UHI is primarily a result of climate change, its root causes often lie in poor urban planning and unregulated urbanization.

Extreme temperatures, particularly heatwaves, pose severe threats to urban areas like Dhaka, exacerbated by poor planning and pollution. Heatwaves, defined as prolonged periods of unusually high temperatures and humidity, disrupt ecosystems, infrastructure, agriculture, and human health, disproportionately affecting vulnerable groups like the elderly in Bangladesh.

Problem statement

Urbanization, for instance, in the form of roads, industries, buildings, etc., contributes significantly to changing climatic measures by warming the atmosphere and generating carbon emissions associat-

ed with increased surface temperature, referred to as an urban heat island (UHI). It involves population migration, socio-economic changes, physical diversion, and multiple differentiations in land surface observation.

This study explores Dhaka's heat islands, identifying vulnerable zones and the key factors driving heat exposure.

Extreme heat is a growing but underestimated threat in Bangladesh, affecting public health, infrastructure, agriculture, and productivity. Heat-related illnesses are rising, particularly during the pre-monsoon season, and studies show an increase in high heat-stress days by 1–3 days per decade. Vulnerable groups, such as outdoor workers, the elderly, and urban poor, bear the brunt of these effects. Rural areas also face intensifying heat stress due to global warming, with phenomena like El Niño exacerbating temperatures.

Urban heat islands (UHI) further worsen the problem in cities like Dhaka. Factors such as dense construction, reduced green spaces, and heat emissions from air conditioners amplify urban temperatures. Rural areas, despite greenery, are not exempt, as global warming drives widespread heat increases.

Policy gaps include the absence of a comprehensive heatwave de inition and early warning systems tailored to Bangladesh. Bangladesh lacks a Heat Action Plan to mitigate and adapt to extreme heat. Urban planning also neglects sustainable design to reduce UHI impacts. Addressing these gaps requires adopting proven strategies like increasing urban greenery, implementing cool roofs, and developing heat mitigation frameworks integrated into urban policies. Without urgent action, extreme heat risks will continue to intensify, endangering lives and livelihoods.

Anaysis of issues

Urban challenges in Bangladesh, particularly those concerning urban planning and traffic congestion, are exacerbated by rapid population growth, climate change, and inefficient transport systems, especially in Dhaka. These issues are deeply intertwined with historical urban development, the lack of coordinated planning, and the increasing pressure of migration from rural areas.

One of the most pressing issues is the lack of comprehensiveness and coherence in urban planning. Dhaka, already one of the world's fastest-growing megacities, is set to absorb a significant portion of these climate migrants, further straining its infrastructure. The city's population, expected to exceed 35 million by 2035, already faces severe overcrowding, especially since the city was never designed to accommodate such a large influx of people. Unlike some global cities that have expanded outward with planned satellite towns, Dhaka's development has been largely unplanned, focusing on centralization. The situation is worsened by the lack of effective decentralization policies. However, secondary cities in Bangladesh, such as Rajshahi, Barisal, and Sylhet, are well-positioned to absorb these migrants if they are adequately developed to be climate-resilient and migrant-friendly. This is an opportunity the government is beginning to explore, with plans to make these towns more accessible and sustainable.

India and Pakistan have heat action plans (HAPs) that have been successful in reducing heat-related deaths and the social impacts of extreme heat (Ref:7)

India's Heat Action Plan (HAPs) have been expanded to 23 heatwave-prone states and over 130 cities. Pakistan also has HAPs in place, including in Karachi. India and Pakistan have implemented Heat Action Plans (HAPs) to address the impacts of urban heat island (UHI) effects and heatwaves exacerbated by unplanned urbanization and climate change. These plans emphasize preparedness, mitigation, and response strategies tailored to local challenges.

India's Heat Action Plans:

India's HAPs, pioneered by Ahmedabad in 2013, have since expanded to over 130 cities and districts across 23 heatwave-prone states. These plans include:

- **Preparedness:** Public awareness campaigns, early warning systems, and heat-health advisories.

- **Mitigation:** Promoting green infrastructure, reflective roofing, and urban cooling strategies to reduce UHI impacts. Cities like Rajkot have adopted innovative measures like urban forestry and district cooling systems.

- **Health Interventions:** Establishing cooling centers and heat shelters, training healthcare professionals, and ensuring access to drinking water. These initiatives have been successful in reducing heat-related mortality. However, a recent review highlights gaps in implementation consistency and the need for integrating long-term climate resilience into urban planning.

Pakistan's Heat Action Plans:

Pakistan introduced HAPs after the 2015 Karachi heatwave that caused thousands of deaths. Key components include:

- **Early Warning Systems:** Dissemination of heatwave alerts to vulnerable populations.

- **Community-Based Measures:** Establishing emergency cooling zones and mobilizing community health resources.

- **Infrastructure Adaptation:** Planting trees and promoting urban green spaces to mitigate UHI effects. While these measures have improved heat resilience, challenges persist in scaling up efforts to less urbanized regions.

Implementation and Challenges:

Both countries face challenges in addressing rapid urbanization and resource constraints. While HAPs have reduced heatwave mortality, their effectiveness is uneven due to funding limitations, insufficient coordination among government departments, and a lack of enforcement in unplanned urban areas. Scaling successful measures, such as Rajkot's district cooling or Karachi's community-focused initiatives, is essential to building long-term resilience.

In summary, while HAPs in India and Pakistan have demonstrated successes, their full potential requires more comprehensive integration with urban planning, better funding mechanisms, and increased public and institutional awareness to combat the rising threats of heatwaves and UHI effects.

Dhaka's traffic congestion directly contributes to Urban Heat Island (UHI) effects and highlights the consequences of unplanned urbanization. The city's heavy reliance on private vehicles increases greenhouse gas emissions and heat-generating activities, amplifying urban temperatures. The absence of green infrastructure, such as urban forests or parks, exacerbates heat retention, while unplanned road expansions prioritize motorized transport over climate-resilient infrastructure like shaded pedestrian paths or cycle lanes.

Unplanned urbanization has led to haphazard construction and the loss of natural cooling elements, including open spaces and water bodies, further intensifying the UHI effect. The lack of foresight in transportation planning—such as limited investment in mass transit systems—forces more reliance on private cars, which not only congested roads but also contribute to heat generation through increased fuel consumption.

In contrast, cities like Jakarta or Manila, though grappling with similar challenges, have integrated sustainable measures like BRT systems that reduce vehicle dependency and mitigate UHI effects. Dhaka's failure to prioritize integrated urban planning, encompassing transportation and climate resilience, compounds its vulnerability to heatwaves and environmental degradation. Addressing traffic congestion with sustainable, multi-modal transport systems and incorporating climate-sensitive design is essential to mitigating both congestion and UHI effects.

Effect of Uncontrolled Industrialization on Environmental Parameter: A Case Study of Mongla EPZ Using Machine Learning Approach

The analysis of Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI), Normalized Difference Water Index (NDWI), Land Surface Temperature (LST) and Urban Heat Island (UHI) indicates a noteworthy alteration after 2011, corresponding with a conspicuous increment in industrial settlements, as represented in the graph of Figure 16. The industrial settlements such as mill, factories rose up to 62 in 2015 which was only 19 in 2011. The upward trend of expanding industrial area inside EPZ continued for the following years and by 2023 the number climbed up to 129, which is almost double that of 2015. This expansion of industrial settlements indicates the increment of industrial activities inside EPZ. The graph in Figure 16 also reveals that after 2011 when the heavy industrialization started inside EPZ, the dense vegetation declined dramatically which has disappeared totally from the municipality by 2019. After 2015, the drought affected area was seen increasing in whole municipal area which ends up showing that over 30% of the total municipal area had faced drought by 2023. The UHI and LST of the area are also showing the same trend like drought after 2015 which ends up showing a catastrophic situation by 2023. All analysis shown in Figure 16 suggests that the upsurge of industrial establishments within the EPZ area has exerted a destructive influence on the surrounding environment of the whole municipality, underscoring the adverse consequence of such unplanned development.

Policy Options for Addressing Urban Heat Island

1.1. Urban Tree Planting Programs
Pros: Provides shading, reduces heat, lowers energy demand, improves air quality, and enhances public health.

Cons : High initial costs for planting, ongoing maintenance, and slow growth in some areas.

Feasibility: Feasible in cities with available space; limited in densely built areas.

Potential Impact: Can reduce urban temperatures by up to 4°C, save energy, and improve quality of life.

1. 2. Planting Vines and Shrubs

Pros: Low space and soil requirements, quick growth, effective shading for building exteriors.

Cons: Limited evapotranspiration compared to trees; may not significantly lower air temperatures.

Feasibility: Suitable for dense urban areas with limited space.

Potential Impact: Effective for shading and reducing surface temperatures but less impactful on air temperature reduction.

1.3 Strategic Tree Placement (Shading Roofs and Walls)

Pros: Optimizes energy savings, reduces cooling demand, improves thermal comfort.

Cons: Requires careful planning, may block winter sun, and has limited effect in colder climates.

Feasibility: Highly feasible with proper urban planning.

Potential Impact: Significant reduction in cooling costs, particularly in hot climates.

1.4 Vegetation for Air Quality and Carbon Sequester ratio

Pros: Improves air quality by filtering pollutants, stores carbon, reduces stormwater runoff. Cons: Requires ongoing maintenance, limited immediate impact on temperature.

Feasibility: Feasible with widespread planting across urban areas.

Potential Impact: Reduces greenhouse gas emissions, improves public health, and helps manage storm water.

2.1. Reintroduction of Urban Green Space

Pros: Reduces UHI effect, improves health, reduces air pollution, provides recreational spaces.

Cons: Land competition in rapidly urbanizing areas, requires significant space and long-term maintenance.

Feasibility: High, especially in areas with available unused or underdeveloped land.

Potential Impact: Significant cooling effects, enhanced quality of life, reduced health risks.

2.2 Strategic Placement of Green Spaces Near Vulnerable Populations

Pros: Directly mitigates heat stress for elderly, low-income, and health-sensitive groups, enhances health outcomes.

Cons: Requires detailed mapping and coordination with social services and urban planning.

Feasibility: Moderate to high, depending on available data and planning resources.

Potential Impact: Reduced mortality rates, alleviates heat-related illnesses, improved public health.

2.3 Climate-Appropriate Species and Canopy Cover in Green Spaces

Pros: Maximizes cooling effects, sustainable long-term with low maintenance.

Cons: Requires research and expertise on local climate and species selection.

Feasibility: High, if properly planned with expert input on biodiversity.

Potential Impact: Long-term cooling benefits, enhanced biodiversity, and ecological resilience.

2.4 Expansion of Green Space for Urban Heat Island Mitigation

Pros: Large-scale cooling impact, combats heat stress and pollution, enhances public well-being.

Cons: Land scarcity in dense urban environments, high development and maintenance costs.

Feasibility: Low to moderate in highly built-up areas, but feasible with redevelopment plans.

Potential Impact : Significant reduction in heat-related mortality, improved overall urban environment.

Recommendations:

1. Promote Urban Greening: Establish more green spaces, including parks, green roofs, and vertical gardens, to provide shade, enhance cooling through evapotranspiration, and improve air quality. Studies show that green areas can reduce urban temperatures by up to 10°C, significantly mitigating UHI effects and promoting public health.

2. Implement Cool Roof Initiatives : Mandate the installation of reflective cool roofs in both new and retrofitted buildings. These roofs can reflect more sunlight, reducing heat absorption and lowering cooling energy demands. Cool roofs have been proven to reduce indoor temperatures by 5-10°C, which lowers energy consumption and associated carbon emissions.

3. Invest in Sustainable Infrastructure: Encourage the adoption of energy-efficient building designs, green transportation systems, and permeable pavements. These features reduce heat emissions and improve water absorption, helping to mitigate heat buildup. Sustainable infrastructure has shown to lower local temperatures and reduce urban flooding, promoting climate resilience.

4. Adopt Thoughtful Urban Planning: Focus on mixed land use, compact development, and tree-lined streets. These planning strategies optimize space, reduce heat exposure, and facilitate natural cooling. Evidence suggests that tree canopies can lower street-level temperatures by 2-5°C.

5. Engage Communities: Educate the public about the UHI effect and involve them in green initiatives, fostering a culture of climate resilience. Community-driven projects, such as urban tree planting, can significantly expand green spaces while empowering residents.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the escalating issue of Urban Heat Islands (UHI) poses significant challenges for cities in developing countries, exacerbated by rapid urbanization, climate change, and weak infrastructure. The detrimental impacts on public health, energy consumption, and economic productivity demand immediate attention. While strategies like increasing green spaces and implementing cool materials offer potential solutions, the unique challenges faced by developing cities—such as poor governance, lack of resources, and insufficient research—must be addressed. Only through tailored, context-specific mitigation strategies and policies can these cities effectively combat UHI and safeguard the well-being of current and future generations.

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Ensuring safe and sustainable
drinking water supply for everyone

Maysha Samiha Eshika

Executive Summary

Access to safe drinking water is a fundamental human right, however millions of people do not have consistent and reliable access. In developing countries, unsafe drinking water and waterborne diseases account for roughly 80% of all illnesses. Climate change and contamination of freshwater has intensified the lack of safe drinking water in Southwestern Bangladesh, particularly in the Shyamnagar upazila, with serious consequences for health and freshwater sources. Over 70% of the surveyed population listed diarrhea, dysentery, and skin disorders as major concerns associated with water scarcity, accounting for 24% of all deaths in Bangladesh. High quantities of trace elements in water can also cause serious health hazards, such as cancer and neurological diseases.

Recommendations include turning Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) policies into effective initiatives, including indigenous knowledge, and encouraging inter-ministerial collaboration. Strengthening WASH governance, emphasizing capacity building, and implementing inclusive interventions in climate-vulnerable areas are crucial to tackling the issue and developing long-term water management solutions.

Introduction

Access to safe drinking water remains a crucial concern for Bangladesh, despite significant progress toward better water coverage and attaining the MDG water target. According to the 2022 Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) Report, only 59.11% of the population has access to safe drinking water, while only 14.94% has piped water supply, with only 2.9% coverage among the poorest. Furthermore, pollution is a major concern, with 86% of water in the poorest families positive for E. coli and 16.7% of the population drinking arsenic-contaminated water.

The problem is made worse by urban-rural inequities, ineffective funding distribution, and difficulties implementing reasonably priced technologies to reach remote and climate-vulnerable places. Improved coordination, reliable indicators, and feedback systems are necessary to track progress toward reaching SDG targets and guarantee efficient action.

Problem Statement

Climate change, over-extraction of groundwater and contamination of freshwater bodies is having a severe effect on Bangladesh, as seen by increasing sea levels, warmer temperatures, and more unpredictable extreme weather occurrences including storms, floods, and droughts. The availability of freshwater is significantly impacted by these occurrences, especially in coastal areas where flooding and tidal surges contaminate groundwater (tube wells) and surface water (ponds and rivers). Currently, 30 million people in coastal areas do not have access to potable drinking water, and 15 million have no choice but to consume saline water (Hoque 2009).

Only 42.6% of the population benefits from securely managed drinking water services, even though improvements in access to better water (98.5%). Additionally, only 36.4% of rural areas have securely managed sanitation, indicating that sanitation coverage is still low (MICS 2019). Bangladesh faces a substantial funding gap to achieve SDG 6. While the fiscal allocation for SDGs 6.1 and 6.2 has continuously increased, a $0.51 billion shortage remains for critical actions. Low-cost, low-tech solutions for flood, storm, and water scarcity-prone environments are still underdeveloped, leaving coastal and hilly populations underserved.

Nexus of climate change, safe water scarcity, and health problems
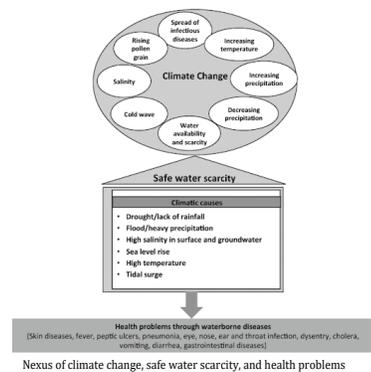
Despite progresses, major gaps still exist in ensuring equal and safe water access. According to the 2019 MICS, 98.5% of the population has access to improved water sources, but only 42.6% has access to safely regulated drinking water. Contaminated water sources, especially in coastal areas, with 86% of the poorest households' water testing positive for E. coli and 16.7% of the population drinking arsenic-contaminated water
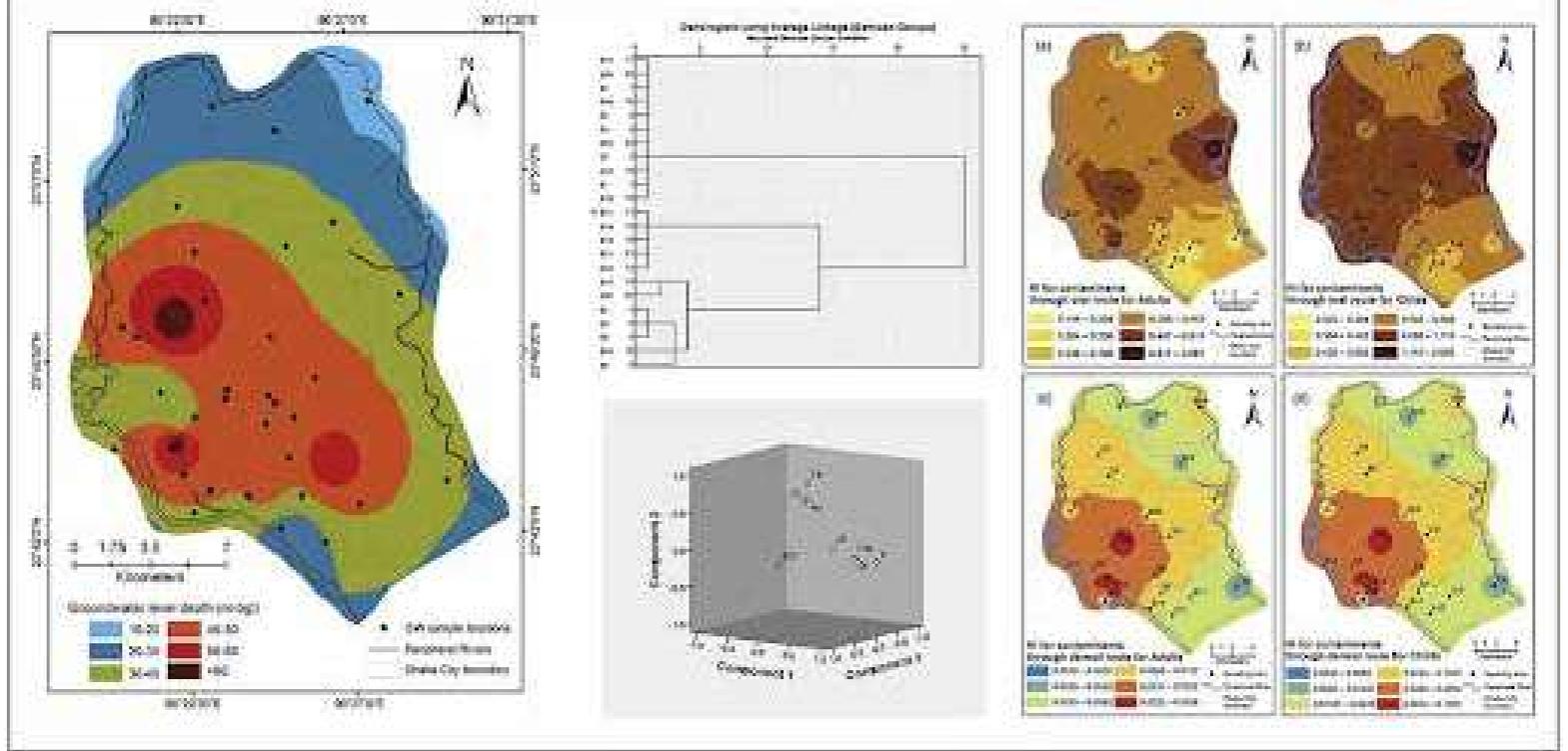
Bangladesh requires an additional $11.8 billion to meet SDG 6, with $9.34 billion needed for objectives 6.1 and 6.2 (at constant 2015-16 prices). In fiscal year 2017-18, the allocation for SDG 6.1 and 6.2 was $0.80 billion, leaving a $0.51 billion gap.

Analysis of the Issue

The Shyamnagar upazila in the Satkhira District of southwestern coastal Bangladesh is a symbol of the country's water issue. This region, which relies on fishing, agriculture, shrimp farming, salt farming, and tourism, is facing significant challenges as soil and water salinity levels rise. Salinity, caused by both natural processes and anthropogenic actions, has led farmers to abandon agricultural grounds, leaving populations without safe drinking water. Villages like as Durgabati and Gopalpur emphasize these difficulties, with women walking 6-12 kilometers everyday to get a modest 36-45 liters of water per home (Swapan and Mamun, 2006).

Consuming contaminated water has terrible health consequences, including diarrhea, cholera, skin problems, and allergies. Chronic exposure to pollutants such as manganese (Mn) and zinc (Zn) in drinking water increases health hazards. Long-term Mn consumption can cause neurological issues (WHO, 2011), whereas excessive Zn exposure can cause nausea, stomach pains, anemia, and other health problems (WHO, 2003). The crisis is caused by a combination of both human-made and natural factors, such as reduced freshwater flow from rivers like the Ganges and Gorai due to upstream diversions, which intensifies salinity intrusion (Gain and Giupponi, 2014), and shrimp farming and increased agricultural irrigation, which exacerbate soil and water salinity (Johnson et al., 2016; Yu et al., 2010). Cities like Dhaka, which has over 18 million population, deplete groundwater at unsustainable rates to meet rising demand. The Dhaka Water Supply and Sewerage Authority (DWASA) removes 2,420 million liters of groundwater each day, contributing to resource depletion (DWASA, 2013).

Policy Options

Targeted Investment in Hard-to-Reach and Vulnerable locations: To reduce inequities in WASH services, particularly in geographically challenging locations such as char, haor, coastal belts, and mountainous regions, the government might enhance targeted investments. This should include funding for adequate, cost-effective water purification technology and sanitation facilities in these locations. This option also underlines the importance of transportable or portable solutions, given the constraints posed by flooding and remote access.

Developing Rainwater Harvesting Systems.: Promoting rainwater harvesting systems (RWH) is critical for ensuring a sustainable and reliable source of drinking water in coastal communities. Financial subsidies or low-interest loans should be provided to homes and institutions to install RWH systems, together with technical recommendations and maintenance training to reduce the risk of contamination. Local governments and NGOs should encourage the construction of communal RWH facilities in locations where household-level systems are impracticable. These initiatives, directed by the Department of Public Health Engineering (DPHE), local government institutions, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), will improve access to safe drinking water during the rainy season, minimize reliance on groundwater, and reduce health risks associated with waterborne diseases.

Scaling Up Pond Sand Filter Technology with Solar Energy Integration: Pond Sand Filter (PSF) technology provides another scalable solution, especially when combined with solar-powered operations.

Government and donor agencies should prioritize the installation of solar-powered PSFs in arsenic-prone and saline-affected areas. Regular re-excavation and maintenance of connected ponds are essential for ensuring the year-round performance of these systems. Community committees that have been advised and encouraged can oversee and maintain PSFs to ensure long-term viability. These measures, coordinated by DPHE, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as UNICEF, and local communities, will ensure year-round access to clean water, reduce reliance on external energy, and enhance community resilience to water crises.

Scaling Up Pond Sand Filter Technology with Solar Energy Integration: Pond Sand Filter (PSF) technology provides another scalable solution, especially when combined with solar-powered operations. Government and donor agencies should prioritize the installation of solar-powered PSFs in arsenic-prone and saline-affected areas. Regular re-excavation and maintenance of connected ponds are essential for ensuring the year-round performance of these systems. Community committees that have been advised and encouraged can oversee and maintain PSFs to ensure long-term viability. These measures, coordinated by DPHE, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as UNICEF, and local communities, will ensure year-round access to clean water, reduce reliance on external energy, and enhance community resilience to water crises.

Improving Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) and Governance: A more systematic approach would be to strengthen water resource governance through increased collaboration among ministries, local governments, and agencies. This would entail incorporating indigenous knowledge and community-based practices into water management plans. Promoting IWRM can help to optimize water resource usage, enhance wastewater treatment, and ensure the long-term viability of ecosystems such as the Halda River.

Recommendations

Implement Climate-Resilient Solutions

Expand inexpensive technology such as desalination plants and reverse osmosis systems in coastal areas.

Allocate funds for pond sand filters and water contamination prevention measures

Enhance Community Engagement and Education

Incorporate local knowledge into water management strategies.

Develop awareness programs about health dangers and sustainable water use.

Strengthen Policy and Institutional Mechanisms

Adopt clear regulations for transboundary water management and industrial water use.
Increase WASH investments in remote and climate-vulnerable locations.

Promote Collaboration and Research

Encourage collaboration among governments, NGOs, and international organizations to share resources and knowledge.Conduct extensive research on climate impacts on water and health to guide policymaking.

Conclusion

The situation in Southwestern Bangladesh highlights an alarming issue in which climate change exacerbates the scarcity of safe drinking water, resulting in serious health consequences. As a result, populations rely largely on contaminated water supplies, which leads to the spread of waterborne diseases such as dysentery, cholera, and skin problems, all of which have a severe public health impact. Furthermore, groundwater contamination with heavy metals and other contaminants creates long-term health hazards, particularly to children. Despite continued efforts to execute water quality improvement programs, obstacles remain in reaching vulnerable and difficult-to-reach locations. The situation emphasizes the need for immediate action to address water scarcity and contamination through improved water management, better infrastructure, and more investments in climate-resilient water solutions.

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Economy

High Youth Unemployment in Bangladesh:
Challenges, Policies, and Economic Growth Prospects

Tarannum Mrittika

Executive Summary:

Being one of the most densely populated countries, Bangladesh contains youths to be one-third of the working age population. Although, the country is still struggling to ensure proper employment to the youth due to many gaps in policy making. As the new generation has proved their strength on the contemporary political shape shifting, it is high time to address and resolve the unemployment problem in order to ensure a prosperous nation in the near future.

Introduction:

Having a population of approximately 46 million individuals aged 18-35, Bangladesh is currently comprising a demographic dividend, which experts have warned will fall off within 2040. The National Youth Policy (2017) has included an outline for Employment and Entrepreneurship among the working-age population, which consists of one-third of the entire country.

Despite being the second-largest economy in South Asia and 35th largest in the world by nominal terms, Bangladesh has a higher number of youth unemployment due to gaps in policy-making and the lack of implementation of necessary measures taken to resolve the issue. A young country in the world map, Bangladesh has faced many torments from the dawn of its history and the youth have always come forward to take necessary actions, although the youth always suffered from socio economic instability.

This document explores many aspects of policymaking and its application to flourish the country's economic growth by resolving the higher youth unemployment rate issue, grasping the time-sensitive opportunity of implicating the demographic dividend.

Problem Statement:

The most concerning matter regarding high youth unemployment issue policy in Bangladesh is the lack of implications of

fthe existing policy and the initiative on reformation in policy making based on current global affairs and local concerns. As the formerly lower middle class country has managed to make an increasing growth in its GDP from the past decade, the biggest challenge has occurred to be the maintenance of the economical development, as despite the progress, many bright young people with so much potentials are in risk of falling into the unpleasant cycle of poverty and life-long suffering, contributing to socio-economic imbalance and social dysfunction. In 2022, around 8,00,000 graduates were unemployed, according to Bangladesh Bureau Of Statistics.

The effects of globalisation, Corona pandemic, 4th industrial revolution and currently occurring political unrests has made survival tactical for the youths of Bangladesh, specially for them lacking access to proper guidelines, opportunities and resources to gain financial freedom. For the demand of time, the existing policies lack the consideration of rapid socioeconomic, political changes, advocating for inclusion of young people from diverse backgrounds.

Analyses of the Issue:

The biggest loophole regarding the policy of eliminating unemployment in youth of Bangladesh is the absence of creating part time job opportunities for the young people alongside academics. Notably, the latest published policy on youth development by the former government (National Youth Policy, 2017) has ignored this issue. The technological advancements and globalization throughout the world has made many opportunities for the youth. Unfortunately, the current policy making lacks the initiative to ensure proper guidance to its youth to grasp the opportunities, not giving proper emphasis on inclusion of the youth from marginalized communities that face many forms of inequality and discrimination. Moreover, most workplace policies lack the consideration of health related work day leaves, such as menstruation leave for female employees, emphasis on mental health resources or ensuring medical facilities to its young workers, which hinders their productivity.

There are many deep rooted social and historical causes

behind this excruciating issue of youth unemployment. The lack of precise addressing of these issues has only contributed to the intensification of social factors. Negative perception on part time jobs as 'odd jobs', stigma of viewing tech usage as a time wasting element, outdated view on overachieving academical qualifications rather than specialized skill development, not emphasising ways to boost productivity, tricks on maintaining work-life balance and many issues are results of inefficient policy making on this regard. This is not only causing numerous suffering to young individuals with so many potentials, but is also putting the economical growth of Bangladesh in risk, considering not utilising the time limited demographic dividend in order to create a prosperous nation with efficient manpower

Policy Options:

1. Advocating for opportunities and facilities in diverse and underrated work ields, such as tourism, mental health services, entrepreneurship etc. This step has the possibility to encourage the youth to flourish their potentials, and come out from the loophole of struggling to find a place in a competitive traditional work field. However this might create hindrance to many youths to a self doubt about if they should take the risk to survive in the society by swimming against the current.

2. Creating part time jobs so that young students start to earn wages alongside their studies so that they understand the importance of money management, skill development and professionalism before entering broader workplaces. However, this might affect the students' academia and overall well-being if they are not aware about balancing study, work and personal life.

Recommendations:

As the high youth unemployment in Bangladesh is a deeply entangled historical and societal issue, any robust and instant specific course of action is difficult to igure out. Nonetheless, the nearest possible actions policymakers can take are listed below-

1. Creating action plans to guide the youth to grasp the opportunities that the current interim government of Bangladesh is providing, focusing on the respected chief advisor's globally accepted theories and initiatives about social business, three zero (zero poverty, zero unemployment and zero net carbon emissions) in order to ensure individual financial stability and the scope to positively contribute to the collective society.

2. Advocating for inclusion in work places in order to help young people from marginalized communities (e.g. hijra, harijans,

indigenous population, children of sex workers etc) to establish their own identity in the society and contribute to the country's economic growth.

3. Make flexibility and specialised training in workplaces with young people with special needs (e.g. people who have autism, mental illness, physical challenges or have faced any traumatic life incident) in order to make them believe that they, too, have a shot in life. Alongside, ensuring sick leaves and providing health resources for all workers is important to boost their productivity.

4. Brushing up on the gender equality policies and ensuring safety in workplaces especially for female employees, showing zero tolerance in gender discrimination and sexual harassment.

5. Make more fields for part time jobs for young students.

Conclusion:

Just a few months ago, it was established in Bangladeshi society that the new generation is 'good for nothing.' But the brave participation and bold contribution of the youth in response to current political unrests has proven what power the younger generation holds. A country devoured by corruption and human rights violations by the former government, the older generations saw no hope for the future of their motherland and their children. It is high time for the policymakers to take necessary measures to ensure employment to the youth, so that they can not only fulfil their potential as human beings, but can also build a beautiful Bangladesh that we all deserve, incorporating thoughts from fresh minds and starting everything from scratch with genuine enthusiasm.

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The State of Youth Unemployment In Bangladesh:
Insights & Recommendations for Action

Faria Prova

Executive Summary

In Bangladesh, the number of young people who are not in employment, education, or training (NEET) has exceeded 27%, signalling that youth unemployment has reached alarming levels. There are substantial obstacles to the country's successful integration of its youth into the workforce, despite its robust economic growth. Women and those from rural areas continue to experience disproportionately high unemployment rates. Furthermore, the informal sector, which is devoid of stable work, social protections, and benefits, accounts for a significant percentage of adolescent employment.

This matter is of the uttermost importance due to the fact that Bangladesh's young comprise a significant proportion of the population—approximately one-quarter—and their complete integration into the workforce is essential for leveraging the demographic dividend. Failure to resolve youth unemployment poses a threat to the country's competitiveness in the global market, social stability, and economic development.

Recommendations include :

Coordinate Industry Requirements with Education: Revise educational curricula at the secondary and tertiary levels to ensure that they are in accordance with industry requirements, with a particular focus on vocational and technical education.

Strengthen Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs): Foster collaboration between educational institutions and industries to establish employment training initiatives, provide internships, and develop skill development programs.

Recognise STEM education and digital literacy: Enhance the availability of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education and digital skills to equip young people with the necessary skills to succeed in the Fourth Industrial Revolution. This will ensure that they are prepared for contemporary employment markets in sectors such as advanced manufacturing, renewable energy, and information technology.

The recommendations are designed to decrease youth unemployment by enhancing Bangladesh's global competitiveness, reducing NEET rates, increasing the employability of graduates, addressing gender disparities, and assuring sustainability. STEM-related education and vocational training will be prioritised, and opportunities for young women and marginalised populations will be provided. Additionally, education will have connections with industry requirements. Both Malaysia and Vietnam have carried out education reforms and public-private sector partnerships to reduce youth unemployment, and these strategies are founded on successful examples. Utilising these strategies, Bangladesh can transform its youth unemployment crisis into an opportunity for sustainable economic development.

Introduction

In Bangladesh, the youth represent one-quarter of the total population (Rahman, 2022). Despite the important role they can play in building both the nation and the economy, there remain anxieties as to whether the youth are sufficiently utilized in the process of economic development. This is a pertinent issue, particularly since the youth unemployment rate is 15.746% - double that of the national unemployment rate (ILO) & higher than the country's historical average of 9.43% since 1991. Approximately 27% of Bangladeshi youth fall under the NEET(Not in Employment, Education, or Training) category, highlighting challenges in integrating them into productive activities. Over 80% of youth employment is in informal sectors with limited protections and benefits. Labor force participation among women is low at 37.01%. Structural issues include skill mismatches in industries like manufacturing and IT, and slow growth of technical and vocational institutions.

To combat the social, political, and economic implications that youth unemployment may thus have on the country, it is imperative to formulate crucial policy solutions to the same.

The aims for addressing young unemployment in Bangladesh include

lowering the youth unemployment rate to more closely match with historical averages and worldwide benchmarks. It is also vital to improve the proportion of young people in work, education, or training, which will help to reduce the NEET rate. Promoting formal employment possibilities is critical for improving young workers' job stability and benefits. In addition, increased vocational training programs can help to close the skills gap between educational institutions and job market demands. Finally, fostering inclusive workforce participation, particularly among women, is critical to ensuring equal employment prospects. These goals seek to bolster and broaden the job market for the nation's youth.

Problem Statement

Youth unemployment in Bangladesh, particularly for individuals aged 15-24, appears to be a major issue, with over twenty percent of young people classified as NEET (Not in Employment, Education, or Training). The efficient involvement of youth in the workforce is hampered by structural barriers, gender disparities, and challenges in aligning skills with labour market demands, despite growth in the economy.

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a significant disengagement of Bangladesh's youth, who currently account for more than twenty percent of the NEET population, from economic and learning institutions. Gender disparities exist, and adolescent unemployment exceeds 10%, making it twice the national average. The participation rates of young women are lower than those of males, which renders them more susceptible. The adolescent employment recovery is lagging, and the COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated labour market vulnerabilities. This puts the lifetime earning potential and productivity of this demographic at risk due to long-term inadequate utilisation effects.

According to some reports of The Business Standard & The Business Insider we get to know about the severity of the problem which gives the idea on the affected groups as well.These issues include :Gender Disparities, Struggle of Rural & Marginalised Youth & Fresh graduates.

- **Gender Disparities:** Culture, education, and economic barriers have led to young women suffering higher unemployment and lower employment rates than their male counterparts.

- **Rural and Marginalised Youth:** The urban-rural divide is further exacerbated by the limited access to infrastructure, employment opportunities, and skills training which rural youth experience.

- **Individuals who are first-time job seekers and fresh graduates:** Many young graduates are poorly equipped for job

opportunities due to their lack of hands-on expertise and industry-aligned skills.

Here we can see that the education system struggles to adequately educate youths for the labour market, leading to a skills mismatch. Economic policies have not kept up with population growth, resulting in a lack of job opportunities. Gender inclusivity is insuf iciently addressed, and many young workers are employed informally, lacking social protections, job stability, and appropriate working conditions. These issues highlight the need for improved policies and policies.

Analysis of the Issue

In Bangladesh, youth unemployment is a major socio-economic challenge, particularly for those between the ages of 15 and 24. Youth unemployment persists, with a substantial proportion classifying as NEET (Not in Employment, Education, or Training), despite the fact that GDP growth has been robust, with an average increase of more than 6% over the past decade. This issue poses a threat to Bangladesh's capacity to effectively capitalise on its demographic dividend, as nearly thirty percent of the population is under the age of 25.

It may be acknowledged by the data that the socio-economic history of Bangladesh is one the cause of youth unemployment & we can classifying the trend in the following manner:

- Economic Challenges After Independence (1971-1990s): In the initial decades following independence, the economy was de ined by economic instability, limited industrialisation, and an agrarian-based economy that offered few formal job opportunities.

- Bangladesh's integration into global markets, particularly through the Ready-Made Garments (RMG) sector, generated jobs during the Globalisation Era (1990s-2010); however, it was unable to absorb an increasing youth labour force. Low-skilled labour continued to be the primary focus, leading in the excluding of youth with higher education.

- Recent Decades (2010-Present): Despite significant economic growth, the transition to a service and industrial economy has been sluggish, resulting in a significant number of young individuals possessing skills which are not consistent with the shifting labour market.

Few decades ago Vietnam faced similar youth unemployment challenges in the 1990s but successfully reduced rates through:

- Establishing a robust technical and vocational education system aligned with industry needs.

- Encouraging foreign direct investment (FDI) in technology and manufacturing sectors, creating job opportunities for skilled youth.

Even if we look at Malaysia a few decades back they were also facing severe unemployment but Malaysia has implemented various strategies to address youth unemployment, including skill development and training initiatives, graduate employability measures, youth-centric policies, and structural challenges. The PENJANA Career Advancement Programme (PENJANA-KPT-CAP) offers skills enhancement opportunities through "Place and Train" schemes, entrepreneurial development, and gig economy training. Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programs are designed to align with labor market demands and are supported by industry collaborations. The Graduate Tracer Study evaluates employment outcomes of university graduates, and programs like MyFutureJobs and incentives for employers hiring graduates aim to create smoother school-to-work transitions. The National Youth Development Policy encourages leadership, entrepreneurship, and participation in decision-making processes, while gender-focused interventions aim to reduce barriers for women in traditionally male-dominated sectors. Malaysia's focus on vocational training and entrepreneurship mirrors successful models from countries like Germany and Singapore, but its reliance on government-driven initiatives highlights room for improvement in private-public partnerships.

Policy Options

Recommendation 1:

We should aim to maximize the demographic dividend by creating more job opportunities for the youth through industry-academia collaboration, skill development, digital transformation, and educational reform by making partnerships between industry and academic institutions, and incentives for youth employment initiatives.

We hope to make an increase in youth employment rates, improved alignment between graduates' skills and industry demands, strengthened capacity for innovation, and increased productivity. It will make an impact by enhancing economic growth, reducing youth unemployment, making sure of sustainable skill development, and creating better job placement rates for graduates, making Bangladesh's labor force more competitive and resilient.

Challenges : Major challenges include addressing the skills mismatch, fostering effective collaboration between academic institutions and industries, securing consistent funding for training and technology infrastructure, and ensuring accessibility to these programs across urban and rural areas.

Recommendation 2 :

Incorporate vocational and technical learning at both secondary and higher educational institutions to ensure that courses are in line with industry requirements & encourage the establishment of public-private partnerships to support skill development initiatives to improve STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education and digital literacy in order to be ready for the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

From this we can expect industry demands would be re lected in the curriculum to improve employability, decrease unemployment, and equip a workforce for both local and global opportunities. This will increase economic productivity, attract foreign direct investment, and establish Bangladesh as a competitive destination for multinational corporations. Public-private partnerships for skill development can facilitate a seamless transition from training to employment by offering hands-on learning, apprenticeships, and internships, as well as the transfer of technology and expertise. Furthermore, they can establish a pipeline for recruiting.

Challenges: The lack of funding for upgrading training facilities and curricula, resistance to transitioning to conventional education systems, and limited capacity of teachers and trainers in vocational training are significant challenges.

Bangladesh: Youth unemployment rate from 2002 to 2021
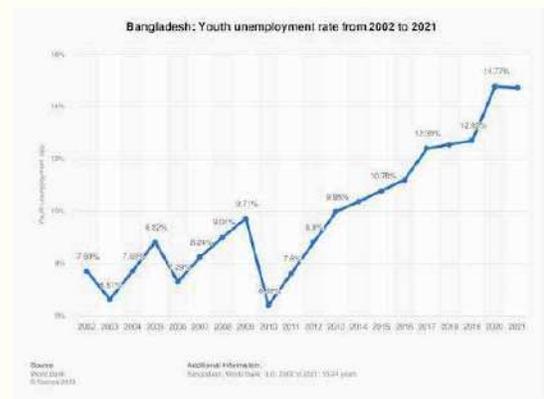
Recommendations 3:

In order to mitigate skill deficiencies in the education sector, there are numerous approaches, such as undertaking industry needs assessments to identify skills deficiencies and collaborating with education ministries, industry leaders, and labour market experts. By integrating STEM, vocational, and technical content, as well as interpersonal skills, curricula can be revised to enhance employability by at least 30%. It is imperative to establish a National Skills Framework that aligns with global benchmarks in order to establish vocational training standards.

In addition, skill development can be promoted through public-private partnerships (PPPs). Private companies that collaborate with educational institutions may be eligible for tax incentives. Additionally, sectoral skill commissions should be established to supervise training programs in critical sectors such as renewable energy, textiles, and ICT. This method has the potential to reduce skill disparity and improve the transmission of knowledge and innovation between academia and industry.

The enhancement of STEM education and digital literacy can be accomplished by enhancing digital infrastructure, establishing STEM scholarship programs, and providing instructors with instruction in STEM and digital skills. Research indicates that students who possess strong digital abilities are 25% more likely to obtain high-paying employment.

Education reform and skill development should be guaranteed funds, with a National Education and Skill Development Taskforce established to oversee the implementation of policies and track their achievement. Targeted programs and public awareness campaigns can be implemented to overcome social and cultural resistance among marginalised communities. Bangladesh can establish itself as a regional leader in education and innovation, propel economic development, and develop a competent workforce by implementing these recommendations.

Conclusion

Unemployment among young people is a substantial socio-economic concern in Bangladesh, particularly among individuals aged 15 to 24. Many of the youth are informally employed, lacking employment stability or benefits, and approximately 27% of them are classified as NEET. Inequalities between genders and ineffective systems of education further exacerbate the issue. Bangladesh's economic development, social stability, and competitiveness worldwide are contingent upon the resolution of adolescent unemployment.

educational curricula are in accordance with the needs of the industry. This can be achieved by establishing public-private partnerships for skill development and expanding vocational and technical education. This will increase employability, stimulate economic growth, mitigate gender disparities, and equip the youth for the current and future labour market.

In Vietnam and Malaysia, successful examples of aligning vocational education with industry requirements were replicated, resulting in reduced unemployment and increased economic competitiveness. Bangladesh has the potential to replicate these successes. These obstacles can be resolved and Bangladesh's potential is feasible by addressing educational obstacles, making investments in skills infrastructure, fostering partnerships between business entities and educational institution

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High Youth Unemployment: **one of the dreadful barrier in the path of Bangladesh's Development**

Samia Chowdhury

As a developing country the high unemployment rate in Bangladesh is really an extreme drawback for its economic status. The unemployment issue is a result of many lagged and unsuccessful policies. It also holds a deep impact on the economic growth and stability of Bangladesh.

The employment scenario in Bangladesh is facing severe instability. In recent years Bangladesh has experienced high unemployment. Each year's fresh graduate rate is not at all synced with the preferable job availability in the job market. One of the main reasons for the high unemployment rate is lagged employment policies in Bangladesh. Over the years employment policies couldn't scale up with the evolving workforce landscape.

In the second quarter of 2024 Bangladesh experienced a rise in youth unemployment rate. This time the unemployment rate increased to 3.65% from 3.41% compared to the same period in 2023. If we consider the past 5 years rate of youth unemployment we can observe a decline in the rate in those years (Bangladesh Unemployment Rate 1991-2024, n.d.). But due to economical, political and other subsidiary reasons in 2024 Bangladesh faced a sudden increase in the unemployment rate.

Bangladesh is currently enjoying a demographic dividend since the number of youthful individuals is bigger than the non-working-age populace. This will lead to financial development, can improvise the labor supply, and can ensure more investment funds. Although this scenario of demographic dividend is anticipated to decay by 2040. Despite having a statistical dividend, Bangladesh has not been able to form sufficient employment for the developing youth population. In 2022, as it were 35% of utilized individuals were youthful, and the unemployment rate among youthful individuals was high. Among graduates, 28 percent were unemployed in 2022, assessed to be around 8 lakh of the entire unemployed populace, concurring to the Work Drive Study 2022 by the Bangladesh Bureau of Insights (BBS). Graduates moreover stay unemployed for a long time, as about 20 percent hold up for two a long time for a work, whereas 15 percent

stay jobless for more than two a long time, as per the BBS data.The share of unemployed tertiary-educated youth inside the full unemployed populace in Bangladesh expanded to 27.8 percent in 2022 from 9.7 percent in 2013 as numerous battled to discover occupations that coordinate their abilities and instructive qualifications.

In 2018, the International Labour Organization (ILO) ranked Bangladesh second out of 28 countries in the Asia-Pacific region for having the highest rate of educated unemployment. The ILO also estimated that between 2010 to 2017 – close to the same period when Bangladesh's youth population increased – the rate of youth unemployment had doubled.The government's last survey on the labour force came out in 2016-17, which also showed a lack of seriousness on part of the authorities to address issues related to unemployment. In that survey, it was also seen that the youth unemployment rate stood at more than double the national unemployment rate, with the rate being higher among the more educated youth. For example, the unemployment rate was 13.4 percent among youths having a tertiary-level education and 29.8 percent among youths having secondary-level education. (*The Daily Star, 2023*)

Experts have pointed out that the "economic miracles" experienced by Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan between the early 1960s and 1990s, and the economic boom witnessed by Ireland in the 1990s, were all down to the utilisation of their respective demographic dividends. For Bangladesh, this window is expected to close within the next decade or two. If we wish to use it effectively then the policies need to be modified in such a way so that the overall job opportunities witness a rise.

This unstable situation of high youth unemployment may also lead to societal chaos. That's why handling this situation with better policy imposition is a need of time.

The demographic dividend can be maximized by creating more job opportunities.To improvise employment scenario of Bangladesh policy should be made emphasizing industry-aca

demia collaboration, skill development, digital transformation, and educational reform.

Partnerships between industry and academic institutions, and incentives for youth employment initiatives can be an effective way of reducing unemployment. Government entities also have important roles to play. Also policy and regulations can play a key role in ensuring mutually beneficial collaboration.

By improving alignment between graduates' skills and industry demands the capacity for innovation and economic productivity can be increased.Enhanced economic growth can ensure better job placement rates for graduates, making Bangladesh's labor force more competitive and resilient. *(Rokonuzzaman, 2019)*

High youth unemployment is the root of several economical and societal imbalances. To create a stable economy in Bangladesh this issue needs to be addressed firmly. Strong policies and regulations can surely help Bangladesh achieve a stable economy.

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